



Date: December 9-10, 2017
Speaker: Paul McIlwraith, Teaching Pastor
Scripture: Leaning Into Christmas-Peace vs Discord

Alfred Nobel was born into poverty in 1833 in Stockholm, Sweden. He was the third of eight children. His father Immanuel, an engineer, later lifted the family's fortunes by helping to develop the first underwater exploding mines successfully deployed in warfare. As a young man Alfred studied the natural sciences and soon partnered with the scientist who developed nitroglycerin. He began to devise ways to harness the new compound's explosive power in a less hazardous form, which eventually led to him inventing what we know today as dynamite. Later Nobel also invented far more powerful explosives, as well as the blasting cap. He amassed over 300 patents and became one of the preeminent inventors and industrialists of his day, establishing numerous factories that produced weapons and military equipment.

Throughout his life, Nobel didn't see his work with explosives and weapons as something he had to apologize for. Most of his nitroglycerin products were also put to positive use in areas like mining, communications and medicine. But, of course, some of his inventions were used in military conflicts, but Nobel felt that "almost everything in the world can be misused." In 1888 Nobel's brother Ludvig, died. But the European press mistakenly printed Alfred's name instead.

Speculation was that it was reading his own obituary that motivated Nobel to use the fortune he had amassed from manufacturing weapons to establish prizes that would recognize the positive attributes and discoveries of humanity.

In 1895, Nobel wrote his in will, the establishment of five prizes. There were in the areas of chemistry, literature, medicine, physics, and peace.

While awarding prizes for chemistry and physics was an obvious choice for the inventor and engineer Nobel, the rationale for a peace prize is less obvious. Some speculate that he wished to compensate for some of his inventions that were used for destructive purposes. When he died on December 10, 1896, his personal fortune was estimated, in today's dollars, at nearly US\$300 million. The first Nobel Prizes were awarded in 1901, the most famous of them ironically enough is the Nobel Peace Prize which is traditionally handed out on December 10 every year, the anniversary of Nobel's death. The winner this year is? Anyone know? The International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN).

The Nobel Peace Prize seeks to honor those who "have done the most or the best work for building fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies, and for the holding and promotion of peace conferences" Although the selection of some of the winners have led to controversy over the years, one of the greatest benefits of the Nobel Peace Prize is the fact that, once a year, the international spotlight shines on peace and what that means throughout the world.

Welcome to the second weekend of Advent at North Park. If you were with us last week, you know that we are in a Christmas series that is focused on Jesus, surprise! But not necessarily the baby Jesus, in the manger, with the animals and wise men? Just Jesus. His life and his ministry. What do we learn from Him in scripture that we can apply to our lives specifically around the four themes of Advent?

Christmas is the season of Advent which comes from the Latin word, *Adventus* which means *coming*. During this time in the Christian calendar, we as Christians remember the coming of Jesus into

the world and we anticipate a time when he will come again and consummate his eternal Kingdom.

Do you remember the four themes of Advent? Love, Joy, Peace and Hope. The question we are asking throughout this series is, what did Jesus's life and ministry teach us about these four themes and how do we, as followers of Jesus, incarnate these qualities when the world so often wants to flip them around. Instead of Love, the world can be a very apathetic place, we can be apathetic people, can't we? Instead of Joy, the world throws at us, sorrow. Instead of Hope, the world can become a place of despair and instead of peace, the world is more about discord and conflict.

Last week we lit the love candle and today, we focus on peace. What does peace mean to you? Can I ask you to do something for me? Just take a moment now, just in the quiet of this room, close your eyes and think about what peace means to you? Or picture yourself in an environment where you feel the most at peace. (do it briefly). Okay, back to reality. Eyes up here. Where did your thoughts go? Maybe it was favourite place in your house with a comfortable chair and a good book. Peace and solitude. Maybe for some it was a walk in nature or picturing a snow covered field on a starry night. Or maybe some of you pictured this. (Show picture of beach scene). This is my idea of peace and relaxation.

