

## **“War and Peace”**

**Isaiah 9:6; Luke 2:8-14**

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Today we lit the second candle on the advent wreath, the candle of peace. Christmas and peace go together; just ask the prophets and angels. Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be the Prince of Peace and Luke recorded the words of the heavenly host that announced at Jesus' birth, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”

With this in mind, there are two things I would like to say about peace this morning. **First of all, you do not have to have peace on earth to have peace in your heart.** This is certainly good news because we don't have peace on earth and I doubt we ever will. Currently, according to the World Watch Institute, there are twenty-five major conflicts raging in our world and thirty-three minor ones. A major conflict is distinguished from a minor one by the number of casualties, at least a thousand, and the likelihood of developing into multi-national regional conflicts. Perhaps you thought war was only being waged in Iraq, Afghanistan or the Mideast. Were you aware that almost every continent is experiencing bloodshed and violence?

How is it possible, then, for us to have peace in our hearts without peace in the world? It is possible because peace is not the absence of anything, especially turmoil, tension and tears. It is the presence of someone, the Holy Spirit of God, providing the strength, courage, confidence, wisdom, understanding, patience, faith, hope and love that are needed in the midst of conflict.

One of my favorite images of peace is the bird nest nestled on some rocks behind a raging waterfall. There is nothing peaceful about the environment, yet the young birds in the nest are sleeping peacefully because of the ever-vigilant watch care of the mother they trust.

Even Jesus' parting words about peace were shared with his disciples in the midst of chaos and conflict the night before he died. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” John 14:27.

Peace is not dependent upon what is around us but what is inside us. This is why we can have peace in our hearts even if there is no peace on earth. The Prince of Peace, whom we can trust to walk with us even through the valley of the shadow of death, will never abandon us.

The second thing I would say to you today is this. **When you have peace in your heart, you want peace on earth.** You want what God wants and God wants peace. What did the heavenly host say the night Jesus was born? “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”

I think God knew this band of angels well, don't you? They had to be hand picked for this special assignment. The event and message were too important to take risks. I believe they were told what to say and delivered the message flawlessly. And what was that message? “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.”

When you have peace in your heart, you want what God wants. You want God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. As a result, you make peace with others a priority in your life. You refuse to hold grudges and seek revenge. You find ways to break down barriers and reconcile differences. You turn enemies into friends.

You take seriously the words of Paul in II Corinthians 5:16-18, "So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation."

Furthermore, you support and encourage those that promote "peace on earth goodwill toward men" on a broader scale. You make sure their voices are heard so their ideas can be considered by those that must make grave decisions. In my opinion, there is no way that the followers of the one who said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God" should muffle the voices of those that are desperately trying to find peaceful solutions to man's conflicts.

I confess to you this morning that I do not know what is the best policy for fighting terrorism, protecting innocent people and promoting justice in the world. I do not have enough information to make sound decisions concerning specific problems. What I do know, though, is this. I want leaders to hear all sides of an argument before making final decisions. I do not want any voice to be silenced, especially the voice of peacemakers. They could be hand picked angels from on high!

On his recent six nation Asian tour, President Bush stopped in Indonesia to talk with five religious leaders, three Muslim, one Christian and one Hindu. Some of these leaders have been harshly critical of the President's policies in Iraq and the Mideast and each has outlined plans for peacemaking. At the insistence of the President, each leader was candid and brutally honest about the source of the conflicts and what needs to be done to promote peace. "Injustice, not Islam is creating terrorism. Attacking injustice would help reduce terrorism," they told him. After the meeting, the religious leaders praised the President for his willingness to listen, genuine spirit and desire to continue their conversation. They are confident more dialogue will follow.

How pleased and encouraged I was to read this article. Immediately, I thought of the words of Moshe Dayan, the former Israeli Foreign Minister, "If you want to make peace, don't talk to your friends. Talk to your enemies."

As Christians, may we always be willing to talk to our enemies with the goal of preventing violence and bloodshed. May we encourage and support peacemakers that look for ways to prevent or end violence. And may we never be content with having peace in our hearts that does not diligently strive to bring peace on earth.