

Sermon Meditation, December 4th
Second Sunday of Advent
Isaiah 9:2-7
Eph. 2:11-22

At first glance, life appears to be a process of accumulation. In the first stage of adult life, we accumulate education, friends, family, careers, and goods. In the later stages of life, if we're not careful, we accumulate only hurts and disappointments related to loss. Pain and sadness are inevitable, even in the life of the most devoted follower of Christ.

How we handle these setbacks will shape our days, our character, and our future. If we respond with unforgiveness and let bitterness take root, we can actually "defile" the hearts of all those around us. In this way, we actually die before we die, if you know what I mean (Hebrews 12:15).

I've asked God to give me the grace and wisdom to avoid becoming a grumpy old man, full of criticism and complaints. Our attitudes and reactions to disappointments and loss are the pivotal factors in determining our level of protection from cold, hard hearts. According to Pastor Francis Frangipane, "Regardless of the hardships we have faced, and in spite of the mistakes we have made, the end of our lives can either be full of praise and thanksgiving or full of misery and complaint. In the final analysis, what we have experienced in life will be as rich as the desires we have had fulfilled or as painful as the things we regret."

When King Jesus reigns in our hearts, His peace controls our days and releases constant blessings. His peace is His Shalom, which produces orderly and honest thinking, and complete contentment and trust in Him. We can cultivate a heart of peace when we . . .

- Focus on contentment with what we've been given and what we have to offer (Phil. 4:12)
- As quickly as possible, fully release and forgive all offenses (Matt. 18:21, 22)
- Love our enemies and pray God's blessings on them every day (Matt. 5:43, 44)

And, the real proof that the Prince of Peace is reigning in your heart is giving Him thanks in all things, no matter how you feel (1 Thess. 5:18). In this way you will guard your heart by deeply abiding in Christ (John 15:1-5). After all, Jesus doesn't give us His peace; "He is our peace." His greatest gift to us is when He gives Himself to us.

Wishing for you the Shalom of Christ this Christmas season,
Pastor Steve

