

This Sunday's texts:

Isaiah 11:1-10

Romans 15:4-13

Matthew 3:1-12

Advent Peace

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The Gospel reading for this morning is from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 3, verses 1 through 12:

In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the wilderness of Judea and saying, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." This is he who was spoken of through the prophet Isaiah: "A voice of one calling in the wilderness, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for Him.'" John's clothes were made of camel's hair and he had a leather belt around his waist. His food was locusts and wild honey. People went out to him from Jerusalem and all Judea and the whole region of the Jordan. Confessing their sins, they were baptized by him in the Jordan River. But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to where he was baptizing, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not think you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham. The ax is already at the root of the trees, and every tree that does not produce good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing fork is in His hand and He will clear His threshing floor, gathering His wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire."

The word of our Lord. Good morning. Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I spent a good bit of time this Advent season taking shots at Christmas. Now sometimes the Christmas season with everything that comes along with it, can butt out Advent, can replace Advent in our lives. Yet I have a confession to make. I love the Christmas-y stuff. One of the best days of the year for me is when I put Christmas music on my phone and climb up on the roof and hang those lights. I love the Christmas music and setting up the tree. Actually, after a year of living in Southern California, I was driving down Highway 85 past Bed Bath & Beyond and Barnes & Noble, and when I saw those lights up, I actually fist-pumped in my car. It's so sentimental! I love the trappings of the Christmas season. And yet for so

many of us, as we think about this time that we spend between Thanksgiving and Christmas, which typically makes up the Advent season, I think that peace is probably not the first word that comes to mind. What are some of the words for you? Maybe it's hectic, stressful, busy, chaotic. The kids are going to be off for two weeks and I still got to work. What am I going to do with that? I got to go shopping after work when all the other parents are. There's a lot going on. Sure, there might certainly be positive words. There's joy. There's family and friends. But for lots of folks, there are also some tough ones. Sadness and loneliness.

That's why Advent is such a treasure for us. It provides four anchor points, four spiritual principles that we can attach to in our lives, as we navigate this season. Not just this season, but for all of life. It's an annual reminder that in a world that inundates us with advertisements and reminders of what we don't have, Advent anchors us in what we do. We have peace, hope, love, and joy that are ours in Jesus Christ.

Last week, Pastor Jim talked about Advent Hope and this idea that the hope we have in Christ isn't a worldly kind of hope, as if it were some wishful dreaming that something good might happen for us in the future. But rather, it is a firm and secure hope that we have a guarantee by the promise and the character of God that what He has told us will happen is certainly ours.

Today, we're going to look at Advent Peace. It will be focusing on a few verses from our reading in Romans 15 today to be our guide. Romans 15:5-6 says "May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

As we get into our text today, actually I want to start by looking at the biblical concept of peace, in particular in the Old Testament because this forms the way that Jesus understood what peace was and who he was as the Prince of Peace. You might be looking up at the slide behind me here thinking "Wow! That is the least helpful slide I have ever seen in a sermon, Pastor Joe." I understand. That is the Hebrew word for peace. So if you don't read Hebrew, it might look pretty, but it's not comprehensible. It's the word *shalom*. It's a word that is still used today by Jews as a greeting. *Shalom*. It means *peace*. But the concept of *shalom* is bigger than just the way so many of us understand it as westerners or as Americans. When we think about peace, we think of it primarily as the absence of war or conflict. And that part of *shalom*, but that's not all of it. In the Bible, *shalom* is peace. It is a completeness and a wholeness and an absence of conflict is an



important part of that, but it's just a small part. *Shalom* is when everything is in its right place, whole and restored, and working together for the purpose for which God created it. That is *shalom*.

I'd like to detour now into Japanese art history. If you bear with me for a few minutes, I think you'll find this helpful. There's a Japanese art form called *Kintsugi*. Maybe you've heard of it. Maybe you haven't. It comes from the Japanese words that mean “gold joinery” and in *Kintsugi*, what is done is you take a broken piece of pottery or ceramic, put it back together, and use a lacquer mixed with gold. It looks something like this. The point of *Kintsugi* isn't that you would repair something in such a way as to conceal the damage. Rather it's highlighted, so that the function of the original vessel, the reality of the brokenness, and the beauty and craftsmanship of the restoration can all be seen, that something that was broken could be brought back to unity, beauty, and purpose by the work of an artist.



It's kind of like *shalom*. This is what God is doing in Jesus Christ for His people. He's taking lives and relationships broken and fractured, chaotic, and bringing about *shalom*. With this in mind, let's get into Romans.

Our text today says, “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had.”¹ This is the New International Version from 2011. It's your pew Bible in front of you. If you look at some other translations, this next one is actually the New International Version from 1984, the one I grew up reading, which I guess would be the old New International Version at this point. It says this, “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity amongst yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.”² Now, this is peace talk. It's talking of the supernatural power of God to unite, to fix the broken, and to restore relationships and make them whole, relationships with Him and with one another in and through Jesus Christ.

Now, this is something I don't want you to miss in the text today. It's easy to miss, but I don't want you to. Where does this attitude of Christ, this spirit of unity? Where does the text say that it comes from? It says that God gives it to us. Hear this. If you don't receive peace from God, where else are you going to get it?

¹ Romans 15:5, NIV, 2011

² Romans 15:5, NIV, 1984, emphasis Joe's

Once a week, usually a Wednesday or Thursday, I'll spend my morning working from the Starbucks over on Kooser Avenue. I encourage you to drop in on me sometime. I'd love to chat and buy you a cup of coffee. I do this because there seems to be an awful lot of not-so-coincidental coincidental things that happen when you just go spend a lot of time around the same group of people. Something happened this last Thursday as I was reading this message. I had my Bible out on the table and somebody came up and talked to me. "Oh, is that a Bible? Are you Christian?" I said, "Oh boy, don't you know it! I'm a pastor! I'm writing a sermon. You're in deep now." He said, "Yeah, I'm a Christian too. What's your sermon about?" which was his next mistake. I went on to tell him I'm writing a sermon about peace. It's for Advent. So I'm writing about peace.

