

Advent Devotions Week 2 “Peace”

Monday – Jim Pierce

*“Comfort, comfort now my people;
Tell of peace!” So says our God.
Comfort those who sit in darkness
Mourning under sorrow’s load.
To God’s people now proclaim
That God’s pardon waits for them!
Tell them that their war is over;
God will reign in peace forever!*

Like hope, peace is always experienced—if experienced at all—in a context. Peace treaties replace the violence of war with a halt to that violence. They don’t replace hatred and distrust with warm hugs and deepest friendship, but they do create space that allows the possibility of changed relationships.

Peace and quiet are what we experience when after a time of intense busyness or a burst of activity, (think Thanksgiving or Christmas dinners with family) everyone settles down for a nap or heads off to something else leaving you a little time for yourself.

Peace may be what you experience as you look out your window at quietly falling snow, hushing activity around and gifting you with time that would otherwise have been spent out doing. Peace, at least until you begin to think about walks and driveways to be shoveled and all those things you were going to do, still need to do, but can’t.

Peace, at its deepest, is what we long for when turmoil, doubt, fear, despair swirl around us and churn within us. Peace, at its deepest, is what eludes us as we try to summon our own failing resources to respond to these things. Peace, at its deepest, comes only and finally and always as a gift from God.

Peace comes when we cry out, “God help me!” and discover again that God is already present, already helping. The peace we most long for, the peace we most need, is the peace that only God gives. May you discover again during this Advent season that God sustains you, that God holds you fast and provides you with a safe place to rest. May the Peace of God be with you now, and always.

*When peace, like a river, attendeth my way;
When sorrows, like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, thou has taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.*

God our comfort and strength, open our hearts, our minds, our souls to your peace that is always as near as our cries for help. Give us faith to believe that in all things it is truly well with our souls. Amen.

Tuesday – Phil Hornbostel

This carol, written in perhaps a more traditional Advent meter of $\frac{3}{4}$, is the oldest of my selections for this devotional series. You can find it in the red hymnal #239, “Hark the Glad Sound!” with libretto by Rev. Philip Doddridge and music (“Chesterfield”) a generation later, by Rev. Thomas Haweis (rhymes with “Pause”). The hymn first was sung to a different, now forgotten music in 1733 at Rev. Doddridge’s “Dissenting” church in England. He was an ordained “Dissenting” pastor (the predecessors of today’s Methodists), and wrote many hymns meant for singing in his local congregation only. But the Rev. Haweis, an Anglican bishop but sympathetic to the dissenters, heard the hymn by 1781, 30 years after Doddridge had died, and wrote a completely new setting for it, in $\frac{3}{4}$ time. This is the dancing, skipping Advent carol which has become an essential part of Advent services for the past 240 years! Here is a familiar version:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R2jc8QbCwPk>

The first verse is reflective of Luther’s Hymn “Von Himmel Hoch”, with the imagery of every Christian preparing a place for the Christ Child in their hearts, a theme that would be picked up further by the better-known “Joy to the World”. The second verse is straight from Isaiah 61: 1-2, with the coming of Jesus beginning the freeing of captives. In verse four, Doddridge refers to Jesus by the well-known Isaiah appellation: “Prince of Peace”, and notes that He comes in triumph, but in peace.

Prayer: O Prince of Peace, help each of us to prepare our hearts to welcome the Christ Child. Bring peace to a world that simply doesn’t have much peace without Your presence. We anxiously await your coming into our lives, today and every day, and to You we offer our thanks, praise, and glad “Hosannas”. Amen

Wednesday – Jeff Langdon

“Peace will come on the wings of a promise”
Hope will come like the morning's first call
Joy will come in the winds of the spirit
Love will come, Love will come
Come Lord Jesus”

The words from ADVENT CRY, a selection from THE WINTER ROSE, by Joseph Martin begin with Peace. Peace will come because peace is a promise. The song reminds us of the longing for the Messiah and the promise of redemption for the people of God two thousand years ago.. and our own longing for the return of the Messiah and the promise of our redemption. We are in this season of waiting.

The word Shalom occurs over 250 times in the Old Testament. I am a child of the late 60's and early 70's- my formative teenage years, I remember the banners and protest signs that were common with Shalom written on them...a word so commonplace that we used it interchangeably with the English word "peace".

But Shalom is a complex and colorful word. One of the problems I understand in translating Hebrew to English is that a single English word can't capture the full range of meanings or thought that words in Hebrew or other languages offer. The English word "Peace" tends to mean something like "lack of war or conflict".

While the biblical concept of shalom certainly encompasses this sort of peace, it is only a part of what God promised his people in the days before the coming of Jesus. In the Harper-Collins Bible Dictionary, the word shalom includes peace, but also "wholeness" and "well-being." Shalom is the ideal ...for our individual lives and for that of God's creation at large... it's a return to God's original creation, before it was marred by sin. Shalom is what God wants for God's people.

Throughout the Old Testament, God unfolds God's plan for re-establishing God's shalom on Earth. Through Abraham, God's people are promised that they will be a blessing to all of humanity. God made "a covenant of peace" with them (Ezekiel 34:24-25) and promised to restore all things by sending a Savior. This promised Messiah would be "... called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7). He himself *would* be our peace (Micah 5:5).

But God does not mean for us to just sit back and indulge in this peace. This peace is an active peace. God calls us to work along with the Holy Spirit to restore God's shalom here on Earth. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God (Matthew 5:9). During this time of Advent, we are reminded of our role to actively make peace as we wait. Advent is a perfect time to make a commitment to pursue peace in your life and that of the world as we look ahead to the time of "Shalom".