The point is, most of us picture peace as being surrounded by beauty, tranquil, quiet, harmony. Don't we? That is our picture of peace. I would probably guarantee that none of you were dreaming of this (Show chaotic scene) were you?

For most of us, peace is synonymous with paradise isn't it? Peace and paradise go together. I can't imagine being in paradise that wasn't peaceful and when I think of peace, that sounds like paradise to me. Many of you would agree. Young moms and dads, as much as you love your children, don't you cherish those rare moments when your kids are asleep and the house is quiet. Those of you in retail this time of year, don't you just savour those brief moments when the customers are few and you get to breathe. Rest.

Carolyn and I popped into Harvey's for a quick burger one night this week and were surprised how

calm it was for being around 5:30pm. We mentioned it to the woman who took our order and she said, *Ssh, I am enjoying it, because anytime now, it is going to be a zoo!*

Those of you who are students in exams this time of year, cramming and studying, little time for sleep. Don't you look forward to those few short breaks, those down times?

Those of you who encounter rocky relationships or difficult people in the work place, the home of the neighbourhood. Don't you just look forward to when those people are away, call in sick or are out of the house or on vacation? It gives you a break. Peace in our daily lives, doesn't that sound like paradise?

Do you know the problem with our culture's ideal of peace is that we often think of it in negative terms? As in the absence of conflict or strife. When two sides in a war come together and sign a treaty, then peace is achieved. When a husband and wife stop arguing and shouting at each other, they have worked out peace in their relationship. But this falls far short of the biblical idea of peace.

We have stated this before, but it bears repeating, often. The biblical idea of peace comes from the Hebrew word, *Shalom*. And shalom is such a rich word. Much fuller and deeper than our English word, Peace. And it goes much further than simply meaning an absence of conflict. That is only the bare minimum. According to Strong's Concordance of the bible, *Shalom* besides meaning the absence of agitation or discord; also means completeness, wholeness, health, safety, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, rest, harmony.

Now just think of those words and think of the place where you were dreaming of peace a few moments ago. Do they align? So let me ask you another question. Can you think of a place mentioned in the bible that had all of these qualities of Shalom? Absence of discord, completeness, wholeness, health, tranquility, perfectness, rest, harmony? Anyone?

Do you remember from our series on *The Story* this fall? It is the Garden of Eden. This Shalom kind of peace is exactly what God had in mind when he created his world. What is another word we have

used to describe the Garden of Eden? Paradise. It was paradise. And the best adjective used to describe Eden is “peaceful”. It was a place of Shalom. Do you see that? Even when God created Adam and Eve, the relationship between these two people was also full of shalom peace. They shared intimate communion with one another, naked in body and soul, without shame.

Unfortunately, as we know, this Shalom peace didn't last. Just like for you, eventually you leave that tropical vacation and return through crowded airports. Or eventually, the children wake up and disturb the few peace filled hours, or eventually the customers come into Harvey's or eventually you have to get back to the books and the studying.

The peace, the Shalom was also broken in the Garden of Eden. By wilfully disobeying God and eating from the tree, Adam and Eve's sin shattered the peace. The Shalom. How do we know? What happened immediately after they took a bite out of the fruit? They felt shame. They felt the need to hide from each other because peace was broken between the two of them. And they covered up and they hid from God because peace was destroyed between God and humanity. Peace was shattered in the garden both horizontally and vertically, because of sin. Adam and Eve's actions had dire results, they were expelled from the Garden. What God intended was for humanity to live forever in his Shalom peace, but now because of disobedience, humanity was doomed to die, both physically and spiritually.

The Story of Adam and Eve, stirs our soul because it is not simply a fairy tale of two people and their tragic mistake. Their story is our story. Because we too, have rebelled against God and it has shattered the Shalom peace in our relationships with him and with one another. God had paradise in mind for us, instead we live in a world where we only get bits and pieces of the Shalom he desired for us. Do you understand that? Now that would be a pretty dismal tale if we left it there, wouldn't it? If God left it there. But as we know, he didn't.

In the Old Testament, God promised to restore peace on earth.

