

## **Advent 2023: Fourth Sunday of Advent**

### ***The Peace through Christ's Candle***

*John 14:23-27*

**Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on Sunday morning, December 24<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at First Baptist Church of Martinsburg.**

#### **A Terrible Imbalance**

I met Daniel for the first time at a grief workshop we provided one fall. Our of the five or six participants, Daniel was the only one I did not know. And he was an interesting person. He was in his early 30's but had been hearing impaired, considered legally deaf, since he was a young teenager. He had lived with his parents but sadly had lost both of them in a two-month span. He was struggling with the grief and sudden loss of both of them.

Daniel had some hearing aids and could hear very loud noises. But he had become a lip reader over time and could have a conversation with you if he looked at you. When he was in junior high, Daniel struggled with vertigo. It was so extreme, the imbalance inside his head was so strong, that it would literally throw him out of his desk at school. Over time, his vertigo completely destroyed his ear drums and cost him his ability to hear.

Despite the issue of his broken hearing related to the imbalance of his vertigo, Daniel knew the peace of Christ that overcame his spiritual brokenness. And he told others about that peace.

Daniel was a Christian and he would be the first to help others see the correlation between the inner imbalance that he had with his vertigo and the spiritual imbalance that all people have because of sin. Daniel was highly intelligent. He had multiple master's degrees in the study of physics. And he would tell classmates and tells those he works with about what it took to restore the spiritual balance through Jesus. He is a light who shines the peace of Christ to all around him.

It is important for people, for us, to realize that we lost peace everywhere. Our imbalance of sin meant that we lost peace in this world between people, between people and nature, and most importantly, we lost inner peace. There was an imbalance that caused conflict between people and God.

At Christmas, we consider the peace of Christ. We need to understand that His peace is more than just well-wishes at Christmas. It is more than a greeting we pass back and forth tonight as we light candles.

### **What is the Biblical Reality of Peace?**

When we consider what the Bible tells us about peace, we understand that it is a multi-faceted concept. First, there exists peace between men. Deut. 20:10 tells us that peace is an alternative to the battle about to happen.

Psalms 120:7 tells us that peace is an alternative to war. Ecclesiastes 3:1, 8 tell us that the reality of peace is a relationship among peoples that avoids fighting. So, the Old Testament lays out this understanding that the peace of God provides external peace between peoples as they can avoid fighting and war. But there is more to it than that.

In Mark 4:37-39, Jesus reveals a peace between natural forces and man. There will one day be a lack of conflict between man and nature. But John tells us that there is a further understanding than just these external ones.

The Peace of Christ is not peace on earth like so many sing about. Remember, when the Prince of Peace was born, it was in a war-torn world, a world under the thumb of the most significant empire to date, an empire powered by the most overwhelming and brutally efficient military in history. A few decades after the Jesus had returned to heaven, that military would decimate Jerusalem.

No, the peace of Christ is more of an on-earth peace. It is the understanding that Jesus came to restore the equilibrium and richness of humanity's relationship with God (Rom. 5:1). Nothing else in this world can offer that. Nothing else can restore the spiritual equilibrium that sin has completely broken. The peace of Christ offers an end to the brokenness caused by sin. Jesus tells us that this peace will be an internal peace, and he connects it to the Holy Spirit. His peace will be the fruit of the Spirit. Peace within.

It is important to understand both the internal and external aspects of the peace of Christ. Because despite the presence of external peace, you can still have internal turmoil. There can be peace between people and peace between you and nature. There can be a complete lack of conflict in your exterior world and yet, there can still be inner turmoil because your equilibrium, your balance, has been shot because of sin.

Anxiety. Chaos. Thoughts racing. Doubts soaring. Panic attacks. Constant confusion. Indecision. Frustration. Guilt. Shame. Regret. The heart is a restless sea of inner conflict, even if everything is peaceful on the outside because something is wrong internally.

Without the peace of Christ, the mind and heart will be in conflict with itself because something is wrong with us. Our lives are in chaos, and not because somewhere there is a war, not because somebody is mad at you, not because a frog wants to kill you. Something deep inside is broken, something is wrong with us. And every night, alone in the dark with our thoughts, we know that something is wrong with us.

