

2019 12 08 – The Real Meaning of Peace

Isaiah 11:1-10

Today is the second Sunday of advent and the traditional theme for this service is Peace. I want to begin by asking you, “What does peace mean to you?” And don’t worry about the title of today’s sermon. There is no right answer to this question. Peace has many definitions. Whatever you say is your truth and that is what is important. So, what does peace mean to you? *(leave time for answers – tranquillity, no war, no fighting, quiet, no stress, etc.)*

I want to begin today with a short story. It goes like this:

There once lived a king who offered a prize to the artist who could paint the best picture of peace. Many great painters sent the king their finest art pieces.

One of the pictures among the various paintings was of a calm lake perfectly mirroring peacefully towering snow-capped mountains. Overhead was a clear blue sky with white clouds. The picture was perfect. Most of the people who viewed the gallery of paintings thought that this picture was the truest depiction of peace.

But when the king announced the winner, everyone was shocked. The picture which won the prize had a mountain too but this mountain was rugged and bare. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. The sky looked very angry; it was filled with lightning. This

painting did not look peaceful at all. It looked like the artist has mistakenly submitted a picture depicting chaos rather than peace.

But if you looked closely at the painting, near the centre you could see a tiny crevice in the rocks. And, in the crevice a mother bird had built her nest. In the midst of an onslaught of angry weather and swirling water, the bird sat quietly on her comfy, dry nest. This is the picture that the king chose as the best depiction of peace.

Adapted from: <https://alltimeshortstories.com/meaning-of-peace/>

Which picture would you have chosen? Which picture mirrors the one that the prophet Isaiah creates in today's scripture reading? Isaiah says,

Then the wolf will dwell with the lamb,
And the leopard will lie down with the young goat;
The calf and the lion cub will graze together,
And a little child will lead them.

Isaiah is sharing his own vision of peace. He is describing a time when prey will be safe from predator; when the weak will have no fear of the powerful; when the youth will show us that we can live side by side with no need of guns or fences; when the children of this world will lead us to a new way of being; .

Isaiah's vision of peace is beautiful. Like the snow-capped mountains mirrored in a glassy lake, his picture is calm and peaceful. 2500 years ago it was a hope-

filled vision for Isaiah's people, the Israelites, as they faced armies at their doorstep. And it is a vision that we can aspire to in our time. We live in a time when social and political divisions seem to be growing rapidly, a time of escalating fear, distrust and economic disparity. Isaiah's vision of serenity, safety, justice and prosperity is just as meaningful in the 21st century as it was in biblical times.

So, if this is such a wonderful vision of peace why did the King choose a painting that depicted a violent storm and turbulent waters? Well, I believe that the King realized that we don't live in a peace-filled world. We don't live in a world free from noise, stress, discord, violence, and war. The King realized, that in order to experience peace in the real world we first need to acknowledge the mess or the chaos in which we live. Joanna Macy, creator of the Work that Reconnects, calls this step in the healing process "honouring our pain for the world," (*Active Hope*, page 57)

Some of us may think that we can achieve peace by just ignoring all the discord or chaos around us: the son who is experimenting with drugs, the sister who has unfriended us on Facebook, the growing discontent in our volunteer organization, the premier who is threatening to take our province out of Canada, the federal government who is breaking its promises or the president who is using Twitter as a weapon." Some of us may believe that if we keep ourselves distracted and we don't think about the chaos in our world, if we live in a bubble then our lives will be peaceful. But this is not true peace. Living in a bubble is just an avoidance tactic.

On the path to peace, the first thing we have to do is face reality. Wayne Dyer, put it this way: “Peace is the result of retraining your mind to process life as it is, rather than as you think it should be.” Once we acknowledge what is real, then the next step is finding a way to be calm in our own heart and in our own mind while in the midst of chaos. The next step is finding our own inner peace.

One article that I read on the Internet suggested that we could find inner peace and happiness by: spending time in nature, meditating and being grateful. To this list I would add all other forms of prayer including singing and dancing. All of these practices help us to recognize that we are not alone in this world. They connect us to God, the Essence of Love that exists in all of creation and in all of our relationships with other beings. These practices allow us to see ourselves and our chaotic world with new eyes. <https://positivepsychology.com/inner-peace-happiness/>

Isaiah described it this way:

The Spirit of YHWH will rest on you –
a spirit of wisdom and understanding,
a spirit of counsel and strength,
a spirit of knowledge and reverence for YHWH

When we allow ourselves to be deeply connected to God, to YHWH, to Christ, to the Ground of our Being then it is possible to have inner peace even in the midst of chaos. Like the mother bird on her nest, we can be calm despite the anger and turbulence that surround us.

It is from this place of inner peace that we can begin the work of bringing justice and peace to our families, our communities, our country and our world. Using Isaiah's words, "Justice will be the belt around this your waist – faithfulness will gird you up."

I believe that the King understood that there are many meanings for the word peace. Peace means being in a place where there is no noise or confusion. Peace means harmony in our personal relationships. Peace means being in a place of security or order. Peace means being in a world where there is no violence or war. But the King recognized the reality in which he lived and he knew that the only way to move towards world peace was by first finding his own inner tranquillity. For him, the real meaning of peace was the ability to have a calm heart and a calm mind in the midst of chaos.