

Malachi 3:1-7/Luke 3:1-14  
Second Sunday of Advent – C (Peace)  
December 9, 2018

“Ahhhh ... Peace ... Perfect Peace”

**Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. (Phil 1:2)**

It’s Advent ... we just lit the “peace” candle because today is “Peace Sunday.” I just wished you “peace” using Paul’s opening in his letter to the Philippians. And a little later, we’ll “offer each other a sign of peace.” I’m pretty sure we all desire “peace.” But, when I thought of “peace” this week, something weird popped into my head. I recalled the old football coach Jim Mora. His team wasn’t doing very well when a reporter had the nerve to ask about their chances to make the playoffs. It set off one of a classic post-game rant, *“Playoffs! Are you kiddin’ me?! Playoffs?! I just hope we can win a game. Playoffs?!”* Some of us might be thinking the same thing when it comes to our teams ...

The theme words for Advent are “hope, joy, love” – and those I see – and “peace.” *“Peace! Are you kiddin’ me?! Peace?! I just hope I can get some. Peace?!”*

Years ago I decided to really get into the Christmas season! I woke up early to hit the Black Friday sales. I had no idea ... it was madness! It seemed rather weird to me to hear “Silent Night” on the Muzak ... while I fought my way through elbows to get that great deal on the latest gadget ... but fight I did and I got it! I vowed though ... never again. *“Peace ... give me some peace.”*

The next year I tried a new tactic ... I waited until the anti-Black Friday ... Christmas Eve ... not a good strategy either. Anyway, here we are ... in the middle of Advent on “Peace Sunday” waiting for the Prince of Peace and Jim Mora’s rant echoes in my head.

“Peace” is an elusive thing. Try as we might, we never seem to get there. We might feel we’re okay in the moment. I’m relaxed. There’s no conflict right now. And that’s one way to look at peace. But, are we truly at peace?

Today it’s seems impossible to find a state of peace. We may have moments of it here and there, but life in a state of true peace is elusive. We may go on a trip to a remote mountain or beach ... maybe even get rid of the phone, computer, and television ... possibly do without a newspaper or magazine. Then, maybe for a time ... peace. But even there, I’m guessing we’ll have the nagging sensation that counters our peace. And then we’re back in world.

That nagging sensation ... it wasn’t always there. Originally the only sensation known in God’s creation was “peace.” “Shalom” is the word used in the Old Testament. It’s a word that describes the perfect unity between God and man ... between man and God’s creation. Isaiah describes the state of “shalom” ... God’s perfect peace ... when He gives us a view of what awaits one day, [\(Isaiah 65:25\)](#) *“The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,’ says the LORD.”* But Adam and Eve, our forefathers, shattered this peace when they went to war with God by deciding they knew better than God what “peace” should look like. But God has desired to restore His intention for peace ever since.

He chose Israel as the nation who would be His instrument that He’d use to bring His peace back to His creation. But Israel continued to break the peace in their disobedience resulting in exile in Babylon. Yet God patiently worked with His people through His prophets. He delivered them from exile, back into the Promised Land ... but they soon

grew impatient ... seeing those around them acquiring wealth and power and appearing to be blessed they put their trust in themselves and the world ... withholding their tithes to ensure they could provide for their own needs ... serving other gods ... searching, once again, for their own version of peace. God tells His people why they aren't in a state of peace. It's not because God has left them or decided He favors someone else. God's promises are constant! God doesn't change! (Malachi 3:6) *"For I the LORD do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed."* And it's a good thing He doesn't change ... because if He had changed His mind, His people would be destroyed. It's not God who has changed ... as always, it's His people. Malachi speaks God's condemnation, (Malachi 3:7a) *"From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them."*

In God's unchanging love and mercy, He urged His people to return to Him, (Malachi 3:7b) *"Return to me, and I will return to you' ... But you say, 'How shall we return?'"*

Malachi was the last of God's prophets. The people were deaf to God's messengers ... trying to find peace with God on their terms, not His. Yet God's patience continued for over 400 years. Patiently waiting for His people to return. Then He sent John the Baptist ... promised through Isaiah, (Luke 3:3) *"The voice of one crying in the wilderness: 'Prepar(ing) the way of the Lord, mak(ing) His paths straight.'"*

The crowds came to see the spectacle ... the outspoken, insect-eating, camel wearing prophet in the wilderness of the Jordan. John preached fearlessly, calling the leaders of the day, to their faces, a (Luke 3:7) *"brood of vipers"* who led the people astray ... leading them into the false hope of salvation by virtue of being genetically related to Abraham and demonstrating their religiosity with outward shows of works trusting in

themselves and endless rituals instead of God Himself. Some even came out to be baptized by John as part of their show.

