

12-5-21 Second Sunday in Advent: Peace

Sermon- Representing the Peace

Scripture- Luke 3:1-6, CTW Luke 1:68-79

Hymns- To be selected by PK, Dave

Theme- Have you prepared the way for the Lord by knowing the peace He has promised and then showing it to others? In this time of chaos, how do we represent the peace of God to others?

I. Introduction: Peace in the Preparation

December has to be by far, the craziest month of the year – wouldn't you agree? If someone from another planet were to come and watch our world during this month, that visitor would conclude that we have completely lost our minds.

Why is this month so crazy?

A. It's because we are preparing, aren't we. As the husband balances precariously on his ladder, hanging the icicle lights in just the right spot – he's preparing. As men and women hit the shopping malls with a high level of intensity and aggressiveness – they're preparing.

As houses become filled with the smell of cookies, and radio stations change around their programming to include old, nostalgic songs about chestnuts and a winter wonderland – people are preparing, because soon, it will be Christmas Day!

This month of December is the season of Advent for us Christians. Advent gives us four weeks to ponder where we are in God's creation of things. Advent can be the time when we, as individuals, as members of the whole family of God, should turn a mirror on ourselves. And we should look at that reflection of ourselves and ponder our place within this large and wonderful family.

B. Just as we do all kinds of physical things to prepare for Christmas, we also do spiritual things to prepare

ourselves for Christ. It's easy to prepare for the holiday of Christmas – just look at what other people are doing – you'll figure it out.

But how do you prepare for Christ? It's a mystery for many people. Many of you might say "I am ready for Christmas! But will you say that you are at peace because you are ready for Christ? What does that mean? How do we go about that?"

In the Gospels, Jesus suggests that because of the demands our life can put on each one of us, it is very easy to forget what our life should be all about - that we **ARE**, because of GOD; that we **HAVE**, because of GOD.

We are the beneficiaries of a truly wonderful God. Without our belief in GOD, this world would certainly be a different place in which to live. God is the best thing to ever happen to the people of this planet.

Advent is four weeks when we should reflect on how we might need to heed John's call to the people.

Advent is four weeks when we should balance our busy schedules with times for **stillness and reflection.**

Because **Stillness** allows things that matter to rise up in our hearts. And **Reflection** gives us the room to ask ourselves questions that we may not otherwise hear.

Questions like:

What do I believe?

Why do I believe it?

What difference is it making in how I live?

What do I give to GOD?

What of mine belongs to GOD?

Advent should cause us to do two things: watch and wait.

Staying awake and being alert are two Advent behaviors Jesus calls us to.

They are also what John the Baptist is calling us to.

II. John the Baptist Teaches Us How to Get Ready

John held his “services” in the desert – no chairs, no heater, no robe with decorations – his church was out in the desert, by the Jordan River.

And what did he talk about out there? Look at verse 3: “He went into all the country around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” He was called the “Baptist” because he encouraged people to be baptized.

A. He encouraged people to repent.

This wasn’t his idea. This was his destiny – this was God’s purpose for his life – John was talked about hundreds of years before he lived, as it says in verse 4: “As is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet: **A voice of one calling in the desert, prepare YE the way for the Lord.**”

John had been called by God to prepare people for the arrival of the Messiah – Jesus Christ was about to start his public ministry, and John was preparing people, getting them ready. He did that by teaching the people to repent.

And we know what it means to “repent”. It means to make a U-turn, to change direction. John was telling the people to change the direction of their lives. They were going one way, unprepared for Christ. John told them to turn their lives around and go the other way, and in that journey, we will find true peace.

B. This is how we should really prepare for Christmas as well. Repent. Think of repentance this way – first you identify, and then, you do the opposite.

First, you identify what is sinful in your life. This will take some quiet time on your part. Turn off the TV, the radio in your

car. Shut down the internet. Take a break from shopping and decorating. Just sit, and think, and identify the weaknesses in your life.

