

## God's Peace Is Different

Isaiah 11:1-9

Luke 2:8-14

John 14:25-27

Archibald Wallace

A few nights ago President Emmanuel Macron of France was feted by President Biden in a state dinner at the White House. Macron had come to the US to talk with our President about Peace, peace in Ukraine. Macron asked, "If Premier Putin is willing to talk about peace in the Ukraine, would you meet with him and talk?" Biden said yes, provided, and yes, if... there were conditions. Macron was exploring, testing, to see if there was some way the warring parties could at least talk about peace.

Macron wants peace, an end to the warring.

Another picture – a girl sits in her room, afraid to come out, afraid to be around others, she doesn't want to make them sick, of get their germs, which she might pass on to another. She has an obsessive compulsive disorder, and she is not at peace within.

A third picture—a man wondering about the mystery of life questions-- why he was ever put here, why is there a world, could it have just happened as he believed or are the do-gooders down at the corner church right—it was all created, by the one they call God. He wrestled daily with the question of is there or isn't there a God. His days are short, he wonders if this is all there is, and he is not at peace.

The Bible talks about each of the three areas where peace was needed.

- 1 There were wars and rumors of war repeatedly. For tiny Israel, it was Egypt, then Assyria, then Babylon, then Greece, then Rome, all of them ran over God's chosen, beating them at war, taking their land, taking their people. There was always the hope for peace, but it was man's peace.
- 2 The Bible is also full of the stories of men and women not at peace within. Cain couldn't deal with the success of his brother Abel. King Saul struggled inwardly to define who he was and to deal with the demons that beset him—most conjured up in his own mind. Abraham wasn't at peace when he and Sarah were in Egypt—he told all that Sarah was his sister, so no one would kill him and take her. Joseph's brothers were jealous, so they sold him. Judas sold out his friend Jesus. The mother of James and John wanted her boys to be first among Jesus' followers; she wasn't at peace about their future. Mary and Martha rebuked Jesus for not coming sooner for their brother Lazarus. Peter denied Jesus three times and then wept bitterly. He had no peace for what he had done.

None of these folks were at peace internally, They wrestled with who they were and who they thought they ought to be.

- 3 As to the third arena where people cry out for peace, it is that area of of personal relationships just not working, just go back to Cain; he wasn't at peace with Abel as brothers. Or consider Jacob's feelings toward Esau; No question

the older son had no peaceful feelings about his little brother-- the prodigal son.  
Each of these stories is about relationships that weren't at peace.

Each of these stories and events cried out for peace, a different kind of peace, one not limited like the one they thought they needed.. The need for this different kind of peace surround us daily. We face conflict daily. We find ways to cope, to just get along, but those temporary fixes are not peace, not real peace.

Avoiding someone isn't peace.

Not talking to someone isn't peace.

Pretending nothing is wrong isn't peace.

A stiff upper lip, grinning and bearing it, talking about something else isn't peace.

In every case a different kind of peace, a true peace, God's peace. Is needed. But it doesn't come easily. And it's different; it's hard to imagine; it's not the peace we would seek when left to ourselves. God knows this, knew it with Israel as they faced yet another conquest, with another mighty empire on its way. Assyria had already conquered and taken the northern kingdom of Israel. Judah, the smaller, southern kingdom saw Assyria on the march, headed their way. Doom was certain. The prophets had been telling the people, if you don't return to God, you will be let go, and the world will come, and you will be smashed and taken. Judah didn't listen, and Assyria came. But God sent word, I haven't forgotten you, I will come back for you. I will rescue you, but not as a political kingdom. I will send something better. I will give you peace, a gift you can't begin to imagine.

