

“Peace – From the New Branch!”

On the Second Sunday of Advent, the Scripture often focuses on the role of John the Baptist in the preparation of the people to receive or respond to the Promised Messiah. Since our bulletin covers for today are based on the Old Testament Reading from Isaiah, I have chosen to use that Text as the basis for today’s message. **The Scripture from Isaiah includes a powerful and beautiful expression of God’s Promise of the Messiah – the New King.** It assumes the end of the dynasty of the descendants of King David. Isaiah declares the Messiah, like a phoenix, would amazingly arise from the seeming utter destruction of the monarchy. Isaiah explained, ***“just as new branches sprout from a stump, so a new king will arise from among David’s descendants.”***

The Reading from Isaiah for last Sunday indicated the Messiah would bring **Peace** with the end of war between nations. Today’s Scripture also indicates the Promised One would bring Peace, yet, its emphasis is not so much on the cessation of wars but on a **Deeper and More Profound Peace**. So, we might refer to the promised Messiah as **“The Prince of Peace”** or even as **“The Peace Child”**.

“Missionary Don Richardson who served for many years among the primitive tribes in Papua New Guinea wrote a book entitled ‘The Peace Child.’ He writes how in translating the Scriptures into the native tribesmen language, he could find no words to express how **Jesus Christ came to give His life that we might have peace with God.** In his book he relates how he finally found the answer in the culture of the native people themselves.”

Richardson “tells the story of two tribes in Papua New Guinea who maintained a blood feud between themselves for several generations. Each generation fought and nursed their wounds only to fight again killing and maiming more and more people. Finally after years of struggle the two tribes realized that they must stop fighting or nothing would be left of their peoples. But what could they do to end years of warring between the two tribes? **Don Richardson goes on to tell that the chiefs of the two tribes came together and brought with them a child they called ‘the Peace Child’.** This child was the son of one of the opposing chiefs which was then adopted into the family of the opposing chief. As long as that child lived the two chiefs promised to cease their fighting so that all could live. Don Richardson had finally found a perfect picture of God’s love for us in sending His Son, the Prince of Peace to die for us.” (Found in “Peaceable Kingdom” by Michael Elmore)

As I indicated earlier, the **Peace**, which the Messiah will ultimately bring about is much more than ending battles and wars among nations. Isaiah explains,

“The spirit of the Lord will give him wisdom and the knowledge and skill to rule his people. ... He will not judge by appearance or hearsay;

he will judge the poor fairly and defend the rights of the helpless. ... He will rule his people with justice and integrity.”

The New King will bring Peace through his fair and just rule – the delivery of justice for the vulnerable and powerless!

The Peace promised in this prophecy is even more profound – for it transforms the very nature of Creation!

Consider the following portions of Isaiah’s description of this broader and deeper Peace:

*“Wolves and sheep will live together in peace,
leopards will lie down with young goats.
Calves and lion cubs will feed together,
and little children will take care of them.
Cows and bears will eat together,
and their calves and cubs will lie down in peace.
Lions will eat straw as cattle do.
Even a baby will not be harmed if it plays near a poisonous snake.”*

Kate Huey comments on the extraordinary nature of this **Promised Peace**, saying, “The promises are astounding and perhaps even unbelievable: ‘the order of nature’ that we all learned about in science class, the violence of predators that we came to accept as natural, will be overturned. The rules of life will be changed, bent in the direction of gentleness and peace, not just any peace, but shalom.” **“‘Shalom,’ Walter Brueggemann says, ‘is creation time, when all God’s creation eases up on hostility and destruction and finds another way of relating.’”** Huey explains, “Things are going to go back to the way they were originally created, the way things were meant to be. ‘This poem,’ Brueggemann says, ‘is about the impossible possibility of the new creation!’ We are told that ‘the old practice of the big ones eating the little ones is not the wave of the future,’ and we can actually look forward to a ‘detoxified’ world, including nature itself, that will be ‘safe for the vulnerable.’ A ‘detoxified’ world”, Huey notes those are, “powerfully striking words when held up next to the nightly news reports about pollution, violence and climate disasters.” Huey asks, **“Can we even imagine such a world, or believe that it’s ‘the wave of the future’? Clearly, the prophet can.”** Huey explains, “It’s thought-provoking, and very challenging, too, to read Genesis 1:30 alongside this passage from Isaiah, for we seem to skim over the part where God gives *‘every green plant for food’* to *‘every beast of the earth.’*” Huey challengingly asks, “What, indeed, was the original plan for creation?”