Ezekiel 37:26-27

I will make a covenant of peace with them; it will be an everlasting covenant. I will establish them and increase their numbers, and I will put my sanctuary among them forever. My dwelling place will be with them; I will be their God, and they will be my people.

God promises to his people that he is going to put it all back together. What was shattered, the Shalom is going to be restored by God. It is his saving mission for humanity. So what does God do? Look at the familiar passage we read at Christmas time in the church. Listen to these words.

Isaiah 9:6-7

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his
shoulders. And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
7 Of the greatness of his government and
peace there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever.*

What did God do to save his people and restore Shalom on earth? Do you see how closely tied God's peace and salvation are to another? What did he do? He sent a child. A baby, actually. That is what this passage in Isaiah is foreshadowing and do you see why it was vitally important, that a description of this coming Saviour, this child is that he will be the Prince of Peace. Do you see the huge significance in that now? And on the occasion of this child, this Saviour's birth, angels filled the night sky and with hearts full of praise, do you remember what they sang out?

Luke 2:14

*“Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace to those on whom his
favor rests.”*

Again, do you see the significance of this word peace in this context? How closely connected God's

mission to save humanity through the sending of his son, Jesus is to peace? Jesus the Prince of Peace came to earth to restore what was shattered in the garden. The wholeness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, harmony; the Shalom to his world. But here is where we may have a marketing problem with Christmas. Just think of how many times, we have seen the sentiment, *Peace on Earth* attached to Christmas Cards or ornaments or snow globes or other paraphernalia related to Christ's birth. Or the song duet of David Bowie and Bing Crosby of the *Little Drummer Boy/ Peace on Earth* that everyone watches at Christmas.

Yes, it is true that the Prince of Peace, Jesus came to earth that we celebrate at Christmas, but the true peace, shalom that God intended for all creation on earth. The Shalom that was lost because of sin, was only re-established at Easter. Through the cross. The death and resurrection of Jesus. Look at what it says in,

Ephesians 2:13-18

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. ¹⁷ He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

Maybe *Peace on Earth* would be more appropriately placed on coloured dyed Easter eggs or inscribed on our Easter chocolate bunnies. Either way, God's plan to restore his Shalom on earth focused on the birth, life, death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus. He is the Prince of Peace.

Do you know that Alfred Nobel, established the funding and the criteria for the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in his will in 1895? Then he died in 1896. But the first Nobel Peace Prize wasn't

awarded until 1901. That's a gap of five years. Do you know what caused the delay? There was some misunderstanding as to how to proceed with what Nobel had established. Nominating and selection committees had to be set up. Legalities taken care of, the prize money properly invested, it all took time. The Prize of Peace was right there, but it took some time for people to know what to do with it, how to respond.

I would suggest that we, humanity have the same problem with what to do with Jesus, God's gift of Shalom. It is right there for us. But the question is; *What do we do? What do we do with Jesus?*

My wife Carolyn is the queen of collecting points. She has a points card for everything. Petro Canada, President's Choice, Shopper's Drug Mart. You name it. You have to be a weightlifter to carry her purse! She gets special offers that come across her phone for times when she can purchase certain products at some of these stores and she gets extra points. And of course the points pile up and then can be used to pay for products at these stores. Sweet deal. Although, I was a little skeptical that in buying all this stuff just to get points that it wasn't really saving us in the end.

That was until last week. Now, Carolyn and I don't really buy each other large gifts at Christmas but this year, I had been saving a bit to surprise her with a Tablet. The poor thing has been forced to read all these wonderful points offers coming in on her little cell phone screen, I thought a tablet would be useful. But last week, Shopper's Drug Mart was having a special Christmas points offer that had Carolyn especially giddy. That is when I noticed that this also had Samsung Tablets on sale from \$279.00 to \$179.00. I asked Carolyn how many dollar's-worth of points she had. When she told me, I let the cat out of the bag about my plan to buy her a tablet. She was all in. By the time we figured it all out, with the sale, Carolyn's points and the special points offer, Shopper's Drug mart would be paying us \$40 to take the tablet off their hands.

