

“Rethinking Christmas: Pursuing Hope”

Isaiah 9:6, Hebrews 12:4

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Why did the farmer sell his vegetables all around the world? He wanted ‘peas’ on earth. **(Image)**
(I’m sorry, I just had to get it out of my system!!)

Indeed the angels said to the shepherds, **“Luke 2:14 New King James Version (NKJV)¹⁴ “Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”**

Oh, to have peace on earth. As we are Rethinking Christmas how do we individually go about Pursuing Peace. Antonyms or opposites of peace are: disagreement, hate, discord, disharmony, fighting, frustrations, war. And yet I also think that a lack of peace can bring fear. However 3 times in the Christmas story we find the angels telling us to in essence have peace by fearing not.

First we find this being said to Joseph:

Matthew 1:20 English Standard Version (ESV) ²⁰ But as he considered these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying, “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary as your wife, for that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

Do not fear Joseph. Be not afraid. Have peace.

Mary is also spoken to: **Luke 1:30 English Standard Version (ESV) ³⁰ And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God.”**

Mary do not be afraid. Fear not. Have peace.

And this same message is given to the shepherds and actually to us.

Luke 2:9-10 English Standard Version (ESV) ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

Fear not. Have peace. Let’s look at this verse a little more. The angel brings what...GOOD NEWS. I like Good News. I hate it when people say, “I have bad news and I have good news. Which do you want first?” Wow---depress and then excite me or excite me and then depress me...what choices. But here the angel says I bring you good news of GREAT joy. Not an itty bit. Not a little. Not small...but, what kind of joy.... GREAT joy. Woo—hoo.

Friends today....in Rethinking Christmas we can be fear not, not be afraid and not only have peace but be Pursuing the Peace that Jesus shines forth from the manger. Jesus is peace!

Over 700 years before Christ was born there was a prophet in the Old Testament by the name of Isaiah. As Morgan read that verse this morning let's once again realize this profound prophecy: **Isaiah 9:6 English Standard Version (ESV) ⁶ For to us a child is born to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**

700 years after Isaiah wrote this prophecy the Prince of Peace did come. And about 2016 years later we are still can call this One who came Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. Oh to fear not and have peace in today's world.

I am concerned that we are engaged in a culture that is bent on producing fear. There seems to be a new wave of racism, bigotry, intolerance and hatred. It is hard to have peace, it is hard to be pursuing peace when we are faced with this every day. And let me just say we have a society that seems to think that if you don't see things the way I see them...well... I will "unfriend" you on Facebook. Lord help us. Who made us judge and jury,

Hebrews 12:14 English Standard Version (ESV)¹⁴ Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

As we keep that verse up I want to let you know that the New International Version says this "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone." With whom? EVERYONE.

It is easy to be at peace when people look like us, talk like us, act like us, but how can we be at peace with those who differ from us. Jesus Himself said in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God."

But because of the Prince of Peace we need to strive for peace and be pursuing peace with whom....EVERYONE....I would interpret that to mean even those that don't believe the same way I do. Even those that may have a lifestyle we would not approve of. What is so difficult about being at peace with those....and yet our culture wants us to buy in to fear, hatred and suspicion. But the Prince of Peace came yes over 2016 years ago for us to be Rethinking how we are to be at peace.

Do our words talk of peace and not hatred? Do our Facebook posts promote peace? Do our tweets and texts not be one of sarcasms and mistrust but ones of building up. Do our lives demonstrate a peace lived out? Oh Rethinking Christmas and how the Prince of Peace wants us today to be Pursuing Peace.

I often sign letters and email with the closure, "With the Joy of Christ." I have noted that various staff team members have particular ways, kind of their standard way of ending their email.

There's a staff team member that signs off by saying, "God's Blessings"," another writes "Blessings." Why one ministry team member signs letters and email, "Better than I deserve." Now there's a truth about grace, love and hope. Aren't you glad you don't get what you deserve? Xxxxx So "Better than I deserve is a great closing. One staff typically signs, "Grace and peace." One signs "Peace to you." Now that's personal....whoever and to everybody I write...Peace to you. But one of my favorites is a standard closure by a team member that closes every email with "Still in one Peace!" P-e-a-c-e. Oh to still be in one PEACE with all that the world throws at us.

Let's go a step farther with this 'Peace Talk' and move a bit deeper into the realm of reconciliation. Yes we must stand for injustice...as we took a stand or actually a walk or run yesterday at the Reindeer Run to help defeat Human Trafficking. We must take a stand against abuse...domestic, child, or animal. But we must be willing to also take a stand and be agents of reconciliation.

Now preacher you really want me to be a peace with someone who may not even believe like I do. Well the Bible says that we are to be ambassadors of reconciliation. I want to do a quick little Bible Study on that passage that calls us to reconcile. I am going to use The Message Bible: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

14-15 Our firm decision is to work from this focused center: One man died for everyone. (LET ME SAY THAT THAT SAME MAN WAS ALSO BORN FOR EVERYONE.) That puts everyone in the same boat. (WHO IS IN THE SAME BOAT....EVERYONE) He included everyone in his death (AND HIS BIRTH) so that (WHO?) everyone could also be included in his life, a resurrection life, a far better life than people ever lived on their own.

16-20 Because of this decision we don't evaluate people by what they have or how they look. (OH MY, WE MAY NEED TO READ THAT VERSE AGAIN) We looked at the Messiah that way once and got it all wrong, as you know. We certainly don't look at him that way anymore. Now we look inside, and what we see is that anyone (YES ANYONE) united with the Messiah gets a fresh start, is created new. The old life is gone; a new life burgeons! Look at it! All this comes from the God who settled the relationship between us and him, and then called us to settle our relationships with each other.(SETTLE OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH EACH OTHER...BE AT PEACE, BE A PEACEMAKER) God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing.

We're Christ's representatives. God uses us to persuade men and women to drop their differences (HEAR THAT...DROP THE DIFFERENCES AND BE AT PEACE) and enter into God's work of making things right between them. We're speaking for Christ himself now: Become friends with God; he's already a friend with you. (The Message Bible)

Here is the way the New Living Translation does translates some of the verses.

¹⁶ So we have stopped evaluating others from a human point of view

¹⁸ God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors;

Beloved are you Pursing Peace? Are you Christ's ambassadors of reconciliation?

As we are Rethinking Christmas may we realize that God our heavenly Father in a sense packed up His Son heaven and sent the Prince of Peace to be here so we could receive Him and strive for peace. A new way of thinking....rethinking. A new relationship. New beginnings. As you watch this video of a father may you make the spiritual connection and transference to "OUR FATHER."

(VIDEO <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/60719/the-gift-of-reconciliation-our-father-loves-us>)

A new beginning with His kids. He came for peace, for reconciliation, for relationship, for new beginnings. That is why He came---that is why He died.

So on this Second Sunday of Advent we celebrate Emmanuel and what He has done, what He is doing, and What He is going to do. And Emmanuel means God with us. Fear not. Do not be afraid. Jesus is Peace.