Huey concludes, explaining, “In his book, ‘Peace’, Brueggemann encounters these beautiful promises of peace very personally, at first rejecting them as ‘[u]nheard of and unimaginable!’ precisely because they are ‘so abnormal,’ and yet he can’t resist taking a second look, and coming to perceive what is truly ‘normal’ — peace and unity and healing – while the strife and discord and suffering that surrounds us are ‘the real abnormalities of life, which we have taken for granted.’”
(Weekly Seeds reflection by Kate Huey)

Consider the broader and more transforming meaning of the prophecy of God’s Promised New King bringing Peace. At our Christmas Celebration, we declare God’s partial fulfillment of this promise in the Birth of God’s Own Son, Jesus Christ. Scott Hoezee connects the **Birth of the Prince of Peace with the Peace of this New Creation**, as he observes, “In her wonderful children’s picture book ‘We Were There: A Nativity Story,’ Eve Bunting (illustrator: Wendell Minor) turns Christmas upside down for us in ways that are revealing.”

Hoezee explains, “The simple story shows us first a slithering snake, then a warty toad, a scary scorpion, a shiny cockroach, a swooping bat, a hairy spider, and a furry rat all on a journey. Each creature introduces itself and then concludes with the words ‘I will be there.’”

Hoezee observes, “As the book ends we are shown more common nativity creatures: fuzzy lambs, doe-eyed donkeys, gentle cows. But as those traditional figures in the stable stand around the manger in which the Babe has been laid by his mother Mary, we see in the corner, unnoticed, that small gathering of the snake, toad, scorpion, cockroach, bat, spider, and rat.”

Hoezee concludes, “Bunting has found a lyric way to remind us that the coming of the Christ is not all about the traditional and cozy trappings in which we have for too long ensconced the Christmas story **but that this is a story for all creatures and that Jesus came to embrace and renew the good, the bad, the ugly; the expected and the unexpected.**” (Scott Hoezee, Comments and Observations)

In Romans 8:18 and the verses following, the Apostle Paul conveys a Christian version of the same promise of the **Radical Transformation of Creation** as that which was shared by Isaiah. Paul wrote, “*All of creation waits with eager longing for God to reveal His children. For creation was condemned to lose its purpose, not of its own will, but because God willed it to be so. Yet there was the hope that creation itself would one day be set free from its slavery to decay and would share the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain, like the pain of childbirth. But it is not just creation alone which groans; we who have the Spirit as the first of God’s gifts also groan within ourselves as we wait for God to make us His children and set our whole being free.*”

Isaiah’s prophecy of the fulfillment of God’s Kingdom – of the Shalom and Reconciliation of Creation sums up the result of this Peace, saying, “*On Zion, God’s sacred hill, there will be nothing harmful or evil.*

The land will be as full of knowledge of the Lord as the seas are full of water. A day is coming when the new king from the royal line of David will be a symbol to the nations. They will gather in his royal city and give him honor.”

The Church – The Body of Christ is the Royal City in this transition period – the time between the initial stage of the fulfillment of God’s Promise through the birth, life, ministry, death, and resurrection of the New King – Jesus – the Son of God – the Promised Messiah and its complete fulfillment of the Kingdom of God and the Total Transformation of Creation in the New Heaven and the New Earth following the Return of Jesus Christ. **So, here we are – in the Royal City – giving him honor!**

Our call as believers – followers of Jesus Christ is to manifest the **Peace** he will ultimately bring to fulfillment when he comes again and the Kingdom is Fulfilled. **That means, we seek justice for everyone, especially the weak, powerless, and the vulnerable.** It means we will seek to live the “Agape” Self-Giving and Sacrificial Love God manifested in Christ. **Instead of only caring about our personal prosperity, we will suffer and sacrifice for the welfare of others and do strange things like – even love our enemies.** You and I are to be Jesus’ agents of the deeper and broader Peace Isaiah prophesized about and of which the Apostle Paul wrote about. **Celebrate and live Peace from the New King!**
Amen.