What is your weakness, your sin? Are you materialistic? Do you like to be surrounded by things? Are you selfish? Do you have impure, immoral thoughts? Are you impatient with others? Do you say things about other people that you really shouldn't say?

What are your sins? Identify them. This is the first part of repentance. **And then the second, do the opposite.** Instead of being materialistic, be spiritual. Instead of being selfish, be generous. Instead of being immoral, strive to be pure in your mind. Do the opposite. Change direction in your life. Make a U-turn. That's repentance.

III. But What About the Change in Your Life?

I left out the most important thing. Do you know what that is? Without this, you'll never successfully change in your life. You'll try, and maybe you'll be successful for awhile. But without the most important thing, you'll eventually fall back into your old ways, just like someone on a crash diet who eventually gains all the weight back.

A. The most important part of repentance is Christ.

Without Christ, true repentance is impossible, and you will never change. But with Christ, anything is possible. After you identify your sins, take them to Christ. Take them to the foot of the cross.

As someone once said, **"when your soul has laid down its faults at the feet of Christ, you feel as though you have wings."** Confess your shortcomings to Christ. And then rejoice, because he forgives you all of your sins. "I forgive you," Christ says. "I died on the cross for all those faults you have. I was punished for your weaknesses. I forgive you."

How can we ever have true Christian peace if we do not recognize this?

B. God wants us to experience true Christian peace. And as Christ forgives you, he also gives you strength. If you want to make changes in your life, Christ will give you the strength you need. As Philippians chapter four says, "I can do all things through **HE** who strengthens (**empowers**), me."

If you want to stop being so materialistic, and instead, be more spiritual, Christ will give you the strength to do that. If you want to stop being selfish, and instead, be generous, Christ will strengthen you.

If you want to stop being immoral in your thoughts, and instead, be pure, Christ will help you. If you want to be more loving, more patient, more kind, then do this - take your sins to Christ, confess them. Let him forgive you. And as he forgives you, he will strengthen you to be a brand-new person.

That's repentance. That's what John the Baptist was talking about in the desert. John pointed the people to Christ as he talked about verse 6: "All mankind will see God's salvation." **Christ is God's salvation.**

IV. So, where can you go today and see him, the peace of Christmas?

On Christmas Eve, the shepherds found him in the most unusual place - not a palace, not a throne. But a humble stable. And still today, if you want to see God's salvation, if you want to see Christ - you will find him in humble places. Here, in the humble Word of God, here is God's salvation.

A. Here in the humble sacrament of baptism, there is Christ. You have all watched a child get baptized. Do you realize that you were seeing God's salvation? Christ was working in that child's heart, changing him, giving him faith, giving him the forgiveness of sins. That's God's salvation.

It is in the Lord's Supper. TODAY, we will all participate in the Sacrament. There in the humble bread and cup you find God's

salvation – the body and blood of Christ, given and shed for you, for the forgiveness of sins.

B. Are you ready for Christmas this year? More importantly, are you ready for Christ? Are you ready to celebrate his first coming? Are you ready to receive him, when he comes again in all of his glory? If you listen closely, over the songs about Rudolph and Frosty and Santa you hear at the mall – if you listen closely, you will hear a voice, a voice of one calling in the desert, prepare the way for the Lord. That is the message of Advent – repent and know the peace of God.

Bible Verses on Peace:

James 3:18 Peacemakers who sow in **peace** reap a harvest of righteousness.

2 Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you **peace** at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

John 16:33 “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have **peace**. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Matthew 5:9 Blessed are the **peacemakers**, for they will be called children of God.

Let Christ take away your sins and change the direction of your life. Let him prepare you for the day you see him, not in a card, or a manger scene – let Christ prepare you for the day you will see him face to face and grant you **His peace**.

Let Us Approach His Table TODAY with this search for peace in our hearts!

Amen? Let us pray.