

“Peace”

Isaiah 26:2-13; Romans 3:10-24;
Luke 1:67-80

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As we move toward Christmas, why in the world would I have picked that Romans passage for today? There's a lot to that particular passage and I could spend a lot of time on it. But the main point, the one thing I want to think about today, is how it says we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.

Sin is not something we like to talk about much, or that we want to think about much in the Christmas season, and yet it's the whole basis of the season in a way. If there weren't the sin, then we wouldn't need Christmas (maybe).

For me, there's a point at which I need to remember that nothing I have done, or that anybody else can do, has made me right with God. I know my own faults. I know how human I am. I know the sin. We all, if we look closely enough at our lives, know that we're not perfect. The failure. The way that we cannot do everything that God has called us to do, and we want to do, even.

The other side of that is not only knowing that I've not been able to do it. When Paul says all have fallen short, it's not like there are a few that actually are the great ones and can do it. We're all in this together. So when we begin to think about what God does in response, we're all in it together as well. It's about God's gift coming to us to overcome that struggle we have, the way we take off on paths that aren't good for us, decisions we've made that have not been helpful, the brokenness of our world and of our own lives. It's starting there that leads us to Christmas. Or at least, I can't forget it in the midst of remembering the grace because the grace comes to the brokenness, to the darkness. If there were no darkness, we wouldn't have needed the light.

So what we have is this hope in the Savior who comes. The scripture today is also about that Savior who comes and brings us the hope we talked about last week. We talked about how hope is general, but we also have particular hopes. And a central, particular hope of our faith is that our savior comes and leads us in the way of peace. Isn't that what Christmas is all about? That God comes and brings us a grace that leads us into the way of peace. We don't often think about a child coming right into our presence to be with us and through being with us, to bring us to peace. Therefore, I would like to think about what peace is.

Stephen and Kieren did a great job this morning with the children talking about peace, because they recognize something the Greeks didn't. When the Greeks thought of peace, they thought it was only a momentary time between war. But what Stephen and Kieren recognized is that peace is really more than that. It's more than just the lack of strife, the lack of conflict—as much as we want that sometimes, and need it. Peace is more than that. They said that peace is the presence of God's love, and I agree with them. If you read the psalm we read this morning, there's this wonderful sentence in

there where faith and love meet, and righteousness and peace kiss. We're going to talk some more about that, but there's a relationship there between faith and love. They are at least acquainted. Think about what it says about peace and righteousness. They are intimately related. So when we begin to think about peace, peace is more than just the absence of something. Peace is something in which we begin to fit something together. It's a way of fitting.

I'm going to ask my helpers to take their places now. (5 of our youth, each with a handbell)

When we begin to think about peace, it really is more than an individual thing. It's more than the absence of something. It's something that builds. So the first thing we are going to do is just listen to what it's like to be an individual. (They play the muted melody of the first phrase of O Come, O Come Emmanuel.)

Now, there's something recognizable about that, but it's each note by itself a little differently this time. (This time, they start off with a chord and play the phrase again, letting each bell ring out.)

So first we had a chord that put some notes together, then we heard more notes that came together over time and made something more. When they worked together, there's something more than each note by itself. So let's think about that one more time. (They play it again.)

Did you hear how the ring built into a chord that last time? How that chord came about, one note, two notes, three notes, four notes, and together they became something that by themselves they weren't. It is in that harmony that we arrived at something more like peace when it worked together. You noticed that even in the notes as they are played in making a melody, there's a little dissonance there. We need that dissonance. There are different notes, and we need different notes to be able to create the harmony. If you think about it, what would sin be in this circumstance? It's not the dissonance, necessarily; it's being out of tune. If we didn't have those bells tuned to each other, it wouldn't sound so good.

Sometimes I feel like that's the way we operate as human beings. We are a little out of tune and we struggle to create the harmonies that God calls us to. That's what I feel like Christ is doing when he's enabling us to recognize our dependence on him. He's tuning us so that we might harmonize, that we might go in the way of peace.

Have you ever seen, at the beginning of the orchestra concert, how the lone violinist plays one note and everybody else tunes off that one note? To work out that peace, that harmony, we have to tune off of the same note. You can tune in little groups, tune to each other, and there's some value in that, but we can't lose sight of the one we need to tune to. Who is the one who is our initial violinist? Who helps us tune to the music of the spheres, you might say? It's Christ. When we tune to Christ we begin to work out real harmony.

Let's move beyond the image of music. What is it to tune our lives to Christ? So much of it is about righteousness. If we read these scriptures again you would notice how many times righteousness is inserted in there. It's the opposite side of sin. It's right relationship with God we gain through Christ, and right relationship with one another.

As we think about how we tune our lives through Christ, it's through our right relationship with God and with each other. So as we go forth we can think about how we tune our lives to God, how that right relationship fits in our life, how we follow Christ and allow that to happen, how that Christ coming at Christmas gives us that note to tune to, one way of thinking as he leads us to the way of peace, that tuning our lives. Instead of looking for how I'm right, I can look for the right tune. How can we make a melody together, one that fits within the harmony that's already there? God's harmony; God's grace.

It's wonderful to go forward to Christmas recognizing we have one who gives us what we need to tune our lives to our God and to each other.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we are astounded that you would come to us, that you would come into our midst to bring not only the hope but the realization of a way we can step toward peace, toward a real harmony. We recognize that you heal the brokenness, you bring us to a fitting harmony together. Help us continue to move towards you, follow you, that we become part of your music, that we harmonize with you, recognize the melodies that we can create together as a body of Christ, as faithful folk following our Lord. Through Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.