

Share Peace

Last Sunday, our worship service focused on the message of the angel to the shepherds—the shepherds on the first Christmas night who were keeping watch over their flocks outside Bethlehem. The angel proclaimed to them, “Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people for to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (Luke 2: 10-11)

This Sunday, I’d like to look at the response to this message. Do you remember what it was? The Bible tells us: “Suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!’” (Luke 2: 13-14) The birth of Jesus leads to two responses: in heaven, the response is praise... on earth, the response is peace.

Peace on earth... how we need peace on earth! There is so much violence and strife in our world. We see it in the news reports... the warfare in the Middle East—attacks by ISIS in Syria & Iraq, by the Taliban in Afghanistan & Pakistan. In Africa, we read about Boko Haram in Nigeria and Al-Shabab in Somalia. In Europe, Russia & Ukraine are at war. And we see it in our own cities, most recently in the murder of the two policemen in Brooklyn.

Peace on earth... it’s also something we long for in our own families, at school, at our workplaces... Peace—we need peace in our inner life, too, peace for the turmoil in our hearts, the struggles in our lives...

And here’s the good news: Peace is God’s gift to us at Christmas. God knew what we needed most, and he gave it to us.

I’m reminded of the story of a woman, Janine, who was so worn out with Christmas preparations, that during the afternoon of Christmas Eve, she took a little nap. When Karl, her husband, woke her a short time later for dinner, she confided to him, 'I just had the most wonderful dream. I dreamt that you gave me a beautiful diamond necklace for a Christmas present. What do you think it all means?'

'Aha, you'll know tonight,' answered Karl smiling broadly.

At midnight, he took a small box from under the Christmas tree and handed it to her. Delighted and excited, she opened it quickly. And there, inside the package was a book entitled: *The Meaning of Dreams*.

How different is God's gift—the gift of peace.

That's the promise of the angels' song: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" The source of this peace is the birth of Jesus, God's own Son, our Savior and Lord. Without Jesus, our human nature inevitably leads us astray. We get caught up in self-centeredness and sin, turning away from God, hurting those around us, powerless to overcome these dark forces in our lives.

However, as the angel promised, Jesus is our Savior. Jesus shows us the depth of God's love for us, because God sent his own Son into the world for us. Through Jesus, the power of sin is broken; we are forgiven and set free to live a new life, to begin again...

And, as the angel promised, Jesus is our Lord: He wants us to live under his direction, to be guided by his Spirit, and to follow his example, living in self-giving love.

This is the source of God's gift of peace—found in Jesus, our Savior and Lord.

There's a beautiful song about the peace we receive from following Jesus. The song is entitled, "You Are My All in All." I'd invite you to reflect on its words as Rachel Guthrie sings it now:

You Are My All In All

You are my strength when I am weak
You are the treasure that I seek
You are my all in all
Seeking You as a precious jewel
Lord, to give up I'd be a fool
You are my all in all

Jesus, Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name
Jesus, Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name

Taking my sin, my cross, my shame
Rising again I bless Your name
You are my all in all
When I fall down You pick me up

When I am dry You fill my cup
You are my all in all

Jesus, Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name
Jesus, Lamb of God
Worthy is Your name

Jesus is the source of God's gift of peace.

However, there are two things we need to do. First of all, we need to open up God's gift.... Open up God's gift. How do we do that? What actions can we take?

I think the most important thing is to be aware of God's presence in our daily life. It's so easy to get caught up in the demands of life, our responsibilities and duties. We ricochet from crisis to crisis. God seems so distant—stress & conflict replace God's gift of peace.

It helps to put our life on pause for a few minutes each day and to think about where God has been active in the past 24 hours... what signs we have seen of his presence... what ways he has spoken to us... which people have communicated his peace...

So, to assist us with this, I'm going to turn to our college students... I'd like to invite them to answer this question: "Where have you seen God at work this year at college?" To make sure we can picture the right place, tell us your name and your major and where you go to college. Then, if you would, share with us "where have you seen God at work this year." Who'd like to begin?

[College students share.]

As we come to the end of 2014, I'd encourage all of you to take a few minutes to answer this same question: "Where have you seen God at work this year?" But let's not stop there—let's make it a part of our daily routine, the fabric of our daily life in 2015—to look for the signs of God's presence, bringing peace into our lives through Jesus Christ.

Now, there's a second thing we need to do. After we open God's gift of peace, we need to share God's gift of peace. We need to take the next step, from being a recipient of peace to being a maker of peace... a peace-maker.

Think about it—what could you do to plant seeds of peace in others' lives? To provide a listening ear, understanding, support, caring?

That's not always easy. I think of a New Year's morning prayer:

Dear Lord,

So far this year I've done well.

I haven't gossiped, I haven't lost my temper, I haven't been greedy, grumpy, nasty, selfish, or overindulgent. I'm very thankful for that. But in a few minutes, Lord, I'm going to get out of bed, and from then on I'm probably going to need a lot more help. In Jesus' name, Amen

Thank goodness for God's help, as we share His peace with others.

I can relate with a Native American story:

A grandfather was talking to his grandson. "Grandson," he said, "there are two wolves living in my heart and they are at war with each other. One is vicious and cruel, the other is wise and kind."

"Grandfather," asked the boy, "which one will win?"

The grandfather paused before he said, "The one I feed."

In 2015, we each have a choice—which of these wolves will we feed? Will we choose to share peace?

When we do, the angels' Christmas song continues to echo in our lives and in our world: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" Amen.

“Where have you seen God at work this year at college?”