John proclaimed a “baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” “Repentance” indicates both “an understanding that one has made a mistake and desires to change” and “faith in God’s promise that only He can forgive those mistakes.” Those who truly repent, trust God to forgive them regardless of what elaborate temple rituals are performed. Trusting God alone, God gives “true peace” them ... and ... forgiving each other ... peace between themselves.

The “brood of vipers” is still around. We’re part of it if we don’t desire true repentance by trusting in God’s promise to forgive us and make peace with us; and then responding with the fruits of repentance. The “fruits of false repentance” ... shallow passing regret, a few tears for show, excuses, brief outward betterment, and a spoken wish to change without heartfelt desire to do so ... don’t bring true peace. “False repentance” eventually leads to the axe of judgment cutting us off at the roots and our being thrown into the fire of eternal conflict.

But true peace comes from only one person ... God. The past several weeks, I’ve had the privilege of teaching Confirmation to our young people. The topic ... confession of our sins and receiving God’s absolution – the gift God has given to us, through His Son, Jesus Christ, to receive His peace in the middle of a world filled with conflict.

The Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ descended into the turmoil and chaos of a world in conflict ... a world trying to find peace on its own. His birth was announced to the world by a multitude of heavenly angels proclaiming, **(Luke 2:14)** “*Glory to God in the highest,*

*and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased!”* And shepherds went to see the newborn Prince of Peace.

His parents did what all good Jewish families did with a firstborn son, they brought Him to the temple to dedicate Him to God, His Father. An old man named Simeon, a devout and righteous man, by the power of the Holy Spirit recognized the infant Prince of Peace and exclaimed, (Luke 2:29-30) *“Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to Your Word; for my eyes have seen Your salvation.”*

The Prince of Peace grew into a man and entered into conflict with the Prince of Darkness in the wilderness. He beat Satan down with the sword of His Word ... *“Man shall not live by bread alone ... You shall worship the Lord your God ... You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.”* Then He brought peace to the demon-possessed, the hungry and sick, the paralyzed and deformed. And He brought peace between God and man as He forgave the sins of many saying, (Luke 7:48, 50) *“Your sins are forgiven ... Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

Jesus fought His ultimate battle for peace on the Cross. He suffered, died, and was buried ... along with the cause of our conflict, our sins. Rising from the dead, He destroyed sin’s power to cause eternal conflict between us and God. He appeared to His disciples saying, (John 20:21) *“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you ... Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you withhold forgiveness from any, it is withheld.”* With these words, Jesus transferred His power to create peace with God through forgiveness to His church.

We trust Jesus’ promises to us. We understand that we make mistakes ... each of us here are, after all, still sinners, guilty of treason against God and deserving death. But,

we're also sorry for our sin. We show true remorse for the pain we cause God and those we've hurt. We repent of our sin. We ask God for His mercy and grace. (1 John 1:9) *"And He is faithful and just to forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* He makes peace with us for the sake of His dear Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Having repented and received God's mercy ... being at peace with Him ... we ask, along with John's disciples, (Luke 3:10) *"What then shall we do?"* The Holy Spirit, helping us turn away from our sin, enables us to respond to God's love for us, by loving our neighbors through the true fruits of repentance. We live our lives as God intends ... freely giving to others since we're no longer conflicted about where our daily needs will come from or what people might think if we show compassion and love to our neighbor. We live in peace with the world around us ... even if it isn't at peace with us ... trusting God to continue replenishing our lives with the things we need ... trusting Him to continue supporting us in the work He's called us to do. Through our lives, lived in faith, we too become "voices crying in the wilderness" God uses to bring His peace to all He puts in our lives each day at work, on the road, in school, or wherever we are.

Then one day, when the Prince of Peace returns in glory, He will carry us all into His eternal peace. Peace ... perfect peace.

**May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. (Philippians 4:7)**

James Kent