

Weekly Study of Sunday's Message.

December 10, 2023. "Advent: The Promise of Peace."

I Intro.

We're full steam ahead headed towards Christmas. Things are running at full speed and we want you to be a part of this great community. We hope you are fed and ministered to by NCC, and that you can be an essential part of us moving forward. We have many ways you can plug into life at NCC. You can find all those through our website, app, and social media sites. Our app is the best way to livestream our services, but you can also livestream on FaceBook and YouTube. You can revisit past services, sign up for events and even give. We're encouraged by your presence when you gather with us. New and familiar faces join us every Sunday. If you join us online, we appreciate your presence. We are 100% committed to our virtual attenders. We are your church family, and if there is anything you need, prayer, or anything else, please let us know. This is our weekly devotional that gives you some specific things to work through from Sunday's message. Whether you were able to participate in this service or not, this devotion is free-standing. You can use it to help you dig deeper into your own spiritual walk. We hope you find this tool helpful on your spiritual journey.

II Recap.

It's the third Sunday of Advent. Our journey towards Christmas. Advent is not actually a celebration of Christmas, but rather a time of waiting expectantly for the coming of the Christ. This can be kind of a weird season for us...and that's okay. This time of year we're always so focused on gifts, planning gatherings, thinking about what our Christmas will look like, we don't think about it also being a season of expectation. We all know Christmas is about Jesus. But everything gets all mashed together. We just want a month of Christmas, everything all at once. We forget what it was like for the people who lived at the time of the birth of Jesus. They had been promised a savior, a messiah, who would come and free them from the captivity they were in. But it involved waiting. And NOBODY waits well. Advent is a time for us to learn to wait well. To live in expectation for the coming of the Christ. It's in this time of waiting, we have our character built by living for the promise of hope, joy, peace, and love. The first week we celebrated the promise of hope and we talked about what promise meant. Last week we talked about joy and how it's grown in connecting with God. Today we talk about peace.

III Scripture.

Peace is going to be a different conversation than we had about Hope and Joy. And that difference is around the work we are to be about. Hope and joy required work to create a space, to empty out some things we needed to get rid of in order to create a 'placeholder' for each of those. Peace requires that same work. But also additional work that God calls us to that brings about this peace God is talking about. Before we dive into a conversation about peace, let's just talk about it some.

What does peace mean to you?

How have you experienced a peace that was really profound?

Peace really does mean so many things. And I don't want to force anyone to embracing just one understanding of peace. We all do experience peace in different ways. But real peace does accomplish some specific things. And no matter how we understand peace, it needs to be moving us to what peace actually is. Peace is actually uniting or reuniting what was divided. If you stop and think about it, lack of peace is often rooted in some sort of division. Whether it's in political parties, nations,

religions, even within families. Once there is division...there is no peace. So, that's the direction we will go on this day of Advent. Our scripture is found in just four verses in Isaiah. And yes...we'll be in the Old Testament, Hebrew scriptures, for all of Advent. So, read **Isaiah 32:25-18** and we'll dig through it to see where genuine peace comes from.

What jumped out to you from this passage?

What ideas did you see linked to peace? What are they?

And how would you see those things be involved specifically in bringing about peace?

This passage seems to be pretty specific about the work that builds and grows peace. A little heads up. This will sound somewhat political. And it is. The work this passage calls for that leads to peace is political. But it doesn't have to be partisan. And we need to constantly remember the difference. But we have to remember this one truth first, and that's what helps us to stay grounded in scripture.

1. We cannot generate peace on our own. The beginning work of peace must come from the Spirit. Which means all the things we do solely from us WILL NOT BRING PEACE. And we have to stop believing it will. **What are the things we do that lead us to believe we can bring peace about on our own?** So, when we're carving out that space, creating a placeholder for peace, it's done with the understanding we cannot fill that space set aside for peace, with earthly things.

2. Peace comes from our work. Justice and righteousness are what brings peace. Now again, it must be led by the Holy Spirit, which means it doesn't have to be legislated for it to happen. We are to be about this work whether it's gotten the government stamp of approval or not.

JUSTICE- in the places where there is no justice. This is God's justice, not our justice. We've co-opted the term. We define justice as people who do things we don't do getting what they deserve. So, we have what we call a justice system, but it doesn't bring justice. It tries to maintain a civil society.

Do laws and punishment return dignity, life, possessions, etc. to the people who lose them?

When your car or house gets broken into, catching the people helps you sleep better at night.

You feel justified that they got caught and punished. But it doesn't fix what is broken.

Those things will continue to happen. God's justice isn't about retribution...it's about restoration.

REAL justice, that brings actual peace, is when the things that cause the injustices in our society no longer exist. We are free from those things that divide.

RIGHTEOUSNESS- in the places where good work is done. This is in places like the church that we find people growing in their Christlikeness. There are many places in scripture where we can find good overarching understandings of righteousness. Love God- Love others. Fruit of the Spirit.

This is what the 'promise' of peace is rooted in. Doing justice...God's justice. Seeking righteousness. By growing in righteousness ourselves, and cultivating safe places for people to brave to grow in righteousness too, we can begin to become what Jesus called makers of peace...God's children.

IV Challenge.

The final challenge is asking some very important questions.

Am I making choices that limit my peace?

Am I working towards righteousness and justice so that peace can be brought about?

We all want this deeper peace the scriptures talk about. Are we willing to do the work to bring it about?