

“Peace to All, Near and Far” – Pr Jim Sprengle – Advent Midweek 2 December 13, 2023

- I. **Ephesians 2:17** – “¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.”
- II. **It seems like everywhere we go right now, it’s busy with people.**
 - a. It started before Thanksgiving – when I pulled into the local grocery store and had to drive around three times to find a parking spot.
 - b. I suppose this time of year brings us closer to people than any other.
 - c. The stores are full, the parking lots are full, and the lines are long.
 - d. You may have been invited to a Christmas party or work party that will bring you together with people you barely know.
 - e. Perhaps your cousin is the chosen one to host this year’s Christmas party, and they happen to have the smallest house in the family – as you envision yourself tightly packed in their living room with extended family.
 - f. The Advent and Christmas season bring us shoulder to shoulder with strangers, neighbors, family, and friends.
 - g. So, is that your definition of peace?
 - i. A long checkout line... a crowded party... sitting on a couch with too many people on it?
 - ii. I can’t imagine anyone feeling peaceful as I describe these things – in fact, most of us think of peace in the exact opposite way.
 - iii. Peace is usually considered to be open space, quiet, and calm.
 - h. Our example of a five-point star last week was the top point and reaching upward to attain peace through possessions... this week our example is the two points on the right and left.
 - i. Sometimes we look for our peace by getting away... going as far from our present location as possible.
 - ii. If you think about it, we are conditioned to believe that getting away is the key to peace – even advertisements from airlines like Southwest and their “Wanna Get Away” program tell us to jump on a plane and get away from the current stress.
 - iii. However, God knows we can’t find true peace by distance alone, so He helps us to be content in our current place.
- III. **If peace could be found someplace far away**, what picture comes to mind?
 - a. It’s funny, but when I get my blood pressure taken, I take a deep breath and imagine myself gently swinging in a hammock between two palm trees on a beach in Hawaii.
 - i. The smell of the ocean, seagulls calling in the distance, a slight breeze, and an empty beach... in my mind, this is enough to relax very quickly... to feel at peace.
 - b. What is your picture of that perfect place?
 - i. Is it a cabin up in the woods... maybe sitting on a quiet lake?

- ii. You have the lake to yourself... no other cabins around you or people fishing or boating.
- iii. Perfectly calm waters with no wind... and all you see is a glassy reflection of the trees surrounding you.
- iv. That's peace... no phone service... no messages or emails... no TV to remind you of all the troubles in the world.
 - 1. Make a little coffee, sit on the porch, and soak it all in.
 - 2. It sounds pretty peaceful, doesn't it?
- c. Okay, so back to reality – or at least where we spend most of time.
 - i. You see, even if we could find a place like that to spend our time, it's not like we could stay there forever.
 - ii. We can't take care of our lives in complete solitude and distance.
 - iii. We can't take care of the people who depend on us when we are out in the woods.
 - iv. No, we need a peace that fits our current situation.
- d. So, if we can't get away, then we try to find peace in the here and now...
 - i. One of the ways we do that is by rearranging the past.
 - ii. If it were possible, our past could use some changing – or perhaps some distance.
 - iii. Unfortunately, the past doesn't stay in the past... the wreckage of the past becomes the wreckage of the present... and sometimes even threatens the future.
 - iv. The past has all those people, those events, those harsh words, and those tears that never fully went away.
 - v. Wouldn't it be great if we could erase the troubles of the past and haul them off that cabin out in the woods?
 - vi. We could just dump all that garbage out there and leave the good stuff with us here...
 - vii. That's one way people try to find peace, is pretending like the past didn't happen.

- IV. **Either way we go, toward isolation or denial** – God brings us back.
- a. We may run away to an isolated place... or we might deny the past... but God stops us from going too far in either direction and is able to give us peace in the present.
 - b. Jesus is our peace... right here and right now.
 - c. We might want to be separate and isolate, but Jesus brings us closer to Himself... as Paul says, “But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility...”
 - i. The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was all about gathering up people and giving them peace.

- d. In all the ways we want to make peace for ourselves – escaping from this crowded, stressful environment – or pretend like the worst part of your past doesn't exist – God stops us and brings us peace in the present.
 - i. Remember the disciples sailing in the boat while Jesus was sleeping?
 - ii. A storm hammers them, and they're rowing like crazy while Jesus was snoozing away in the front of the boat.
 - iii. Finally, they wake Him up and ask, "Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing?" (Mark 4:38).
 - iv. So Jesus gets up... rebukes the wind and waves, and there was calm.... And then He asks them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:40).

V. **Where is our peace?**

- a. Is it on a perfectly calm lake, or can it be found in the middle of a storm?
- b. We all know the lake might be glassy smooth now, but how long before a storm hits?
- c. That's why our peace is found in the only thing that doesn't change... the One who is with us even when the storms of life inevitably come.
- d. The main way that Jesus brings peace is through reconciliation.
- e. He takes the conflicts of the past, along with our desire to change that story, and He helps us to see our part clearly.
 - i. He brings us peace by showing us the brokenness we brought to the relationship, but also that He can bring healing.
 - ii. As we tend to distance ourselves from the conflicts, and these people and events, Jesus brings people together.
- f. Christ brings peace by bringing together all people through His birth, life, and death.
 - i. From His birth in the stable to His death on the cross, His coming brought together those who otherwise would remain far off.
 - ii. Paul says, "And He came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near." (vs 17)
- g. Peace doesn't come when we deny our story.... Peace comes from our Savior Jesus and His death on the cross...
 - i. Peace comes when by grace through faith we are completely forgiven.
 - ii. His peace means that we are gathered up from far and near, regardless of who we are.
 - iii. Real peace is only found in Jesus' death and resurrection.
- h. So dream away about your perfect cabin by an lake that's always calm.
 - i. We all know that's only in our dreams... but that's okay because we don't need that to find our peace... just like we don't have deny where we came from...

- ii. We find peace this Advent when Christ is with us with words of power and calm...In Him, there's forgiveness for the past and power over the storms of today. Amen.¹

¹ Sermon based on Advent and Christmas series: Paavola, Rev. Dr. Daniel E., *Peace Came to Earth*, © 2023 Concordia Publishing House.