**Advent Peace: Seeking Peace in Our Lives**

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*“Through the heartfelt mercies of our God,
    God’s Sunrise will break in upon us,
Shining on those in the darkness,
    those sitting in the shadow of death,
Then showing us the way, one foot at a time,
    down the path of peace.”* Luke 1:78-79

This is the second week of Advent. In this time, we will explore where we can find peace in challenging times. We will light candles in the darkness. We will remember the past and work towards building a more just and verdant future. We will tell stories about what it means to be peacemakers and followers of Christ.

 This afternoon, I invite you to think about times when you have felt at peace. Where were you? Were you alone, with family, out in nature, in church, watching your beloved animals? Keep thinking about spaces and places where you feel peace.

 When I think about times when I have been most at peace, I remember certain moments in my childhood. I can picture an afternoon up at our cabin after my brother and dad had shoveled the snow off our flat roof at the cabin leaving an enormous pile of snow in front of the cabin. My dad invited me to climb the homemade ladder and jump off the roof into this enormous pile of snow. At first, I was nervous. I wasn’t a very adventurous kid and not that athletic, but I watched my big brother go first and it seemed like a blast. The jump into the snow pile was scary at first and then when I landed, I felt so proud of myself and peaceful looking up into the bluebird Colorado sky and watching the camp robbers soar by squawking overhead. I felt strong and capable. And so close to the snow. I scrambled off the snow pile and made snow angels all over the yard imagining that I too was somehow a part of God’s creation.

 I miss some parts of my childhood where I did not worry all the time. There is something beautiful, peaceful about getting to be the child and allowing the parents to do the worrying. I realize that many children do not have this privilege as they live in homes that are dangerous or lack adequate food, shelter, housing or live in war-torn areas. This is wrong. For all children should be loved and protected from basic fears for survival.

 When we light our Advent candle for peace, let us use it as a chance to shine a light against the shadows of conflict and war. Let us reflect on how we can be peace makers in a world that has too much conflict, fear and war.

 One of the most beautiful aspects of the liturgical season of Advent is that it isn’t all ribbons, bows, and hyper-happiness. If you have attended a funeral and are sad, church is the place for you to sit and be still. Tears belong in church. If you need to weep, weep. If you need to sing, sing out. If you need to pause, pause and pray. Pray for whatever you need. If you are worried, tell your worries to God. God has you. God cares for you, personally, deeply, completely. God is on the side of all of us. Each person matters and their complete wholeness and belonging matter to God. Jesus came to be the Prince of Peace.

Into all the challenges we are facing in the wilderness, the exile of being human in a world that isn’t always humane, let us breathe in.

And out.

Again breathe in.

And out.

Emmanuel, God with us, is coming to bring us peace. To bring us comfort and to bring us joy. Nothing, not a pandemic, not war, not hunger, not domestic violence, not addiction, no nothing can stop God from entering our lives again this Christmas.

In today’s Scripture reading Zachariah, the father of John the Baptist sings of his hopes for a child growing in his wife Elizabeth’s womb. Zachariah and Elizabeth longed for a child for years. And they never conceived. And then it happened, when they were old beyond any time where a couple could consider having a child, an angel of the Lord, Gabriel, appeared to Zachariah and told him the good news that Elizabeth would conceive and give birth to a healthy son. Zachariah was so struck by this news that he was silent. He left the sanctuary and tried to tell his congregation of the miracle of Gabriel’s message and could say nothing. Instead, he used sign language to tell the congregation of the miracle of Elizabeth’s pregnancy. For nine whole months, Zachariah was mute. Imagine that a man who spoke for a living, who was a famous priest, kept mute by the angel of the Lord. Miraculously, when the child was born, and the baby was to be named at his circumcision after his father to be another Zachariah, Elizabeth declared that her only child would not go by the name Zachariah, but instead would be John. The neighbors and relatives said no. No one in the family was named John and then Zachariah used sign language and asked for a tablet. Where he quickly wrote down, “His name is to be JOHN!” With that, Zachariah’s mouth opened, and his tongue was loose and all he could do was talk and praise God.

Zachariah’s song of affirmation read today ends with this, “Through the heartfelt mercies of our God, God’s Sunrise will break in upon us, Shining on those in the darkness, those sitting in the shadow of death, then showing us the way, one foot at a time, down the path of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79) His song is for all of us. Those who mourn and sit in the shadow of death as well as those who rejoice. And it is a song of peace. It is a song of peace for those who need it the most. And it will come in the middle of the worst of times.

This sermon strives to encourage all of us seeking peace. It is a sermon for all of us who long for peace and just haven’t found it yet. It’s ok not to be filled with joy or peace. We will remember the words of Zachariah that God’s Sunrise, Jesus, will be born again and show us the way of peace. He is the Prince of Peace, holding out a space and place for all of us living in uncertain times.

The Gospel writer Luke begins his story about John as a grown man in chapter 3 locating the story in time. He lists the imperial, religious and regional authorities of the day. We may want to fast forward through this introduction, but it is wise to slow down and see how John, the hairy man now grown who was a relative nobody is the only person on the list given divine authority. Luke lets us know that “the word of God came to John.” The real power of God is not held by imperial authorities or regional leaders but instead located in the hands of a man of the wilderness who comes from the desert and baptizes the people and preaches repentance.

John the Baptist keeps saying, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord.” I always picture John singing that from the musical *Godspell*. John wants to teach us to be prepared. To search for peace. To look for a release from the narrow places of sin and oppression, conflict and despair. We are to work to be more like John and seek genuine freedom, liberation from whatever is holding us back from becoming fully human. We will seek to remember that Jesus is coming to “proclaim release to the captives.” (Luke 4:18)

I love the devotional conversation starters this week that invite us to ask “What is peace? What does it look like, sound like, feel like, smell like, taste like?” We are invited to look around and see if we can find any glimmers of peace in our lives or in our world. We cannot solve so many of the wars and conflicts, but we can think of one thing we can do to make the world a more peaceful place. We are invited to send a letter, text or call someone we have had a disagreement with and seek peace. We cannot solve the world’s problems, but we can work to be peacemakers, candles of light in our one-on-one relationships.

We can strive to create peace. Peace in our hearts, peace in our homes, peace in our own small corner of Cape Cod. May you seek peace and find it in big and small ways, this week and always. Amen.