

122312 Advent 4c

“Peace Baby” -- Rev. Seth D. Jones ©

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55 (the Magnificat)

CS Lewis once said, “*If war is sometimes lawful, then peace is sometimes sinful*”. In the human striving for peace, it would be the height of presumption to suppose that, in the name of peace, all wars are unjustified. This would also presume that all treaties and agreements to peace are justified and correct. We are human beings and I, personally, believe we are driven by all kinds of things to fight wars. I have a personal theory that, if you back up the history far enough, there is always a point at which a choice could have been made which would have altered the outcome in such a way wars would not have to be fought. Primarily, though, I see war as a massive failure of human imagination and vision.

Peace, from the human perspective, is almost always about the absence of something - the absence of war, the absence of violence, the absence of hate and anger. True peace, though, the peace which can only be given by God, is something we receive, something given, the presence of something rather than the absence of something. Jesus says to the disciples just before he leaves them, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid*” (Jn 14:27). God-given peace, the peace Jesus gives to us, is not the peace of the world. The peace of the world is measured by the distance between wars. The peace of God is measured by eternity and is not bracketed by anything except the love of God.

Jesus says, “*Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.*” Last week was a horrifying and tragic week for Newtown and for this country. Perhaps this time the trajectory will be different. In the past, the trajectory has been: random mass shooting occurs; the 24 hour news cycle begins immediately; the next couple of days are full of quotes and politicians jockeying for positions; the NRA comes out with some outrageous statement, followed by even more outrageous statements by televangelists who are somehow qualified to speak to millions; and then, except for those directly affected, it all disappears into the ethers of our need to know about the next horrible thing.

Mary is surrounded by oppression and warfare. Back in her day, the walk to visit Elizabeth would have been punctuated by Roman soldiers and crucifixes as a warning to others who might disobey the superpower that was Rome. She is a pregnant teen who is not married yet, a state of being which is

punishable by death according to Jewish law at the time. She has many reasons to be troubled and afraid. We, over the past week and year, have been given many reasons to be troubled and afraid. Random shootings, like the one in Newtown, like the one the week before in Clackamas, Oregon, like the one before it in Minneapolis, or the one before it in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, or the one before that in Aurora, Colorado...how far back shall I go?...these trouble us and fill us with fear. These events reach deep into our minds and souls. They alter how we view others and view the world. We are troubled and afraid, and that is precisely the outcome sought by those who perpetrate these acts - to instill fear and terror into the hearts of others. And when we give into the troubled mind and fear of the perpetrators, we give in to their distorted, delusional view of the world.

What, then, does God's peace mean in the face of trouble and fear? What does God's peace mean in the face of a country gone insane over guns and television and a thousand voices that all have the right answer to huge problems?

Micah says to us, "*And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God. And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace*" (Mic 5:4-5a). God gives us peace. God's peace means we receive something - we are fed and we know the truth of God's presence. We will be secure with no threats now or in the future. The one who brings peace is peace.

But I am with where many of you are today. For the people of Newtown and for those of us who sympathize with them, my question is "*How?*". How does Jesus do that? Often, it sure doesn't look like there is any hope at all for God's peace in this world. Until the second coming, that may well be true, but I believe we should also refuse that view as well. Christ is meant for here and now. God's peace is eternal and therefore intended to be present with us in this moment, whether here, or in Newtown, or Minneapolis, or Milwaukee, or Aurora. Somehow, God's peace begins with us.

The only thing I can even remotely relate to the question, *How does Jesus do that?*, is when Rhiannon was born. For a few hours after Rhiannon was born, Kate was in surgery. Rather than going into her mother's arms, the new baby went into mine. I was worried about Kate and about the baby. I took her out into the hallway where some friends were waiting. Then the friends went home to take care of their lives. It was late at night. For a while, in the midst of trouble and fear about the future, it was just Rhiannon and me standing by a window late at night, watching the snow fall outside, since a blizzard was happening

that night. There was a moment, perhaps only a few seconds, where I knew peace. A moment where I felt peace. It was not the absence of trouble and fear. Rather it was the addition of something; the addition of something that changed everything back into time and forward into the future.

The only other time I have felt anything like that is when I decided I was done with the spiritual run-around and came back to the Christian faith. In that moment, again, it lasted maybe just a few seconds, I felt the presence of Jesus as peace, something he gave to me, which erased trouble and fear. I suspect for most of us our experience of peace in our inmost being is a memory of peace rather than the presence of peace itself, in the here and now.

Mary begins her journey as the mother of the Son of God in an expression of complete trust. “*Let it be with me according to your word*”, she says in response to the angel Gabriel. The promises of God come to fruition in Mary’s preparations for Jesus’ birth, and she proclaims in the Magnificat her joy and trust in what God is doing with her and for the world. In her pregnancy, God’s peace is making itself known. In Jesus’ birth, God’s peace takes on flesh and bone and enters the world as the Christ. In Jesus’ death, God’s peace is subjected to the human version of peace - in the view of the empire and the view of the religious authorities, Jesus’ death is how the peace of the realm is maintained. In Jesus’ resurrection, God’s peace is shown to be the final word on human activities and motivations.

What is peace for you? Maybe it is a memory of peace in the past. Maybe you have not really known much peace. Maybe it is only a second, a simple thing. Maybe you know peace as an idea or hope of what could be, something only thought of rather than experienced. Is peace for you the addition of something, or is peace the absence of something? Take a moment and reflect on what peace means to you.

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God’s peace means the reversal of fortunes and the setting right of injustice in this world. God’s peace means beginnings in simple things, like a baby in the womb or holding a newborn in your arms. God’s peace is the possibility of joy and hope, even as the insanity and destruction of the world swirls and swarms around us. *Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not fear.* “*The Kingdom of God is within you*”, Jesus says in the Gospel of Luke, and this means we are, like Mary, carriers of the light of Christ into the world. It means *we* are agents of God’s peace.

Hear the positive giving of the peace which God gives in Mary’s words:

*‘My soul magnifies the Lord,*

*and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,  
for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.  
Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;  
for the Mighty One has done great things for me,  
and holy is his name.  
His mercy is for those who fear him  
from generation to generation.  
He has shown strength with his arm;  
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.  
He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,  
and lifted up the lowly;  
he has filled the hungry with good things,  
and sent the rich away empty.  
He has helped his servant Israel,  
in remembrance of his mercy,  
according to the promise he made to our ancestors,  
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever. ' (Lk 1:46-55)*

May God's peace be in our hearts, our families, our church, our communities and our world as we enter our celebrations this week. May God's peace - the addition of security, hope and a future of abundance rather than loss - be with all those who have lost loved ones, especially in Newtown and all the other places of darkness and danger of this world. May God's peace be our future, something which radically alters and adds to our lives and the lives of others, rather than merely the absence of trouble and fear. May God's peace be a daily thing, like a young woman awaiting the joyous birth of her God-given child. Amen.