

"Peace"

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Let's join our hearts together in prayer. Let us pray: **Gracious and loving God, open our hearts to the Peace of Christ, the Way for peace in the world. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.**

A mother with five small children, decided that their summer vacation should begin with planting a garden. So, she took her little brood to the nursery where, for the next two hours, they squabbled over who gets to push the cart, insisted on seeing every plant in the five-acre greenhouse, cried and screamed when there were no petunias, and broke a large, expensive clay pot. Home at last, she complained to her very patient husband, "All I want is to rest in peace and have lots of beautiful flowers." "My dear," said her husband, "I believe they call that a funeral."

I've heard it said that "Peace is not the absence of violence, chaos, disagreements, discontent, or discord. Peace is what we feel when we do not allow these to affect us." And I might add, this is peace before we are resting in peace at the funeral home.

On this Advent Sunday of Peace, Mark doesn't begin his gospel with the birth of Jesus like Matthew and Luke do. Nor does Mark begin by harkening all the way back to the beginning of time like John does: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." Instead, Mark begins his gospel by proclaiming the good news of Jesus' adult ministry. "Gospel" originally meant "proclamation" or "good news," referring to the oral proclamation of the good news, and Mark wants to proclaim that good news in writing. So, Mark simply begins: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Mark then refers to the prophets of the Hebrew Bible, the holy book known intimately by Jesus and his early followers. Some ancient texts just refer to "the prophets;" the NRSV refers to the prophet Isaiah. But the quote in Mark, "See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way; the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths

straight," is a conflation of the passage from Isaiah that Terry read this morning and a passage from the prophet Malachi. Mark is telling us that the prophets foretold the coming of the Lord and that John the Baptizer, who appeared in the wilderness clothed in camel's hair, with a leather belt around his waist is the messenger of the good news of Jesus' arrival.

The prophet Elijah wore camels' hair with a leather belt around his waist, and he was taken up into heaven in a whirlwind. The prophet Malachi foretold Elijah's return "before the great and terrible day of the Lord," making John the Baptist a harbinger of the Messiah and the coming of a new age. This is the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

The prophet Elijah confronted the 9th century BC Empire that was ruled by King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, and he called upon God to perform miracles. John the Baptist confronted the first century rule of the Roman Empire, and he proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the miraculous forgiveness of sin. John said that he was not worthy to stoop down and untie the thong of the sandals of the one who would come after him to baptize with the Holy Spirit.

According to the Associated Press, in 1994, hospital emergency rooms in the United States treated 1.4 million victims of violence or suspected violence. But they weren't from a war zone and they weren't all because of crime on the streets. The Justice Department analyzed the data and found that roughly half of the victims were hurt by someone they knew. Seventeen percent of the victims, 243,000 people, were injured by a spouse, former spouse, or a current or former boyfriend or girlfriend. Eight percent of the victims were injured by a relative such as a parent or child. Twenty-three percent were hurt by friends or acquaintances. It would seem that peace needs to start at home. Former U.S. President, Ronald Reagan said that "Peace is not the absence of conflict, it is the ability to handle conflict by peaceful means." It's true for nations, for interpersonal relationships, and for our own internal peace of mind.

Jesus was a Peace activist of his day, peacefully criticizing the Roman government as well as the religious leaders. Jesus preached to crowds gathered to hear his good news messages of love and justice and peace. The authorities jailed

him and crucified him to send a discouraging message about dissent to his followers. But Jesus, the One born in a manger, rose from the dead to reassure us of the good news of God's love and presence in our lives. It was very good news and together, we continue to proclaim the Peace that Jesus preached; the good news of the risen Christ, the Son of God.

There was a millionaire who was bothered by two aches, one in his stomach and the other in his head. He was diagnosed and treated by many medical experts. He took heavy doses of prescription drugs, and underwent expensive injection treatments. But the aches persisted with increasing intensity.

At last, a monk arrived and was asked about his agony. The monk spoke very kindly to the wealthy man, and pronounced the fault to be in his eye. He said, "set right the eye, and the head on top and the stomach below would both behave very sweetly." Further, the monk said "To improve the eye, concentrate on only one colour." He suggested to concentrate on the colour green. "Do not let your eyes fall on red or yellow, or any other colour."

The wealthy man got together a group of painters and purchased barrels of green paint and directed that every object on which his eye was likely to fall be painted green.

When the monk came to visit him after few days, the wealthy man's servants ran with buckets of green paint and poured it on the monk because he was wearing a red robe. They didn't want their master to see any other colour than green for fear that the pain in his head and stomach would come back.

Hearing this, the monk laughed and said, "If only you had purchased a pair of green glasses, worth just a few dollars, you could have saved these walls and trees and pots and pans, and chairs and sofas, and also a pretty large share of your fortune! You cannot paint the world green."

How often do we try to change our environment and even try to change other people, and get frustrated when they don't change? How often do we take a look at ourselves? We'd be more at peace if we would just change our own outlook, change our own way of seeing and thinking, and change our own actions. And our change might motivate others to change as well. Mahatma Gandhi said, "Be the

change that you wish to see in the world." If we change our vision, the world will appear accordingly.

Ramsey MacDonald, one-time prime minister of England, was discussing with another government official the possibility of lasting peace. The government official was an expert on foreign affairs, and was unimpressed by the prime minister's idealistic viewpoint. He remarked cynically, "The desire for peace does not necessarily ensure it." This MacDonald admitted, saying, "Quite true. But neither does the desire for food satisfy your hunger, but at least it gets you started toward a restaurant."

Peace on earth starts with individual hunger for peace; and that starts with peace in our spirit - the Holy Spirit. I'd like to close with a poem called *Peace on Earth*.

Peace on earth, with a world at war?
 O what were the angels singing for?
 That far-away night when the Star shone down
 with a glorious light on Bethlehem's town?

Peace on earth! They were singing of Him,
 who was born that night to redeem from sin;
 who still has the power to cleanse and to heal;
 the contrite heart who is willing to kneel.

Peace on earth, amid sorrow and loss?
 Yes, peace indeed, at the foot of the cross!
 Peace in a world that is troubled and torn,
 peace in each heart where the Saviour is born.

Peace on earth, while the nations rage?
 And history is making its darkest page?
 Yes, peace on earth, for its steadfast light
 is burning in thousands of hearts tonight!

May God's peace be a steadfast light in our hearts today, tonight, and always.
 Amen.