

12.04.22 – Advent 2 - PEACE
“Preparing the Way for Christ’s Peace”
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 (NRSVue) ~ Pam

Prayer for Guidance and Support for King Solomon

- ¹ Give the king your justice, O God,
and your righteousness to a king’s son.
- ² May he judge your people with righteousness
and your poor with justice.
- ³ May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
and the hills, in righteousness.
- ⁴ May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor.
- ⁵ May he live while the sun endures
and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
- ⁶ May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
like showers that water the earth.
- ⁷ In his days may righteousness flourish
and peace abound, until the moon is no more.
- ¹⁸ Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel,
who alone does wondrous things.
- ¹⁹ Blessed be his glorious name forever;
may his glory fill the whole earth.

Amen and Amen.

L: This is the Word of God blessing King Solomon. All: Thanks be to God!

Matthew 3:1-12 (GNT)

The Preaching of John the Baptist

- ¹ At that time John the Baptist came to the desert of Judea and started preaching. ² “Turn away from your sins,” he said, “because the Kingdom of heaven is near!” ³ John was the man the prophet Isaiah was talking about when he said, “Someone is shouting in the desert,
‘Prepare a road for the Lord;
make a straight path for him to travel!’”
- ⁴ John's clothes were made of camel's hair; he wore a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. ⁵ People came to him from Jerusalem, from the whole province of Judea, and from all over the country near the Jordan River. ⁶ They confessed their sins, and he baptized them in the Jordan.
- ⁷ When John saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming to him to be baptized, he said to them, “You snakes—who told you that you could escape from the punishment God is about to send? ⁸ Do those things that will show that you have turned from your sins. ⁹ And don't think you can escape punishment by saying that Abraham is your ancestor. I tell you that God can take these rocks and make

descendants for Abraham! ¹⁰ The ax is ready to cut down the trees at the roots; every tree that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown in the fire. ¹¹ I baptize you with water to show that you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is much greater than I am; and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals. ¹² He has his winnowing shovel with him to thresh out all the grain. He will gather his wheat into his barn, but he will burn the chaff in a fire that never goes out.”

Leader: These are Words of Preparation from God. All: Thanks be to God!

Please pray with me:

Dear Lord, as we experience Advent this year, let us be grateful for our many blessings and benefits. We pray for those do not have family around or enough to eat. Let us pray for those without shelter, as we open our hearts and minds to be watchful and expectant for the peace only you can bring. May we embrace the responsibility of doing our part to promote justice and truth. Be with those who cannot be here today; may we hear your word through this messenger’s voice. Amen.

Thank you to those who helped us decorate the church yesterday! It was 3 hours of work and fun putting it all together. There will be bits more to come each week, so please enjoy the beauty God’s creative process brings to this building and to your homes. Poinsettias will be here by December 18th; thank you to those who have purchased in memory or in honor of a loved one. You may still complete the form and place your contribution in the offering tray, right up until December 18th.

Let me announce that for Christmas Eve at 3 pm this year, we have a woodwind quintet and a guest or two for our “choir”. We will also meet on Christmas Day for our normal schedule and will sing favorite Christmas hymns that day at Assembly and during worship, so please fit coming to church into your holiday celebrations.

Today is the Second Sunday of Advent – Peace. We are in a period of preparation and watchfulness for the Messiah’s birth. Yesterday’s “Deck the Halls” could be considered a form of holiday preparation, but it was nothing compared to Mary and Joseph’s preparing to be new parents!

When one prepares to decorate, the first steps are to gather the boxes of all decorations, then to empty them and take inventory, giving or throwing away any worn out or broken items, asking ourselves whether we want to use them this year or add a new color or item we've discovered or purchased. We all know that in our haste to put decorations away, they are sometimes tossed into boxes without being sorted especially if children are helping!

