

Sermon Title: Longing For Peace  
Scripture Text: *Isaiah 9:2-7*  
Theme: Peace  
Date: December 4, 2011 Advent II  
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*Isaiah 9:2-7*

<sup>2</sup>The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined. <sup>3</sup>You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. <sup>4</sup>For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. <sup>5</sup>For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood shall be burned as fuel for the fire. <sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. <sup>7</sup>His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this. <sup>1</sup>

An atheist was complaining that she had no special holiday. Christians have Christmas and Jewish people have Hanukkah, but atheists don't have any holiday. And the Christian said, "Why not take April 1<sup>st</sup>."<sup>2</sup>

The coming of Jesus Christ, his birth, his arrival on the planet, was an expression of a holy longing. Eight hundred years before Christ, the prophet Isaiah was calling out to whoever would listen. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness— on them light has shined."

Like the other prophets both major and minor, Isaiah proclaimed something that all suffering people long for: an answer to their suffering. A light in their darkness. Something to save them, to change their circumstances, to ease their distress.

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<sup>1</sup> The Scripture quotations contained herein are from the New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright, 1989, by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

<sup>2</sup> [http://jokes.christiansunite.com/Christmas/Athiest\\_Holiday.shtml](http://jokes.christiansunite.com/Christmas/Athiest_Holiday.shtml)

Years ago, I had just arrived at an interim congregation, to serve them while they searched for a pastor. Like you, they had some emotional work to do before they formed their pulpit committee and began their actual search. They had some healing to do. Their particular situation was that they were conflicted about how they felt over the departure of two central figures in their congregation: the pastor and the music director. Those two hadn't gotten along, and the bitterness and vitriol were palpable. By the time the pastor and the music director left, people were so upset and divided that they were spitting venom at each other as they assembled for worship services. People told me they would walk into the narthex, and someone from "the other side" of the conflict would see them, and turn, and walk away in the opposite direction. Half the session resigned. Just after that is when they asked me to come.

That's no way to be the church. And over time, I helped them move through their emotions, and get it all out, and come to a point of healing and forgiveness, enough that in about a year they could safely form their committee. And they did, and they called a pastor, and it worked out all right. But for a while there, it was rough. They lost a lot of people in that conflict. Peace can be elusive.

That office administrator had it all figured out, though. They often do. She lit a candle on her desk. And the sign by the candle came from a Chinese proverb. It read, "Better to light one candle than to curse the darkness."

Isaiah spoke of breaking the rod of the oppressor, boots of tramping warriors, garments rolled in blood, burning them as fuel for the fire. Stocky language. All about the boiling middle east. They've been boiling in conflict over there for centuries, and it continues to this day. Isaiah wrote of one who would rise up over wars and warriors. He wrote of a victorious king and prince of peace, whose authority would grow and be unsurpassed. Isaiah's people knew him only as Messiah. We know him as Jesus.

I had a room mate in college. We didn't get along well. Differing lifestyles. It wasn't open warfare, but more of a quiet armistice. I came back to the room once from an Inter-Varsity meeting. The lights were out. The two of us in our separate beds before falling asleep. I think I had the upper bunk. Ouch. I asked him, "Who do you believe Jesus is?" And he said, "One *heck* of a guy." I softened the language.

To know *of* Christ is never enough, is it? What is enough is to let him be your peace.

Colossians 3:15 says “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts ...”

Paul wrote to the Romans, “May the God of hope *fill* you with *all joy and peace* in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>3</sup> Do people know you as filled with joy and peace? They can. We need to work on it. Rather, it is a work of the Holy Spirit. It’s both.

Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”<sup>4</sup>

Did you know “Peace be with you” is a fairly common phrase heard around the world. In India it’s accompanied by the raising of the hand to the forehead. In some cultures it’s shaking of hands and kisses cheek to cheek. In others, it’s a hug or a wave. I’m not advocating all of this. I’m saying it’s an observed world-wide phenomenon to want peace, to speak of peace, and to share forms of peace.

Our peace comes from a unique source. “Not as the world gives do I give to you,” Jesus said. Christian faith asserts the peace of Christ is unique and priceless. Paul wrote, “Therefore since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>5</sup>

Day-to-day peace can be elusive. Things are rough, budgets are pinched. There’s plenty to fuss over. If you had to choose one over the other, would you rather have economic security or personal physical security? Many in the world can’t have both. They have to choose.

Like the family depicted on 60 Minutes last Sunday. Did you see it? They ran a story about a family living in a truck somewhere, I think in Florida. The mother had died. Now it’s just the father who is an unemployed carpenter and his two school-age children. He used his last \$1,000 to buy that truck, and they live in it. At least they have a truck, many have nothing. They talked about the importance of choosing where to park the truck at night, for security reasons. The hospital emergency room parking lot is an

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 15:13

<sup>4</sup> John 14:27

<sup>5</sup> Romans 5:1

excellent choice, they explained, because the area is always lighted and the restrooms are always available. There are at least ten other students in that school they attend who are like them, homeless, but they are glad to be in school.

Psalm 46:10 “Be still and know that I am God.” There’s a peace there. I’m told it is translated in Japanese “lay down your weapons.” See? Sort of, unclench your fists. If you had ten seconds to comply, what would you do? If you had ten seconds to lay down your weapons, would you keep fighting your parents, your sister, your brother, your children, your boss, your neighbor, your God, your reality? Your memories? If that’s all you had left in life, ten seconds, would you make your peace? Why not do it now? Why not make peace now, with God, with yourself, , with whomever, and over what your life is. Not what you want it to be necessarily, not what others think it should be, but what it is. Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Peace is accessible, attainable. Identify with Christ, and you will gain a peace the world cannot give.

“... he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”