In fact, Carolyn had so many points that we could even get two tablets and Shopper's Drug would pay us another \$40 to take that one off their hands.

So, guess what Carolyn got me for Christmas this year?! How could we not? The offer was too good to pass up. It was right there! Why would we not take it?

Why would we treat God's gift of Shalom, his salvation and peace for our lives, any differently? The creator of the universe has restored us back into wholeness, harmony and completeness even though we were responsible for shattering it in the first place and we are going to leave it there? Leave him hanging? Why would we do that?

Why would you do that?

Do you know how to experience God's peace? It all begins by believing and receiving the gift of Jesus. Surrendering your life, for the gift of new life and new peace, Shalom that you can have in and through Jesus. Isn't that amazing? That's it. You don't even have to cash in any points to receive this offer, Jesus already took care of all of that.

In *John 14:27* Jesus says,

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

In *Romans 5:1*, the Apostle Paul says,

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

Through Jesus, God has given humanity the gift of peace. Not temporary or fleeting like the world gives. This is peace that restores Shalom in the world. And here is the more amazing thing. When we accept this offer of peace from God, we get peace with Him but it also leads to peace in other things. Peace with God leads to peace with ourselves. It leads to peace in relationships. Marriages, with our parents, our children, our friendships, co-workers, classmates, neighbours. And I know what you may be thinking, but Paul, I have received Jesus, but I still have a marriage that is turbulent. Some relationships that are strained. Worry seems to consume me. How come my life still feels so peace less?

Two things I want to say to you. The first is that this side of heaven, the world will not be restored to its full glory and splendor, paradise. Full Shalom will not be with us until Jesus returns again. The second Advent. But that day is coming.

But secondly, I think that many of us who proclaim to follow Jesus, forget that we got a two for one deal in the transaction. Not only did God, through Jesus bring us peace, but we also have the Holy Spirit living in us. Which guides and directs us and gives us the strength and power to live in peace even when it seems like everything around us is out of control. Like a hurricane is swirling around us and we are in the eye of the storm.

Look at the promise we have.

Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Here is my observation, because I can be guilty of this as well. I think there are times when those of us who proclaim to be Christians forget the power that we have available and that is in us. Or we don't tap into it. When a problem or worry comes into our lives that threatens to shatter the Shalom, peace that we have with God and others, we too often focus on the problem or the worry. And it consumes us and we forget the power that we have through the Holy Spirit to rest in him. Rely on him, trust in him and his peace.

Don't you love the Christmas carol, *Hark the Herald Angels Sing*, that we sang today?

*Hark! the herald angels sing
Glory to the new-born King
Peace on earth and mercy mild
God and sinners reconciled*

Do you know this song was written by notable Hymn writer, Charles Wesley, who lived a full life of service for Jesus? But when he was 79, his health began to deteriorate. As sickness took over his whole body, he knew that death was close at hand. His doctor who regularly visited his bedside during

his final days, described Wesley's attitude as he faced death. He said,

He possessed that state of mind which he had been always pleased to see in others, unaffected humility and holy resignation to the will of God. He had solid hope and unshakeable confidence in Christ which kept his mind in perfect peace.

We have all known those people whose unwavering faith allows them to face even the most difficult circumstances with a steadfast peace and it comes by focusing on Jesus, through prayer and reading scripture. And then tapping into his strength through the Holy Spirit, instead of becoming fixated on the problem. We all have that power, greater even than dynamite, that lives in us.

When we accept this offer of peace from God, we get peace with God but it also leads to peace in other things. Peace with ourselves and peace in our relationships. In fact, God has invited us to be agents in his mission to restore Shalom to the world. By taking his peace that lives in us, out in the world. We can spread it around. When people see you coming, do they see peace? Or chaos?

Matthew 5:9, Jesus says,

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

We are to be peacemakers.

In 1979, Mother Teresa won the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in caring for the poor and needy around the world.

