

“As It Is Written”

Luke 3: 1-6

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Thinking about peace during the month leading up to Christmas always makes me laugh a little. Peace is proclaimed on holiday cards, television specials, and in decorations. But if we're being honest, isn't it also the opposite of how most of us feel this month? It's a time when you take your regular busy life and you add on preparations for family gatherings and company and gift giving. You add parties and tree trimming and grocery lists that have doubled in size. You add the pressure of “It's almost Christmas! Don't you dare complain or look tired or stop smiling this month, because that's not what Christmas is all about!”

And then we get to church and – I can say this because I know I've been guilty of doing this – we hear messages that tell us if we can just search for peace or create peace within us or in our households, we will really be able to get into the spirit of the season. Forget the stressors and the commitments and the pressures. Peace, man. What's so hard about finding peace? And if we aren't able to do that, we start worrying that maybe there's something wrong with *us*, we assume that everyone else must be filled with and exuding peace in every moment of the day. That's when I start laughing. Not because it's particularly funny, but because I laugh in order to keep from crying.

Regardless of how we are feeling on the inside, every single year our Advent season marches onward through December with a whole week devoted to peace. My goal this year is that no one leaves this sanctuary after hearing a message of peace with a nagging feeling of guilt that you aren't doing peace the right way in your life. We don't have time for guilt or shame this

year. Instead, I want to share some Good News with you.

This is news straight from the prophet Isaiah's mouth, and it is so good that many years later John the Baptist was still shouting it out for all of his followers to hear. It is SO GOOD that we heard it today, just as we hear it every year in Advent.

The Good News is this: *every valley shall be filled. Every mountain and hill will be made low. The crooked will be made straight, and the rough ways will be made smooth.* This is the promise from the prophet Isaiah. This is the message he brings for us, from God's lips to his lips to our ears. This is the message of peace that we are supposed to take in this month. There is nothing in this scripture that tells us that we are doing something wrong or tells us that it is our responsibility to be the sole peace maker and peace keeper this season.

Isaiah's prophecy says that is what *God* is going to do. In Advent, we are reminded that God comes down to earth to be with us in order to fill the valleys – those valleys that manifest as aching holes in our heart, the holes that come from loss and from grief – God comes down to fill those with love. God looks at the mountains – the obstacles that seem too large to overcome, the paths that seem too steep or too treacherous to walk – and God lowers them, making them passable for even the most timid adventurer, restoring hope to the hopeless.

God takes the crooked and makes them straight, which has nothing to do with what gender you are attracted to, and everything to do with taking the things that seem out of line and downright messed up, and God straightens them out until things make sense again, until things are going in the direction they are supposed to. In Advent, we are reminded that when God is present among us, the rough ways will smooth. The impossible will find a solution. The difficulties will become simple. The pain will turn into healing. The chaos will turn into peace.

There is a lot in our Christian faith that tells us to go out and do. But not everything is about doing or giving of ourselves, some of our faith is about receiving. Receiving God's love.

Receiving God's hope for us. God's joy for us. And God's peace for us.

For me this is the reminder that when things go wrong or feel difficult, God is our champion – giving us the strength we need to face whatever comes our way. God creates a space for peace in this world so that each one of us can step into it – feel it for ourselves – revive our spirits and refresh our souls in this cold, dark, difficult season.

It feels so incredibly right that this Sunday, this day set aside to give thanks for the peace that God offers to us, this Sunday is also the first Sunday of the month, our traditional day to receive communion in worship. The story we tell during communion is from Jesus's Last Supper, which we usually associate with the week leading up to Easter, but the theology of communion is perfect for this Advent season. It is an invitation to experience God's peace in the form of a meal. In the invitation, we are reminded that there are no requirements for sharing the meal, whoever is hungry is invited to eat. We are reminded in our time of confession and pardon that it doesn't matter what mistakes we have made or what is going on in our lives – God still loves us and invites us to sit, rest, and be nourished.

Communion is a peace meal – it is a gift to each one of us. For some of us, it may be the only time this week where someone says to us, “Here, let me serve you. Let me pour your drink. Sit, rest, enjoy.” I'm sure that for some of us, that moment when we are called to just stay still, to pass the bread and the cups, to be in prayer and meditation, to listen to the music...I'm sure that for some of us this is the most peaceful moment we may find today. Communion is a peace meal where we are invited to come and eat and receive the peace that surpasses all understanding.

This month, you may find yourself in moments that feel more like war than peace. Maybe a moment stuck in traffic after a long days work. A moment when you are trapped in a tense political conversation with your Uncle. A moment when you realize that your child's wish list is longer than Santa was planning on spending. In those moments, I hope that we will remember

that God's peace surrounds us. That God is bringing peace to earth – our earth! - and that those moments of stress and strife will soon fade into something much sweeter.

I want to leave you today with an invitation. If this is not an invitation that speaks to you, remember my earlier pronouncement of this being a guilt-free, shame-less Sunday, and hear this as an invitation for anyone who needs it. Some of the clergy and faith leaders in Glastonbury have been troubled by the amount of fear that has surfaced in our country these past few weeks. It seems like something happens almost every week to amplify the fear we carry with us. In addition to praying fiercely and regularly, we are inviting all of Glastonbury to gather together this Tuesday evening for a peaceful witness.

A peaceful witness means we aren't coming together because we have answers or we are experts on peace, but we are coming together to seek peace - to be intentional in creating a space where all feel safe, welcomed, and loved. Our hope is that it will radiate into the world, overcoming the fear that so many of us feel, making a small difference. Our hope is that we will experience God's peace out in our community, just like we do when we gather in this sanctuary, when we receive communion. So on Tuesday from 5pm to 6:30pm, we will be gathered out by the fountain in the center of Glastonbury. We'll have candles, but you can also bring your own. We'll have signs of encouragement and hope, but you can make your own and bring it with you. We'll be singing and speaking and listening and just being together. We're not sure what will happen or what will come of it, but we know that gathering together to seek peace and be a witness to peace is what this Advent week is about, and is exactly what we need right now.

Usually when I plan events I think, “What if no one comes?” But for this event, this week, I have been thinking, “What if everyone comes? What if the whole town is present? What would that be like?” Whether you stop by on your way home from work or on your way to a meeting at church, whether you are alone or you bring children or neighbors or strangers you meet on the

street, whether you are feeling peaceful or not sure you remember what peace feels like, I hope to see you there. Surely it will be a time when the valleys are filled, the mountains are lowered, and the rough paths are made smooth. Amen.