

## Seeing a Different Peace

Scripture: Isaiah 40:1 – 11, Jeremiah 6:13 – 16, & Isaiah 11:1 – 9

Advent #2 – 12/5/21

When I think of times in my life when ‘peace’ was not a word that described my life. The reason for this feeling of lacking ‘peace’ has everything to do with where my confidence lied.

My peace was based on my own ability to get a job and earn a living, not based on the One who said that I would never be left alone or deserted. My peace was based on my relationship with my spouse and children, not grounded in my relationship with God and Jesus Christ. My peace was based on my communication skills and likeability, not on the One who called himself the Prince of Peace. My peace was based on my personal ability to change, not on my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Our scripture reading from Isaiah 40 offers us the chance to see peace differently. God asks us to lay aside what we think we can do and He calls us to experience the comfort he can supply.

God invites us to remember that no matter how gifted we think we are, at the end of our days, we are just like grass and we wither away and the flowers of our life fade. True peace comes when we remember we are not in control and never will be. Surrender gives us this beautiful gift of peace.

‘What a Friend We Have in Jesus’ is a hymn we sing often in church. When I sang it not long ago to a beautiful lady Ruth Woolcock, who was 98 in a nurse home, she sang along with me. She ask me about these words in the song – *O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

She said that many times in her life, she tried to go it alone. She said she often would not remember God presence in her life. But she now at the late stages of her life, know God wanted to carry her burdens. She now understood that God longed to give her directions about what to do next. I asked her if I could share that wisdom with the children in our church. She said YES! And I did share that wisdom from Ruth Woolcock. The children listened to my sharing and one of the children who was a great grandchild of Ruth said 'If Great Grammy said that, it must be true!

May each of you gather this wisdom - *O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.*

In our reading from the book of Jeremiah, the people are soon going to be under attack. Jeremiah offers them a choice – place their confidence in human leaders who readily seek to deceive you or ask God for guidance. The prophet reminds us that if we draw upon the wisdom of God, we will find rest for our souls.

Doesn't that sound nice to hear in the December! REST!

How would you describe your personal experience with God?  
What words would you use?

Some of you might speak of God's holiness because you have seen God do miracles in your life that were beyond your understanding. Some of you might speak about God's love because no matter what you have been through in your life, you have never felt God has left you. Or some of you might describe God's judgement because rarely have you been separated from guilt for the less than perfect choices you have made.

My answer to how I would describe my personal experience with God would be a combination of all three things – God’s holiness because of the miracles I have seen; God’s love because no matter what, God has never forsaken me; and God’s judgement because he has forgiven me for all the wrong choices I have made.

But during this Advent, I found myself buried in anxiety. The pandemic, the social unrest and the racial injustice in our nation have caused me to be very anxious! How about you?

We need to see God through the lens of love! Not just for ourselves, but for our neighbors and the entire created world. The Lord longs to give us what is good. God wants us not only to work for peace, but to be at peace! Let me repeat that - God wants us not only to work for peace, but to be at peace!

In our second reading from the Book of Isaiah, chapter 11, we are given a picture with vivid words about seeing peace differently. Though this passage may seem to be a fairy tale with the lion lying down with the lamb and the cow and bear grazing together, it is not!

God wants to show us a new way to live in this world. God is offering us new life, not only in the paradoxical places in our lives, but in the possibilities around us that seem dead and gone. God moves in situations that may feel dead to us. But where is this?

Some in our modern context would say we can find God at work in who is elected to office, or those who find their way into Oprah’s Book Club, or those in the social media who voice their opinion in retweets and likes.

But Isaiah 11 would beg us to turn away from all this and go to the stumps! Isaiah tells us to start with the deadest of dead ministries, the deadest of dreams, and the deadest of dead relationships. There is God at work. Peace springs up among the ashes.

So in what dead thing in your life does God want to work today? In what dead thing in our lives does God want to work today? In what dead thing in our church does God want to work today?

Isaiah 42:14 says – *For a long time I have held my peace, I have kept still and restrained myself; now I will cry out like a woman in labor and I will gasp and pant.*

I do not know if your family is anything like mine, but around the holidays especially, certain topics must be avoided in order to keep the peace. Casseroles, turkey, ham, and sweet potatoes do not go well with politics or religion. If you are like me, you make the choice to keep the peace out of respect to your family members so that WWIII will not erupt!

There does come a point in our life of faith when we cannot be silent anymore! We must let our voices be heard. Not because of our ego or desire to be right, but because the presence of god in our life compels us to speak. Like a woman in labor, we must give birth to something new. Have we arrived at such a time?

Here is the thing: peace is not about keeping everyone happy, even though that is what we wish for. Living in peace is about authenticity. It is about going to bed at night knowing you have fully shown up for the day. It is about having the courage to be who you are without shame. Have we arrived at such a time?

When we do this, we give others permission to do the same!

If you see injustice, speak up. If you see racism, speak up. If you see hatred, speak up. If you see God glory in Jesus Christ, speak up!

Let us pray:

God of peace, we forget that you are the author of our days. We seek peace in people, things, and goals that do not satisfy. Reboot our lives this day and give us true peace.

God of Peace, we invite you into our lives. Into all the nooks and crannies of our lives. We invite you into the moments when we feel alive and the moments when we are filled with fear. We want to walk with you all day long.

Loving God, you long for our bodies, our families, and our neighbors to be at peace. As giver of all good things, surround us with a new vision for our lives today because we want to see you as you are!

O God, take us to the stumps of our stories. Take us to the dead places within our lives and this world. Remind us that you long to do something new.        AMEN.

To conclude this message, Emily Swett will be singing 'O Come, O Come Emmanuel' with two new verses written by Rev. Kevin Munroe on peace.