After accepting the award, someone asked her, *What can I do to promote world peace?* She responded, *Go home and love your family.* How are we doing with that one these days, Church? Loving our family? Letting go of grudges, mistakes, failings. Turning in instead of out. One of the greatest steps to peace in any relationship is forgiveness. Just offering forgiveness. What is the expression, *let go and let God?*

And I just feel I have to say this. In the last little bit, it seems I have just been hearing about so many families, where the young adult children have just cut their parents off. Become estranged. Blamed them for a whole list of failings as a parent when they were growing up. Now, there are some horrendous parents out there for sure and their abuses are inexcusable.

But for most of us, because I can include myself here. I am a parent, too. We do the best we can with what we have. Children, youth, young adults, we as parents do the best we can do, given the circumstance and the situation, given what we have in the moment.

If we have failed you at times, we ask for your forgiveness. But we invite you to turn into us and not away, let's forgive each other and work for peace. That is our call as followers of Jesus. To be peacemakers. Amen? And to you who are parents. Scripture tells us that we are not to exasperate our children. Not to frustrate or embitter them. We are to encourage and support them even when they make decision that maybe we wouldn't. We can speak into circumstances when invited but be there for them. May that stimulate some very good and healthy conversations this season.

And being a peacemaker isn't just limited to our families. We are to carry this Shalom into our world. Where are we standing up for Shalom, God's peace in the world? Being agents of Shalom is seen in things like peaceful demonstrations of taking back the night when violence has overtaken a community. It is seen in being involved in anti-bullying programs in schools. It is seen in being advocates and voices for the poor and needy in our communities when structures and circumstances seem to marginalize them.

It is seen in giving our time and resources to things that propagate equality of life, wholeness and self-worth. It is seen in going to the sometimes messy areas of our lives and relationships with others to grow our character and our love for each other and Jesus, not running away when conflict arises. It is seen in leveraging our God given gifts, talents and resources to further his kingdom of Peace here on earth, just as it is in heaven.

As we ponder Peace/ Shalom this Advent season, as we remember the Prince of Peace. It is not good enough to just hear the words and do nothing about it. As you sit around the dinner table or having a coffee with friends or family, today, tomorrow or this week, challenge yourselves.

Where are we inviting Jesus to use us to work for His peace in our lives and in the world? Where are we blessing people and restoring them to fullness?

Where are we doing the tough work of walking side by side with someone to bring peace not just keeping things superficial but really living for peace like Christ? Who are those in our community, our neighbourhood, our workplace, our schools that God is bringing to our mind, to reach out and engage in relationship because his peace is in us to share with others.

And if you are with us today and you have never experienced this kind of peace in your life, it is available to you today, right here and right now through Jesus Christ. Will you receive it? It is too good of an offer to let go!

I pray that as we journey to Christmas this year that we will discover Jesus Christ anew in the voids in our lives. That we may sense that He is with us, even in the dark and chaotic moments. At work to bring us to him, to save us and offer us the peace/shalom that only He can bring. In our relationship with him, within ourselves, with others and with the world.

Amen? Amen.

Peace Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

O divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen.

Shalom, go in peace.

Points to Ponder

Leaning into Christmas

Peace vs Discord

With a friend, your family or in your small group, discuss the following questions.

1. Discuss this concept of peace with your group. What does peace mean to you? Describe a place or circumstance when you have experienced the most peace? Where is your “peaceful” space?
2. Discuss how God’s idea of peace, Shalom, is so closely linked to his saving of humanity, restoring humanity back to the Garden.
3. What is it that robs you of peace in your life? Why? Have there been times when you have gone through a particularly turbulent situation and you have felt such peace? What accounted for the difference?
4. What does it mean to be a peacemaker in the name of Jesus to the world? Where are the areas that you feel God can use you to take his Shalom out into your world? Brainstorm with your group, some ideas of ways you can work for peace.

Prayer and Action Item

Pray for one another out of the key points that were discussed. Pray against the discord that the world can throw at us in our relationships. Pray for God’s perfect peace to be present within you that allows you to withstand the turbulent times. Pray also for intentional opportunities to take his Shalom out into the world in which you go.