We went on to have this conversation that they didn't quite sit right with me but honestly, I didn't have the right words at the moment. I wish I had, but I didn't. Maybe you can relate to that too. He went on to say "Peace, that seems really unrealistic." This is a Christian guy. He said, "Look at the Church. So many denominations! Sometimes we come together and we agree on some things, but you really think that there's going to be unity? Let alone in the bigger world outside of the Church. And if the Church can't even do it, then what hope is there for the rest of the world? Peace is unrealistic!" And I wish that I had something better to say at the moment. I thought about this conversation a lot and eventually, it dawned on me, a little too late. I'm sure that happens to you, too.

The thought was this. Of course, peace is unrealistic. He's not exactly wrong. Don't you think that if peace was realistic, we would have figured it out by now? At the time of Jesus, people were traveling by foot and donkey and now we can fly people to the moon. We're not any closer to peace. We just have more sophisticated ways to sow seeds of division and wage war. Peace is unrealistic because we can't get it by our own power. We can't achieve it by ourselves. We can only receive it when we seek it from the Prince of Peace. If peace is going to happen in this world, it's going to happen on God's terms and by His power, not ours.

If you only hear one thing today, this is the thing I want it to be. **True peace comes from God and there is nowhere else to get it.** If you're looking for it somewhere else, what you're going to find is a half-baked pale imitation of the real thing. It's going to seem like it, but it's ultimately going to fall short.

So if you're in a place in your life right now where peace is hard to come by, maybe that's the seasonal chaos – wow! there's so much going on how am I going to get everything done right now? Maybe it's bigger than that. Maybe it's

challenges in life: illness, problems with relationships, whatever it is. I'm going to guess that I don't have to tell you what is stealing your peace right now. You probably know. And if you don't, my encouragement to you is to ask God to show you. I promise you He will.

So what can you do? Pray that God would give you peace in those situations, specifically the challenges, the hardships, the struggles in your life. You don't have to hide them because they're not the right kinds of things to pray about. You don't have to say I don't have my life together and so I have to leave that part out when I come before God because I can only bring the good stuff to church. No. Say I am struggling and God, I need Your peace because I'm not getting it anywhere else. Here's what the scriptures say. Philippians 4:7: "The peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."

It says that peace, real peace doesn't make any sense. It transcends our understanding. You can be standing in the middle of the storm, in the middle of the chaos, in the hardship, in the brokenness of life and you can have a peace that doesn't make any sense. Except that it does because it's from Christ. You can have a peace that people who don't know Jesus look at your life and they say I don't get why you can have peace right now because it seems like this is a 5-alarm fire. But it only seems that way because maybe they don't know that your God has already conquered sin. He conquered death and He is disarmed and stands victorious over Satan. He's already stomped him into the ground. So you can stand there and have peace because you belong to the God who is victorious. Amen? The peace of God doesn't make sense except it does. The scriptures say this, "I'm convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all of creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is ours in Christ Jesus our lord."³ That's Romans 8. You can have peace in your life in all circumstances because you are His and according to the promises of God, nothing can snatch you from Jesus' hand.

I want to revisit *Kintsugi*. You see the origin of *Kintsugi* is not rooted in the idea of art for art's sake. It's rather in the idea that something could be so beautifully restored, not just aesthetically so that it looks nice, but then it could also be restored to the purpose that it had originally that it lost when it was broken, that it could be taken from disrepair and chaos to wholeness and then not set up on a mantle or a pedestal to be looked at as something pretty, but set back in the cupboard to be used again.

³ Romans 8:38-39

And this is what our text says today. Right? “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind that Christ Jesus had ***so that...*** with one heart and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁴

Peace isn't just the end. The peace that God gives is peace that has a purpose, that the unity of God's people would be a powerful testimony to the goodness of their God. The point from the beginning was that the people that God chose and sanctified and set apart for Himself would glorify Him in the way that they lived in this world. And in doing so, they would point others to the God who could put together that which was broken and speak peace into that which was chaotic, that the testimony of this *shalom* that God brings to your life, to the life of the Church would be a powerful witness to others. I believe it will be. I believe that to a world that is divided and filled with animosity, you and I could proclaim and live out peace.

So brothers and sisters in Christ, this Advent let us be people of peace. May the God who repairs broken things and beautifully makes them whole again do that very same thing for you, so that united together, we might glorify the One who sets things right, who makes them whole. And that this would be an invitation to those around us, living in darkness with no peace, to come and see, to take a look into a manger this Christmas and behold the Prince of Peace.

Advent peace... it cuts against the grain of the world that we live in. It is calmness and quiet where there is chaos. It is a unity where there is division and conflict. And it transcends all understanding because it only comes from God. And it's a true peace that sets our hearts at rest and tunes our lives as individuals and as a family of faith to the purpose for which we were created and set apart, to bring glory to God, the God of Peace, the One who takes broken things and with something far more precious than gold, the very body and blood of Jesus Christ, takes what was broken. He makes it whole again. He brings about *shalom*. Advent peace. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank You that You are the God of Peace. Lord that not only that You have the power to bring about peace, but also that You see us. You see where we are. You see the state we're in. Our way is not a mystery to You. And so we can come before You, in the chaos of life, in the hardship, in the brokenness, and say, “God, this is me. Make me whole. Give me peace.” In Jesus' name. Amen.

⁴ Romans 15:5-6, emphasis Joe's