

Oak Grove Presbyterian Church
Rev. Dr. Bart Roush
December 4, 2022
Isaiah 11:1-9

Let us pray for the presence of God's Spirit.

Speak to us, Lord. Speak to us in the waiting, the watching, the hoping, the longing, the sorrow, the sighing, the rejoicing. Speak to us by your Word in these Advent days and walk with us until the day of your coming. Amen.

Isaiah 11:1-9

¹ A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow out of his roots.

² The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

³ His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
or decide by what his ears hear;

⁴ but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;
he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

⁵ Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

⁶ The wolf shall live with the lamb,

the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.

⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.

⁸ The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den.

⁹ They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

We often hear from the prophets at Advent – at the beginning of a new liturgical year. We hear both their words of warning and of promise. It is not unlike the New Year's resolutions that some of us will make in the not-too-distant future. "This year I will get enough rest, enough exercise, I will read more. This year will be better – this year I will be kinder. This year, I will treat myself and others better." In the New Year, we make promises to ourselves that many of us, as much as we try, eventually break as we fall back into old habits and patterns. This cycle of hopeful resolutions followed by disappointment has played out in the wider context of God's people.

There would be a new king and there would be hope that this time it would be better - and then it would not be better. A new king would come along, and there would be hope that it would get better, and then it would not get better.

Isaiah speaks a word of hope and peace amidst this chaos and despair. His prophecy has two visions. First is the hope for a righteous ruler in the line of David – a shoot from the stump of Jesse, David’s father. The second is the hope for God’s kingdom to reign where harmony and peace will be possible.

Jesse was the father of the great and beloved king David. David, like Saul before him, was the anointed one of the Lord. Isaiah envisions a future where a new anointed king in the line of David will sit again on the throne.

The hope is outlandish. The kings of Judah and Israel did not follow in God’s ways, and have come to ruin – there is not a righteous one in the bunch. The family tree of Jesse is now likened to a stump. But from this, Isaiah declares, a new shoot shall come – and the Spirit of the Lord will rest on this new king. He will have a spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and might, of knowledge and fear of God. He will rule the people with righteousness and faithfulness. He will be equitable to the meek and the poor.

Last week, we lit the candle of hope to begin our season of Advent. This week, we lit the candle of peace. It seems fitting to me that we start first with a word of hope. Hope makes things possible. Even those things that may not be possible. Hope lets us dream of a peaceable kingdom. Hope lets us not respond in fear and retaliation, but in forgiveness and reconciliation. Hope allows us to bear God into the world. We become the light-bearers of a new possibility when we act from hope. Hope allows us to bring part of the peaceable kingdom into being and invite others to join in. Hope is foundational to our faith and calls us beyond ourselves.

One writer has written, “Hope opens something in the human heart. Like shutters slowly parting to admit a winter dawn, hope permits strands of

light to make their way to us, even when we still stand in cold darkness; but hope also reveals a landscape beyond us into which we can live and move and have our being. With hope, closely held interior thoughts are turned outward; deep desires, perhaps long hidden in secret corners of our heart, might be lifted up to the light. At times, hope peels back the edges of our imaginations to free what waits – underneath – a changed life, a new resolve, a yes pregnant with possibility. In other moments hope dares us to unfold a layer of desire – for relationship, for clarity, for courage.”¹

This Advent hope is about the people of God declaring the impossible, the unimaginable. Isaiah describes the impossible, and really the absurd. Not only is the idea of a righteous king from the line of Jesse out there, but then he lays out a vision that’s radical and strange. A wolf laying down with a lamb. The lion and the cattle eating in the same field together. A child playing over the place where a poisonous snake lives. It’s all very jarring. Relationships based on fear are transformed to relationships of peace and trust. It’s a whole new way of being.

There are a variety of meanings of the word for peace in scripture. It is rich and complex. In the Hebrew, the language of the Older Testament, peace can mean wholes and total welfare. Shalom. It is the sum of God’s blessing in the community of faith. It is about right relationship between the people and God, and with one another. It is total peace as Isaiah describes.

The New Testament word for peace has multiple meanings. It can be the absence of war and chaos. It can be about an individual virtue of being calm and in a state of serenity. It is used as a greeting, just as we did earlier in our worship. And it also encompasses the idea of just and right relationship with God and with one another.

And peace can be hard to come by.

The comic, “Peanuts” by Charles Schultz (a Saint Paul native) has always been a favorite of mine. And I thought of one this week.

In a Peanuts cartoon Charlie Brown’s sister Sally comes to him and says, “I hate everything. I hate everybody. I hate the whole wide world.” Charlie Brown responds, “But I thought you had inner peace.” Sally replies, “I do have peace. But I still have outer obnoxiousness.”

Whatever Sally may have, it is not the peace described in scripture. But I think many of us can relate to Sally. Peace doesn’t come so easily.

In Philippians (4:6-7), Paul writes, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

A peace that surpasses or transcends all understanding. A peace that doesn’t make sense. When Isaiah describes this new king, he says the king will, “not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth.”

It seems rather odd, doesn’t it? Not to judge by what we see – by what is right before us? This time of Advent reminds us that God doesn’t always play within the rules – and that God can do the unexpected – can show up in seemingly impossible ways. God does not promise to take the chaos and the busyness away but does promise to be with us. Maybe peace can be those smaller moments of calm – a clean email inbox, or clear calendar, or a task finished - but God’s peace is deeper than that. God’s peace is a reminder that we are not the ones in charge. God’s peace is a reminder that we are created in the image of God, and that is good. God’s peace is a promise that God is with us. God’s peace is a

promise that God will make all things whole, that the well-being of the creation is God's concern.

Advent is that time where we wait and prepare – prepare for God's peace. We wait for the inbreaking of the Prince of Peace so that the world may be made whole, that peace might prevail. And not just any peace, but a deep peace that is anchored in justice and mercy. A peace that allows us to face the uncertainty of the world with the promise that nothing is impossible for God. That goodness is stronger than evil, love is stronger than hate, truth is stronger than fear, and life is stronger than death.

To spend some time in preparation, I'm going to invite you into a brief prayer meditation. I will read the scripture passage from Philippians a few times, and in-between I will invite you into a time of prayer. Get as comfortable as you can, and if you wish, you can close your eyes.

First take a breath. And another.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Say a prayer for yourself – open your heart to God and ask for God's peace in your life.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Say a prayer for someone you love – place your loved one in God’s peace.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Say a prayer for someone you don’t know well – hold them before God.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

This may be a little harder, offer a prayer of peace for someone who irritates you, someone who is hostile toward you, someone who makes you sad or angry, someone who has hurt you, or someone you cannot forgive. – pray for whatever peace might look like.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Say a prayer for the world, for a situation that seems hopeless, but imagine if all were made well – Pray for God’s peaceable kingdom.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Say another prayer for yourself – open your heart to God and ask for God’s peace in your life.

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Amen.

¹ Pamela Hawkins, *Simply Wait*