

**“Unbreakable Christmas?”**  
**A sermon by**  
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**First United Methodist Church**  
**Appleton, Wisconsin**  
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**Isaiah 9:2-7**

<sup>2</sup> *The people who walked in darkness  
have seen a great light;  
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—  
on them light has shined.*

<sup>3</sup> *You have multiplied the nation,  
you have increased its joy;  
they rejoice before you  
as with joy at the harvest,  
as people exult when dividing plunder.*

<sup>4</sup> *For the yoke of their burden,  
and the bar across their shoulders,  
the rod of their oppressor,  
you have broken as on the day of Midian.*

<sup>5</sup> *For all the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.*

<sup>6</sup> *For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
authority rests upon his shoulders;  
and he is named  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

<sup>7</sup> *His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace  
for the throne of David and his kingdom.  
He will establish and uphold it  
with justice and with righteousness  
from this time onward and forevermore.  
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.*

Do you remember the time when you were little and anticipated Christmas? (*acknowledge kids*)  
Do you remember the time when you set your heart on a Christmas gift that you saw in a fancy catalogue and all you could think about in December was whether this gift would show up under the tree? ...

A young boy had the greatest wish of his life: he wanted a bright red toy truck for Christmas. The ads the young boy saw in the catalogues were stunning and so was his desire to imagine owning it. The red shiny truck was the young boys Christmas wish number one.

As Christmas Day arrived and the boy’s family started the long anticipated gift-exchange, the young boy headed right for the largest of the gifts. It seemed like it’s exactly the size to hold that shiny red truck. He unpacked the wrappings ever so carefully...and indeed: they housed the wonderful red truck. He got it – now he owned his very own shiny red truck.

All day he played with it, all day he enjoyed it. As he was waking up the next day, guess what he did first thing in the morning: Back to the shiny red truck. He didn’t have to go far because the truck spent the night right next to him in bed. Another day of full-red-truck-joy lay ahead – but then it happened:

The boy’s parents heard the cries of their son through the whole house. With tear-filled eyes the young boy came into the living room with something in his hands that used to be a shiny red truck. All the boy could say was: “Mommy, Daddy, my Christmas is broken.” ...

What breaks your Christmas? Can Christmas break?

Five days ago a semi-truck loaded with construction steel from Poland mauled its way into a Christmas Market in the capital city of my home country of Germany (12 dead, 48 wounded). For countless families their Christmas this year is broken – even if they tried hard not to set their minds on material breakable Christmas gifts.

This world is not what it is supposed to be. Whether we set ourselves up for embracing material gifts or whether life attacks us in the meanest of forms, in this world we have the phenomenon that the most wonderful time can break.

Terrorist attacks, a newly diagnosed mean disease in your body, a disrupted relationship, a lost job, you name it. Life circumstances can break even the most wonderful time of the year.

I really don’t mean to press the mood of the evening. You know all this. You know that sometimes we set our hopes and dreams a little too much on stuff that can break like a shiny red truck. And you know that our lives in general are fragile and breakable. Maybe you are in a broken life situation right now. That’s why we must come together as people as we do tonight; we have to ask ourselves the question: Is there something to hold on to in this world? What are the unbreakable Christmases out there? Is there such a thing?

And so we find ourselves in front of a nativity like the beautiful one displayed here on our communion table. It represents the occasion of the first Christmas in humanity's history and the meaning of this story cannot be taken away and cannot break in a world that is full of breakables.

God gave us the gift of his son and no-one can ever make that go away. God offers this gift, to anyone, at any time, period! That is what 2000 years of the church's history has taught and tried to communicate to us.

We are pretty rapidly entering the realm of faith. From broken gifts, terror attacks and mean diseases right into the story of the shepherds and the angels. It is hard to make this radical jump and yet, for the sake of our fragile lives and the desire for something unbreakable, we need to follow the path of the story that is displayed here in front of us:

When the first Christmas happened, God became a person. The heavenly host announced peace on earth and there is nothing that can break this sort of heavenly gift! Peace is given to people living fragile lives. And that's the power of Christmas.

Can I ask you a challenging question?

Do you think that we break our Christmas experience if we lose this meaning of Christmas? Do we break our Christmas if we forget about the peace that God made with us at the first Christmas?

Living in the 21<sup>st</sup> century in the western world is not exactly the environment that cocoons the appreciation of God making peace. Because here's the thing:

If Christmas means that God made peace with the world/us, that implies that this world/us were not at peace with God. What's the opposite of peace? ... That implies that the world/us were at war with God!! That's not an easy sell these days!

So do you think our Christmas breaks if we lose the sense of appreciating the gift of peace that God made with us? Are we setting ourselves up for the tears of that little boy from the story I told earlier? Are we handing our fragile lives over to forces like terror, disease and more and let them break our joy that is supposed to be unbreakable?

I was thinking hard about this tough question and I realized something?

I thought about the story of the Wise Men traveling to visit baby Jesus. They were from far away – they were probably as far removed from an appreciation of a God offering peace to the world as our 21<sup>st</sup> century is.

And yet they traveled! They made their way to the Christ child. And the Bible tells us that they were *overwhelmed* with joy upon finding that baby (Mt 2:10) and worshipped that child – that doesn't sound like a broken Christmas.

Here is what I'm trying to say:

If people who didn't have an understanding of the need for peace with God could find Christmas joy – then shouldn't we 21<sup>st</sup> century people be able too?

If God could draw Wise Men from the East into the joy of Christmas, he can draw us – he can draw you and me! Call me naïve but I believe it. God can draw us into the unbreakable aspects of Christmas – into hope, love, joy, and peace.

Earlier today we heard an ancient prophecy from the book of Isaiah. 700 years before the birth of Christ a man in Jerusalem stood up and boldly announced that the future will have a ruler that will bring perfect peace.

Christianity identified this ruler with Jesus Christ. He was that Wonderful Counselor, that Mighty God, that Everlasting Father, that Prince of Peace.

Friends, I assume you came to church tonight because there's something powerful in you that believes in the un-breakability of Christmas and its Prince of Peace. Sure we can celebrate a version of Christmas without pondering the story of Christ being born.

But as we let ourselves get drawn into the story we may connect with that old message that the prophet Isaiah announced: This Jesus is God's Christmas peace-offer to you that cannot break. Our lives *can* break and there are many things that have the power to break our Christmas 2016. But God's gift of his son has the power to mend. God's personal peace offer to you has the power to heal many painful tears.

Make Jesus Christ your prince of peace and see what happens!

This Jesus said something outrageous: he said that you have the potential to bring his peace to others! Do it! Bring Christ's unbreakable peace to others no matter how desperate the circumstances are. Hold stubbornly against it and be a person of God's peace, bring God's peace, make peace. Join God, accept God's peace for you personally and bring peace to those around you who need it.

That truly will be an unbreakable Christmas. Amen!