

Sermon for November 30th, 2014

First Sunday in Advent, Preaching Series: Comfort and Joy—Peace

BLESSINGS TO YOU AND PEACE FROM GOD THE FATHER, OUR LORD
AND SAVIOR JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

On this **first** Sunday of Advent we have much to celebrate **and** anticipate. We have lit the **first** of our Advent candles, the candle of **Hope**. Our hope is the assurance that God will **fulfill** the promises that He has begun through Christ Jesus. Hope is having faith that God will be in the places in our lives which seem **hopeless**. Also, today is Youth Sunday which is always a time of **great** energy as our youth get to actively participate in our worship service in so many ways. In our **children's** sermon today we talked about what it is to wait and look forward to an exciting event **and** how sometimes waiting is the hardest part and it is a test of patience **especially** at Christmas time. And last, but **not** least, I am beginning the Preaching Series about Comfort and Joy as we await the blessed arrival of the **Christ** child. Our first week's sermon focuses on the topic of: peace.

The bible verses that will be associated with this series of sermons comes from the Old Testament book of Isaiah the 40th chapter, verses **1-11**. Each week the sermon will have a different subject associated with these verses. This week we will be focusing on the **first 2 verses** of that chapter which read: *'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her*

that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid, that she has received from the LORD's hand double for all her sins.'

In these verses God is looking down tenderly on Jerusalem even though the sins of the people were many. For us to get some idea of what was going on at the time that this book was written—these are God's ancient words to His people **spoken** through the prophet Isaiah in the 6th century B.C. This was the time when the Israelites were living in exile in Babylon. The prophet was speaking words of encouragement, peacefulness, and hope to a people who were so far from the home of their ancestors. God is offering consolation and care for His people who have **sinned** against Him but whose sins He has forgiven. The words of this text bring comfort, joy, hope, and peace to a people as their sins have now been paid in full.

'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.' These words that Isaiah has written have relevance even now and are not lost on us today. These words ring true in every age, place, and life because we are all in need of comfort, joy, hope, and peace.

But **where** do we find these things in this world of ours today? It is **one** thing for us to hear about what was happening **thousands** of years ago and of how God had compassion on His people, of how he forgave their sins, and of how he wanted His people to be spoken to tenderly and with compassion. But **how** does this translate for **us**? **Peace**. We **want** peace but we know so **little** of it in our

world, in our community, and in our lives. We only have to turn on the evening news to be confronted with that reality. We live in a world where **violence** runs rampant, a world where **warfare** is a common occurrence in many parts of the globe, and we live in a country where people **turn against** their fellow human beings with shooting, rioting, and looting with **no regard** for life or property. Where is the comfort, joy, hope, and peace in that? Like ancient Israel we, too, **long** to hear words that will give us **something** to live by. We want to know that one more powerful than us is coming. Not one who will **overpower** us with power and might but the one who is able to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves. We want someone to love us, to forgive us, to heal us, and to bring us peace in this world of ours.

As for us Christians **Advent** is a special time of the year. Or at least it **can** be. Although, we are entering a season that can be **anything but** peace filled. If we can survive all the hustle and bustle and hassle, the pushing and shoving, the traffic around the malls, the pre-Christmas buying frenzy. If we can keep that from taking our focus off the reason for the season Advent can be a **special time** of the year. It is a time of looking ahead with **hopeful** expectation to the of arrival of a baby, the **Prince** of Peace, the **Child** of Promise, the **Word** made flesh which will come to live among us. This is the time of the year that our faith clings to.

'Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.' these words of comfort defy logic and marks Advent as a period which **redefines** reality. It turns out that our idea of peace as Christians is something **different** than the worlds. For us peace is a **relational** word it is about our **connection** with God. Let's just think about how many times we use the word '*peace*' in our worship service. Each week we hear about it in our **hymns**, we sing about it in our **liturgy**, our **readings** are filled with peaceful images, peace is offered at the **beginning** of the sermon, we offer one another **signs of God's peace** in our passing of the peace time, we **pray** for peace during our prayers of intercession, we **go** in the peace of Jesus Christ after communion, and we receive a **blessing of peace** at the end of worship.

Peace is a gift from God, a **divine** presence, nature, and knowing if you will, a knowing that no matter what is going on around us, no matter what chaos our world is in that God's comfort and joy is with us. That we can **tap into** the peace of God which **surpasses** our understanding by just taking a minute, breathing, and knowing that God is with us. This reality may be most comforting especially at this time of the year when our **hectic world** becomes a bit crazier than usual. God's promise of peace on earth is the **promise** of Advent. The Good News of Advent is that God is sending His Son to **heal and restore** all people no matter **who** we are, no matter **when** we live in history.

God's **blessing** of peace is ours—just wait a couple of weeks **you** will see.
He is coming, just be patient. I would like to end with a reading from a small book
that I read from **almost** daily. It is called, "*The Quiet Mind.*" (p. 38) **AMEN.**