

Community Church of Issaquah

December 4, 2022

A Different Kind of Peace

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Do you find it strange that our minds work in such unusual and mysterious ways at times. There are times when I can recall some of the most unusual things from my past and then there are days when I can't remember my own password for my email. Here's an example or two. I had a call last week and when I looked at the number of the caller, it wasn't at all familiar, but I answered out of curiosity. The voice on the other end of the line began talking about our working together and how he was just checking on me to see how I was enjoying retirement. I had to pretend that he was very familiar to me, but I had no clue who he was. It was an odd conversation to say the least, especially when he ended the call by telling me that I would need to call him next time. "What next time?" I asked myself silently.

Then while I spent time reading the Scriptures that the Christian Lectionary give ministers as suggestions for our sermons and messages, the word "peace" caused a memory to flood my brain as if it had happened that morning, not years ago. When I was a young teenagers in Jackson, Mississippi, I had developed a most unusual interest in the Miss America pageant. I have no reason why, but it began when Miss Mississippi 1958, Mary Ann Mobley, won the title of Miss America – the first winner ever from that state. And then, miracle of miracles, Miss Mississippi 1959, Linda Lee Meade won the title the very next year. That was the

first time any state had won the pageant back-to-back. I'm guessing that a part of the reason for my interest was only because of the Mississippi phenomenon, but I can recall at some time after that something happened that has remained in my mind since that day to this every time I hear the word "peace."

There was another pageant, a Miss Universe pageant I think, that was on our black and white television screen one evening. I remember all the contestants standing on the stage in their formal gowns singing a song in unison. I can still remember the words to that song even after all these years. It goes like this:

"Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be. With God as our Father, Brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony. Let peace begin with me. Let this be the moment now." I will spare you the pain of my singing that, but those are the words that are permanently engrained on my mind.

As I sat at my desk meditating on the concept of peace for our Advent focus, I began to focus on the different types of peace that each of us might be well aware of. There seems to be so much "un-peace" in the world, and we heard David in the Psalm write, "The Lord gives strength to his people; the Lord blesses his people with peace." And then Luke wrote, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests." I couldn't help but ask myself, "So, where is **this** peace?"

Our world today is bereft with war and conflict and violence. We long to hear some nation calling for a cease fire that would begin a peace process, but I'm not hearing any today. We long to hear that protesters were not being arrested or killed for opposing rulers or rules. We long to hear that elected officials would come to a truce and work in unison for the good of their people. Sadly, this is the very same longing that the people of God were seeking as they anticipated the coming of a Messiah – someone who would bring an end to all the fighting. They prayed anxiously for God to be the source of their peace.

That's actually the most familiar definition of "peace" that you and I recognize. Peace instead of war. Each of us wants nothing more than a peaceful world where God as our Father will bring us together as sisters and brothers. At this time of Advent or anticipating the birth of Jesus, that is definitely a part of our search for peace. But there are other areas of our lives that are in need of peace as well.

How about finding peace with others – family, friends, strangers? As people of faith in Christ, we are commanded by him to love one another as he loves us. We try to do that, I'm sure. I want to be at peace with others, but it is at times a struggle. How do you find peace with a person who finds your personal information on Google and begins to send death threats to your email and calls with those messages of hate and potential harm? And then to worsen it, finds your son's personal information and calls him with the same hate message. Oh, yes, I know that not all conflicts in relationships are that severe. Sometimes it's

just a disagreement with a family member or spouse – big thing and little things. Things like this:

“I don’t want a large Christmas tree this year and I’m not spending a lot of money on one. I want a little one that we can plant in the yard and keep after the holidays.” No. “I want one of those Douglas Firs like we bought from the Christmas Tree Farm last year. That only cost \$225.” A word of advice: You’d better learn the words to the song I was telling you about. “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” This example sounds trite and silly, and it is. But each of us has had something to strain our relationship with someone and for the life of us, we cannot seem to find a peaceful solution.

This Advent and holiday season we need to ask ourselves if we are seeking that kind of peace in our lives. Peace with others. Remember David’s promise – the Lord blesses his people with peace. The candle we have lighted this morning representing “peace” in lit for that very purpose, too. Are you seeking peace with others? Ask yourself if you are at peace with those in your life. If you’re like me, I have work to do in this area, as perhaps you might as well.

This questioning myself about “peace” made me aware of a third area of peace when I asked myself, “Self, are you at peace?” Even deeper, am I at peace with God. That’s a tough one. And when I did ask myself that hard question, I had to admit that there are places in my own heart and mind, in my own life where I struggle with inner peace. I had to admit that if I truly wanted peace to begin with me, then I need to first examine what is happening in my own

life. Don't get me wrong, this isn't about condemning myself or beating myself up about something I might be struggling with each day. That's not the point.

The realization is that I need to find some inner peace with God about some things that are happening in my own life. I need to find peace about the loss of contact and friends who were a part of my network as a chaplain – more than 750 of them. When the saying, “Out of sight, out of mind,” haunts me to think that I might not hear from them or see them, there's an absence of peace there. And I need to find peace in the anxiety of slowly going through the process of completing all the necessary medical appointments and procedures that will allow my spouse to be placed on the waiting list for a heart and kidney transplant. I need to find peace in wondering what that will do to our household. I need to find peace for one of my dearest friends in in critical condition in an ICU ward far away in Texas and I can't be there for her or talk to her. And I need to find an inner peace that God will help me make this Advent Season meaningful and joyful for you here are CCI.

Please know that I'm not feeling sorry for myself or anything like that. I'm only sharing some of my inner peace struggles. In truth, we all have them, and we all search for the answers to God's promise of his blessing us with peace. Now, my intention is not to make us sad or depressed – not by any means. What I wish for all of us is that we begin – or continue - a journey toward peace, recognizing that peace comes in different ways to us every day.

As Christians, we should continue faithfully to pray for world peace. Like the believers who waited faithfully for the coming of Christ whom they were sure this arrival would bring peace to their world. It didn't happen that way, but we need to never give up that hope that Christ will bring "peace on earth, good will to all" like we sing at Christmas. We should also, as followers of the teachings of Christ, seek to make peace with others with whom there might be space and misunderstanding between us and them. Find peace with those who need peace as much as you do. And more than anything this Christmas season, spend time praying for inner peace that will lighten your load of stress and bring a great light of inner peace to you. Ask yourself, "Am I at peace with God?"

That's a chore to tackle all three of those needs for peace, but God does indeed bless his people with peace. Let me close with a little quote from one of my favorite books of all time. The book is titled Markings and it was a personal journal of a Swedish humanitarian and writer who served as Secretary General of the United Nations until his death in a plane crash. His name was Dag Hammarskjold. Here is one of his brief but powerful prayers:

Give us peace with you, Lord

Peace with all people

Peace with ourselves

And free us from all fears

Now will you join me as we celebrate the life of Christ as we honor him in our communion.