Let us pray: God we are reminded of the promise you made of Shalom... a time when every tear will be wiped away, and when there will be no more death, sorrow or crying... because all things will have passed away. Help us to work for that peace in our waiting. Come Lord Jesus, Come.

(PS... the choir will be singing "Advent Cry" during an upcoming Sunday worship... come and hear)

Thursday – Juel Pierce

*"Comfort, comfort now my people; tell of peace!" So says our God.
Comfort those who sit in darkness mourning under sorrow's load.*

*To God's people now proclaim that God's pardon waits for them!
Tell them that their war is over; God will reign in peace forever.*

ELW 256

Advent comes just as winter is coming. Outside is cold, darkness, the winter of sin and sorrow. It's not surprising that we long for comfort in Advent.

This hymn connects comfort with forgiveness. I don't know about you, but much of the discomfort in my life comes from knowing I have hurt someone, or have ignored someone who needs me, or I have done something that exposes someone I love to hurt. And not just those things that I do to individually hurt and expose those near me. I also feel in bondage to sin. Without even making a decision, I overlook the ways in which there are people who are poor, ignored, victims of war and violence. All of these keep me living in a world of sin, rather than in God's kingdom of peace.

And then I hear the promises in this hymn: "Comfort my people!" I, like all those who live in a world of sin, whose lives are in the midst of warfare from the evil that would claim us all, hear this promise. God's pardon is here for you! The war is over! The Lord's peace comes to us who wait for God!

May the peace of God that passes all understanding, fill us this Advent.

Friday – Misty Coyle

Holy, holy, holy
Jesus we adore thee!
Peace has come; our King is with us!

"Peace Has Come"

Hillsong

video: <https://youtu.be/7BFXCd2pWrM>

Have you ever noticed whenever an angel appears to anyone in the Bible, they always start with, "Do not be afraid" or "Fear not"? I know if a celestial messenger appeared to me, my heart would jump and the fear would give me goosebumps. When the angel appeared to the teenager, Mary, he began with the 'do not be afraid' part and continued with, "God has found favor with you." As the story reads, Mary had no issue with giving herself to the peace of God within her heart rather than the outside influence of fear.

Fear, as I have been told many times, is the enemy of peace. We are in a situation we are out of control and inside all we can feel is utter turmoil. We believe that the worst will happen to us and we look for every solution possible to relieve this uneasy feeling and put control back into our own hands. You can see most of the people around us feel this way. Look at how popular Yoga and meditation has become in the last few years. Most live without inner peace. We try to control how much peace we have by taking cautious care of our relationships, spend our

money more wisely and independent of outside influence; and we avoid people that make us uncomfortable.

However, inner peace cannot be controlled from the outside. Inner peace comes from God; from within us. Mary seemed to have no interest in controlling her fear! In fact, according to the Bible, she was someone who faced her fears, confident that God was in control. Mary had a deep and abiding belief God always had her best in mind. When she realized God was giving her a sacred, but hard mission, a purpose in life that would expose her to ridicule, pain, and family rejection, Mary simply chooses to say, "I am the Lord's servant... May your word to me be fulfilled" (Luke 1:38).

Mary's peace did not come from the outside. Mary's peace came from the inside. We look for inner peace to come from something or someone around us. We attempt to weed out all uncertainty and discomfort and hide behind walls of our own making. However, when peace flows out from the inside, knowing that God loves us and has our best in mind, that peace lasts a lifetime.

Heavenly Father, let your peace grow in us more and more every day so that the fear can dissolve in your light. Amen!

Saturday – Rev. Roger Lenander

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,
from heav'n's all-gracious king."
The world in solemn stillness lay
to hear the angels sing.

This may be the only commonly sung Christmas carol in our hymnals that does not mention the birth of Christ! The focus is rather on the song of the angels, "Peace on the earth, good will to all," taken from Luke 2:14. The "hymn's central theme contrasts the scourge of war with the song of the angels' 'peace to God's people on earth.'" This is one of the earliest social gospel hymns written in the U.S. the songs author, Edward Sears, context was the social strife that plagued the country as the Civil War approached. This hymn comes from a Boston publication, *Christian Register*, published on Dec. 29, 1849. The original stanza three, missing from our hymnals, sheds light on the poet's concerns about the social situation in the U.S. in the mid-19th century:

"But with the woes of sin and strife
The world has suffered long;
Beneath the angel-strain have rolled

Two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not
The love-song, which they bring:
O hush the noise, ye men of strife,
And hear the angels sing!"

Verse three in the Evangelical Lutheran Worship hymnal articulates the situation of so many with images of those "beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low, who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow...." The second half of this stanza offers hope that the song of the "blessed angels" who "bend on hovering wings" would soothe the "Babel sounds" of a suffering world.

It is right that we should joyfully sing "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing" and "Joy to the world" each Christmas season. But always there are moments when we realize the message of peace has not yet been fully realized on earth. Then we sing "It came upon the midnight clear," and the power of the Incarnation and the message of the gospel touch us even more deeply.

(Notes from Dr. C. Michael Hawn, Professor of sacred music at Perkins School of Theology)

God, the Creator and Sustainer of eternal peace, move into the hearts and minds of this world that your peace would be firmly planted in our words and actions. Guide the leaders of our world to forge that peace in our world that works to turn swords into plowshares and turn us away from our warring ways. Amen.