

PEACE, WHERE DO YOU FIND IT?

We just lit the peace candle on this second Sunday of Advent. When you think of peace what picture do you see in your mind - a mountain on a clear day or any other quiet time? When peace is mentioned in the Old Testament with the word shalom, it means a wholeness, completeness and harmony of life. As we sing the circle song at the close of the service today think of that meaning "shalom to you now shalom my friend" and "Christ be your shalom" as you look around. In the New Testament peace refers to an inner well-being. Depending on what translation of the Bible you read. Peace is mentioned over 200 times in the message up to nearly 500 times in the 1899 American version.

Peace must be important to God. After all what were the first words Jesus spoke as he appeared to the disciples in the upper room – "peace unto you" also when appearing to Thomas. In John we can find several instances where Jesus told his disciples that He gives us a peace unlike anything this world has to offer.

As Advent gives way to Christmas-- remember the angels after they told the shepherds the good news of Jesus' birth a multitude of heavenly hosts praised God "glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased".

We know God the Father and Jesus offer us a peace, and it is our choice to take it or not. God does not force anything upon us. The question is as we make preparation during this Advent season for His birth, where are we trying to find peace? A few weeks ago in the message there was a challenge to use our time wisely to prepare for the birth of Jesus and letting Him in our life, our heart, and our spirit!

It is in Jesus where we will find real peace!!!! Why? Because the world's definition of peace is an absence of war or strife or conflict, but Jesus offers us a peace, despite conflict, strife or war!!!! It is a peace that passes all understanding, why would we not receive that when offered it?

There are reasons we don't have peace, God's peace, because as the old country and western song told us "we are looking in all the wrong places". It is interesting that a gall up poll taken regarding personal success, that peace of mind was fifth after good health, an enjoyable job, happy family, and a good education. There were 20 to 30 options to choose from and surprisingly materialistic things such as money, a luxury car or expensive house finished near last.

This may tell us, people have their heart in the right place. If you think about it when you do not have peace you lack inner well-being. Then no job will satisfy no matter the pay, and if you are not happy the family is not likely to be happy. After all you are the spiritual head of it, and I suppose you

could have a good education without peace, but if you are not in area of vocation you desire, i doubt if you have peace or well-being. It has been proven that your health will not be good either without a peace of mind in those other areas.

Who doesn't want peace? However, we only have to look at the past and current situations to realize that in order for peace each party wants it on their own terms!! Many historians will tell you that World War 2 was because revenge was on the minds of the loser of World War 1. Look at the situation like in Missouri. Revenge is on the minds of many and they will not have peace until "justice is served" in their minds.

Many will experience peace only when things go their way. Look around our world-- so much conflict, because somebody wants their way, with no compromise. This can especially fit our situation as we progress with a possible expansion. There will be no peace in the body of Christ if we all want our own way, and there is nothing worth the toll such a conflict brings.

The second reason for no peace is the seeking of revenge, how long have some conflicts been raging? Many are centuries old. Even in our sports a game is touted as revenge for a previous loss or thumping. And we wonder why we have conflicts when we talk of revenge when it is only a game!!! In James we hit the nail on head - "what causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. ..." James 4:1-2a. We want it our way! It is one huge obstacle to having peace.

Now this may sound strange to mention on a Sunday morning, but it is a valid question. "Do you include God when solving your problems? Or do you have to be in charge and do it your way? It really comes down to a trust issue, and asking yourself "is God looking out for my best interests? ". Consider this too, how many times have you involved yourself in a situation, only to have the situation made worst by your own involvement? There is a saying, "if something is big enough to worry about, it's big enough to pray about". No matter the situation we can have peace about it if we pray and hand it over the God.

These are two reasons why many people don't have peace, so where can we find it? For the disciple of Jesus Christ, when we read the Word we know. One way is peace with God through obedience. In part Isaiah 48 says "if you listen to my commandments then your peace would be like a river". There are numerous verses where Jesus himself spoke of the peace He gives to us. Ephesians 2 "for He is our peace, who has made us one, and broken down the walls between us", and we will never have peace apart from God. Peace starts with God. When we have a relationship

with him and trust and obey him it will bring a peace no matter the circumstances around us and what we must go through.

Peace is also found with one another. A verse from Ephesians 4 “be eager to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace”. How? With trust in God then, I can ask for or grant forgiveness keeping the bond of peace. After all we are His disciples and we are reminded of those words of Christ on the cross, words of forgiveness, and we have far less things to forgive of one another.

Now if we can find peace with one another then the next step is peace with the world, out there. Easy? No not really. However, we are to be the example. Recall Romans 12:17 “if it is possible as much as it depends on you, live peaceably with all men”. We are to be different, but do we show it? Do we repay evil with good, hostility with kindness, and pray for those who use us? It is a tall order, but they are all here – God the father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit to forgive and guide us.

Another verse we can put our trust into God is Philippians 4 – “for I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength”. If we have the trust and confidence in the promises of these verses, then we will have peace within. Later in Philippians 4:7 “and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Just like joy, peace is something that does not depend on circumstances, outward things. It is possessed deep within us, because of relationships with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. When we have those relationships, Jesus’ words in John 14 take on a special meaning – “peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Now we know where to find it, how do we maintain it? Peace is a Fruit of the Spirit mentioned right after love and joy. They are traits deep within our spirit, offered by God in order we may share them with others and draw them to God.

In closing here is a story of man and his family.

There was a Chicago lawyer. In 1871, Chicago was devastated by a great fire that destroyed much of the city...including many of the family's possessions. At about that same time, his son died. But in spite of his own personal loss, he unselfishly helped others who had become grief-stricken and homeless because of the fire. Some time later, he and his wife and four daughters planned a trip to England where they were going to take part in a revival with the Evangelist D. L. Moody. As their ship was about to depart, he was unexpectedly detained by urgent business and so he sent his family ahead with intentions to join them later.

As the ship neared England, it collided with an English sailing ship and swiftly sank drowning 226 of the 273 passengers on board. His wife was one of the 47 who survived. She sent a telegram with these two words “saved alone.” Their four daughters had drowned in the tragedy.

He left immediately for England, and as his ship approached the area where his girls had drowned, he penned the words to this song... *“tho’ satan should buffet, tho’ trials should come, let his blessed assurance control, that Christ has regarded my helpless estate, and hath shed his own blood for my soul. It is well, with my soul. It is well; it is well with my soul.”* And the words of the first verse are very fitting today - *“when peace like a river attended my way, when sorrows like sea-billows roll, whatever my lot, thou has taught me to know; ‘it is well, with my soul.’ it is well... it is well with my soul.”*

Remember peace is another word for well-being.

We lit the peace candle today, may we continue to prepare for the birth of Jesus and peace only He brings – the Prince of Peace. Amen.