

Walk In The Realm of Peace
Isaiah 11:1-10
Dec. 9th, 2007
Rev. Steve McCoy
First United Methodist Church
Marquette, MI
2nd Sunday of Advent

Today we lit the candle of peace, we pray for peace, we call for peace and we look forward to the coming of the Prince of Peace, but what does that really mean? What are we called to be as followers of the Prince of Peace?

For some peace is a concept of the lack of inner turmoil. So for some the coming of Christ represents an individual understanding that if they have him in their hearts everything is going to be okay, even if it isn't okay.

For others it represents a future that is dreamed for, but never realized. A pie in the sky ideal we should at least say we are working towards but let's be realistic, it'll never happen in our lifetime.

Others take it a step further declaring that it is something far off down the road, perhaps when Christ returns, or when we die and get to heaven, we say that they are now at peace.

Others still fear that this peace never was and never can be. Have you seen ancient maps of unexplored portions of the world? Maps that portrayed the prevailing ideas of what lay beyond, the unexplored lands and the uncrossed seas? Maps from before the adventures of Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus and Ferdinand Magellan? How grotesquely inaccurate those maps were! How vastly they differed from what the explorer eventually found! How fantastic were the notions the ancients had about what was out there - a dropping-off-place, mammoth sea serpents to swallow up ships. But as things turned out, it wasn't that way at all. You know, if Columbus had believed half the maps and legends of his time he would never have lifted an anchor!

Well, we are all traveling into the unexplored land, and we ought to be careful how we map it until we've traveled there. Certainly we shouldn't let the future do things to us it never meant to do. It is my belief that the future means to be friendly and hope filled; and I don't think we ought to treat it as an enemy. If we do, and start in to do battle with it, I can tell you this: it's a battle we can never win. Let's not suspect it of standing over us with a club waiting for a chance to clobber us into the ground, or of lurking in the shadows to pounce upon us around the next dark corner.

And surely we shouldn't be afraid of the future - not if we are Christians.¹

¹ Brett Blair: sermons.com

In fact all the scriptures today tell us exactly that in form or another. Perhaps as Isaiah suggests, we should not look on this peace as a pie in the sky, future hoped for dream kingdom, but instead turn this peace towards righteousness and justice which Christ calls us to enact in this time and in this place. Not to judge by what we see, or even by what we hear, but in the light of grace which God first gave to us in Christ. As Peter Gomes writes: The coming of Jesus "...is accompanied by truth triumphant over mere fact, by justice and righteousness and mercy triumphant over a mere accommodation of present circumstances, of joy triumphant over mere pleasure, of peace triumphant over the mere absence of overt hostility." ²

In this season of Advent we need not place our hope in something that never existed, nor should we place it in where we have not been, but instead understand that the coming of Christ is Gods call to us to bring about this peaceable kingdom now. So often even I can become cynical, as many people can, about the state of our world. We deem solutions as impractical, or even impossible. But it has been said that impossible is only the degree of difficulty. What is possible through God is the stuff that dreams in fact are made of but also in fact find our hope.

I was listening to the Ed Schultz Show on the XM radio and he commented while they were in Miami how a bus driver said there is no such thing as Christmas anymore. When asked why, he said it's become so commercial, so distorted it doesn't mean anything anymore. Well it still means a little more than that to me Ed replied and then moved on. It can be very easy for us to get discouraged, but we cannot must not allow this peace that surpasses all understanding to be obscured by the fact that people are tired of being told what they need. Rather than surrender we maintain that hope of the peace and righteousness that prevails because of what God has done, is doing and will do in the coming of Jesus Christ. No sale, so discount no commercial, can ever diminish that fact unless we surrender that power to them.

Isaiah takes an ideal and uses a metaphor for what this peace could look like. He does not say it will actually be like this but he does describe that predators and prey will live together as one, the snakes will not bite with their venomous jaws, for the earth will be filled with knowledge of the Lord, as much as the waters cover the seas. This is part of what we journey for as we welcome the light of Christ into the world. The Light that is filled with Peace. That story can not and should not and will not allow itself to be distorted no matter how much others may try.

You may have heard this in different forms, about the story of the member who in order to join the church had to be able to tell the Christmas story. So they begin to tell the pastor well there's this man and a woman Mary and Joseph, who travel to have a baby. The pastor says uh huh, and then there are these angels that tell the shepherds about it and they go to find the baby. Uh huh the pastor says go on. And then there's these wise men who see a star. Keep going the pastor says. And they follow it to find the

² Gomes, Peter. *Sermons: Biblical Wisdom for Daily Living*. San Fransisco, Harper Sanfransisco, 1998 p.7

baby. “Yes your doing great.” says the pastor. And it leads them toward the manger and they find the baby Jesus.... then there’s six more weeks of winter?

We may get distracted but the basics are there. The Christian journey or the Christian walk then does not become some aimless wandering where we believe we might find Jesus along the way but instead leads us ever closer to that day where justice and righteousness will prevail in our world. We must again be careful not to read into this more than is being asked. To read into this that there is law, and to begin to pass judgment of who is rich and who is poor. As Gene Tucker writes: Isaiah, “...presents for us unqualified good news. Whether in this world and history, or beyond they cry joyfully that God wills-and one day will bring about-justice and peace for the world and all its living creatures. No interpretive comments should be allowed to obscure this tone of joyful hope”³ So with that hope and that grace that cannot be undone let us walk together in the realm of God’s Peace. Thanks be to God, Amen.

³ Tucker, Gene M. *The New Interpreters Bible: Isaiah*. Nashville, Abingdon Press 2001, P.142