We too must take stock of our spiritual lives each year or more often to ask ourselves what things we need to let go of, or what do we like about our spiritual practices that we want to keep? Are there sins we've committed, or acts omitted of which we need to repent? We ask these questions usually at Lent because the Cross on which Jesus died reminds us that he died and rose again for us and our salvation. I suggest that we take that same inventory this Advent preparing for his birth, but with the knowledge that he will also die to save us.

The psalm read today is also about preparation. Psalms 72 and 127 are attributed to Solomon about the millennial reign of the coming Messiah. The expectation was that the King would reign in righteousness and peace on behalf of the oppressed. Kings were expected to keep the peace. David's rule was coming to an end, and he wished to name and bless his successor, Solomon, who would finish building the Temple for God. The writer prays for peace and prosperity, and that God would give the king wise judgment. When a king's rule was **righteous**, giving God the honor, power, and glory, then his legacy would endure throughout generations. Peace would reign and generational pain would be healed. Of course, for God's peace to prevail, humankind must cooperate and live

ordered lives. This king was reminded that he was only God's surrogate to defend and protect the poor. In this context, cautiously, Jesus might be considered God's surrogate to defend and protect us all.

John the Baptist could also be considered Jesus' "surrogate" until Christ's divinity was made known: "A voice of one calling: 'In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God' (Isaiah 40:3)." There had been no prophets in over 400 years, so word spread that John was the wilderness prophet Isaiah wrote about, and he drew crowds to hear his message. The wilderness was something Israel knew about, and important Godly things happened there. The wilderness was also an area where fugitives from society (either criminals or outcasts) could hide and live undetected. John adapted to that lifestyle wearing rough clothing, a camel hair coat, leather belt, and a beard, much like the descriptions of Elijah. People were confused by his appearance and some thought he **was** Elijah! His spare diet of locusts with natural honey assured people he was a holy man, so they came to him.

While you may not be called to observe these extreme disciplines in your spiritual practices, we are called to hear his message: the Messiah is coming! ¹¹ "I baptize you with water to show that you have repented, but the one who will come after me will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. He is much greater than I am; and I am not good enough even to carry his sandals (Matt. 3:11)." This is so significant that each of the four Gospels and the historian Josephus' work tell of John the Baptist.

Although John's account in Matthew has many layers of interpretation, this year we focus on his message of repentance and what that means for us to empty ourselves before Christ's birth. Only you can

answer quietly in your heart what that means to you, in terms of letting go of things that will not honor or esteem Jesus and your faith in him.

Internal spiritual peace cannot be yours without it. We do wish for world peace also, so I encourage you to spend time in prayer and meditation for it. Perhaps if our world societies would “let some things go” like competition, slavery, trafficking, violence, abuse, and war we might imagine a world in peace. Yet we believers know that Christ will bring us peace one day, and that he brings personal spiritual peace if we surrender to him now. Which kind of peace are you seeking this holiday?

Remember what I said last week: “Our future hope is that God will bring about PEACE, not through human achievements or victories of war, but through his own love, presence, and work . . . God’s great power to bring peace to all nations is the foundation of our belief in his mercy and grace, and even though we may not witness it in our lifetimes, we can hope and pray for it.” The emptying and repentance we speak of today comes from Jesus, and it is only through him that we find **transformational peace**. It is then we can be a “non-anxious presence” to the world, being an example of Christ’s peace.

Will you begin this process of emptying today? As you go home or out to lunch, think about what keeps us in chaos? What do you need to do or let go of to bring about peace in your life and community. Name it. Then let it go. Leave it at this altar for God’s healing and renewal. As we come to the communion table, *empty* yourself of whatever keeps you from experiencing the PEACE of Christ. Then we’ll come together in JOY next Sunday. Keep watch! Amen! //

Will you pray with me? God of justice and peace, thank you for these words to remind us that *Emmanuel* is why we are here today. May our internal spiritual peace grow and show to the world your love for us. Help us to consciously empty our minds of distraction so we may watch and wait for the Christ child to be born. Bring transformational Peace to our world and mercy for our sin. Forgive us, oh Lord, as we humbly ask these things in Jesus' name, **Amen.**