### **The Promised Peace of Christ**

And now the Prince of Peace says he can give us inner peace. The Apostle Paul described the Peace of Christ in Phil 4:6-7 as being of a type or quality that surpasses all understanding.

What does that even mean – surpasses all understanding?

Well, with my understanding, I can read my Bible, I can observe the world around me, I can gather evidence that there is peace out there or peace with nature. But deep down I can still have these fears that irrationally bother me. There are all sorts of issues that make us unhappy, and they are not fixed by straightening up the external things. There is a peace that Jesus provides that surpasses all of those limitations.

Peace with God – the reason that we need the Peace of Christ is because the underlying issue of all of the chaos caused in our lives, the reason we have conflict in our hearts and minds, is because of our conflict with God. All the conflict in this world was the byproduct of our conflict with God.

All of our issues, all of our problems, will continue to exist until our conflict with God is resolved. Back in Genesis 3, in the Garden, conflict with God entered the world through sin. Sin caused conflict with God. No peace. No rest. Instead, conflict everywhere – both internal and external.

When sin caused conflict with God, it meant that the relationship was severed and broken. We will get all caught up on external conflicts being the problem. But do not be fooled – the main issue, the main problem, is conflict with God. Every person is born at odds with God.

By nature, we are broken. Until the conflict of God is resolved, a person will never know or experience peace. God told the prophet Isaiah that “there is no peace for the wicked.” (Isaiah 48:22). That means that there is no peace for us, except for one thing. Christmas and all that followed from it.

Christ shone as a light into that dark brokenness. He was our promised Prince of Peace. And on that night he was born, a multitude of angels appeared promising that the Prince of Peace had brought peace among those with whom he is pleased. Jesus came to resolve our conflict, restore our balance, and shine a light into the darkness.

One day there will be nothing BUT peace between people, nothing but peace between man and this good earth, nothing but inner peace for those who know how Jesus made it possible and believed and received him.

Jesus was our Prince of Peace by bearing our sicknesses and carrying our pain. In turn, humanity thought he had been punished by God through the physical pain. Humanity considered Jesus to be afflicted. However, Jesus was pierced for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities. He brought us peace by having our punishment for our sin and brokenness placed on him. This means that His wound healed us. His death on the cross resolved the conflict between us and God and it restored our spiritual equilibrium and allowed us to experience His peace.

And now that light that had shined in the darkness compels each one of us to share that same story with a darkened world around us.

Can you imagine being the recipient of inner peace and NOT telling someone else how to experience it for themselves? We should shine our light into the darkness and tell people how they can have his peace. We should be Christ’s candle, shining His light into the darkness.

We should be able to tell about how Jesus lived without sin. He had not done anything violent, and he had not lied. He did not sin, yet he suffered, because our sin.

We should be able to tell others how Jesus suffered and died. He was stricken, punished, afflicted, pierced, crushed, chastised, and wounded. He poured out his soul to the point of death for us.

We should be able to shine His light of truth and let people know that it was God who struck him and put him to death – it was God’s will, God’s plan, for Jesus to be born to die for our sin. It was not an accident outside of God’s plan. It was not a surprise. The death on the cross was as planned as the birth in Bethlehem. Jesus removed the conflict between God and people.

We should be able to communicate that this message is the heart, the essence of Christianity: God substituted His Son to endure our punishment so God could make peace with us, with sinners.

We should be able to tell others that Jesus suffered and died, the Son suffered and died, for us. Those were our sins and sorrows he carried. It was our sin and shame that covered him. God laid all of our iniquity on Jesus. Jesus did not have conflict with the Father. He died because we had conflict with God.

And we should be able to tell others that the result of trusting Jesus as Lord and Savior restores to us, brings us peace. We can be at peace with God. Jesus solved the problem. He brought us peace. Jesus was born to bring us His peace.

We are unable to make peace with God. We cannot do it. Only God can make peace with us. We cannot save ourselves. Jesus did that for us. And we receive this gift of salvation by faith. We believe in our deepest, strongest, interior heart, that Jesus died for our sins, was buried and raised from the dead. Paul says that we are saved by faith and since we have been saved by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let’s go tell others that message.