This promise of peace, God's peace is repeated among many of the prophets. Today, I want us to look at Isaiah 11:1-9, where Isaiah preaches God's word of a new kind of peace that is coming. Let's listen together as God spoke then and as God speaks to us now in the words of Isaiah 11

#### Isaiah 11

- 1 A shoot will, come up from the stump of Jesse; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.
- 2 The Spirit of the Lord will rest upon him—the Spirit of Wisdom and of Understanding, the Spirit of Counsel and of Might, the Spirit of the Knowledge and Fear of the Lord.
- 3 and he will Delight in the fear of the Lord.  
He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes or decide by what he hears with his ears;
- 4 but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.  
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.
- 5 Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist.
- 6 The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling will be together.
- 7 The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

- 8 The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
- 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.  
For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

You want peace, God asks. OK, I'll give you peace, peace through a person, peace in a person. Did you hear? Peace is coming. God promised. And this peace would be brought by one called the Branch, one who would come from the descendants of Jesse, one who would be Spirit filled and Spirit guided, one who would make it possible for extreme adversaries like a wolf and a lamb, a leopard and a goat, a human and a snake, to be able to live together, In harmony, doing things differently --- like lions eating straw, the strong sharing with the weak, the innocent not harmed by the traditionally evil. The one God is promising a new kind of peace that will make all things different. There will be peace, peace that wars can't shake, peace that will take away dominance, and make attacks seem insignificant. The peace that comes will be based

- on justice
- on fairness
- on equality
- on acceptance,
- on mutuality,
- on trust,
- on sharing.

To understand more about this new and different kind of peace, let us hear two other short readings from Scripture. One is the traditional Christmas story from Luke. Not all of the story, but the part about the angels and shepherds in Luke 2: 8-14

Luke 2

- 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby keeping watch over their flocks by night.
- 10 An angel of the Lord appeared to them and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.
- 11 But the angel said to them,  
"Fear not, for I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.
- 12 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you, he is the Messiah, the Lord.
- 13 This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."
- 14 Suddenly, a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying:
- 15 "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests."

The words of the last line about "peace on earth" confirm what God was saying through Isaiah, that the Special One coming was bringing something, something new, God's peace, a different kind of peace. The heralds weren't singing about the end of war, or that we wouldn't ever be at odds with one another again or that our mental health would always be right.. These heralds were talking of a new kind of peace, God's peace. So what did they mean? This peace that Jesus was bringing was harmony, an

inner wellness, being one with God. Because God was with us in Christ, we could know God, be with God, walk with God, listen to God. God would no longer be some distant being, unknown and unknowable. God would no longer have to be feared or seen as scary. God was coming, in Bethlehem, soon to be walking and living among us, soon to be pouring himself out upon us. Jesus had been sent to reveal the essence of God, to make it possible that each one of us could know God intimately and be in a relationship with God, like things were in Eden at the beginning.

With God among us we could become one in spirit with God, we could be spirit filled, we could become one in mind with God by knowing God's mind and words, and we could become one with God by having God in our lives every day, in a close personal way. From the day of Jesus' coming, and for all of time thereafter, no matter what the circumstances, God would be with us, before us, behind us, in us.

God's peace meant we would finally be able to be one with God, no matter what. We would live in harmony from then.

God's song would be our song.

God's message would be our message.

God's love would be our love.

God's forgiveness would enable us to forgive.

God's justice would be how we approached everything and everyone.

God's grace would enable us to shed his grace on others

Peace, that wonderful oneness with God, was made possible when Jesus came to us in Bethlehem. Peace, heaven sang, Good tidings of great joy! Peace, that confident assurance that no matter what, God was with us and in us, and we could never again be separated from God.

A final note: Jesus came back to his disciples after his resurrection on Easter night, and his first words to the trembling hulk who stared at him in amazement were: "Peace be with you," echoing the words he had taught them the night of the last Supper in John 14:25-27

John 14

25 All these things I have spoken while still with you.

26 But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you

27 (Therefore) Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. (meaning peace). Therefore, let not your hearts be troubled, and let them not be afraid.

Peace—God's extra-special gift to us of being one with God—a gift that no one can take away, all made possible because of the one who came to Bethlehem.