

Kuhn Memorial Presbyterian Church
955 Main Street
Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
Second Sunday in Advent

Prelude

Lighting the Candle of Peace Vince and Brenda Keys,
Annie Kendrick and Brooks,
Elliot Keys with Josh Keys recording
Greensboro, North Carolina

Today we light the candle of peace.

We all hope for peace. As you read your Sunday paper, notice all the places, near and far, consumed by fear, where struggle is the people's daily bread, and there is no real rest from labor. Consider all the people of the world in need of God's peace. How might you be an agent of peace?

Hear these words of scripture from the prophet Isaiah:

*The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.* Isaiah 11:6

And these words from Second Peter:

*In accordance with God's promise
we wait for new heavens and a new earth
where righteousness is at home.* 2 Peter 3:13

Let us pray for God's peace:

Almighty God, you have made us and all things to serve you.
Now prepare the world for your rule.
Come quickly to save us,
so that wars and violence shall end,
and your children may live in peace,
honoring one another with justice and love;
through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.
Amen.

Hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

Text: Latin prose, pre- 19th century; Music: Plainsong, adapt. Thomas Helmore, 1852

1 O Come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
that mourns in lonely exile here
until the Son of God appear.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

2 O come, thou Wisdom from on high,
who ordains all things mightily;
to us the path of knowledge show;
and teach us in her ways to go.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

5 O come, thou Key of David, come,
and open wide our heavenly home;
make safe the way that leads on high,
and close the path to misery.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Prayer of the Day

May this eternal truth be always on our hearts:
That the God who breathed this world into being,
placed the stars in the heavens,
and designed a butterfly's wing...
is the God who entrusted his life
to the care of ordinary people
and became vulnerable that we might know
how strong is the power of Love...
a mystery so deep it is impossible to grasp,
a mystery so beautiful it is impossible to ignore. Amen.

Scripture Readings Isaiah 40:1-11; Mark 1:1-8

The Morning Message

I read a story this week that captured the scripture readings in just the right way for us today. The Rev, Nathaniel Phillips, of the Kirk in the Hills Presbyterian Church in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan* writes that one summer he led a mission trip to his hometown in Maine. His group had a day off and they were headed to the beach for a day of rest, relaxation, and fellowship.

He writes, “My wife is there, too, with my five-year-old daughter and our baby who is just a few weeks old. My wife is driving our car to the lake and I am guiding the group so I am in the church van. I am riding as a passenger, offering directions to the driver on our way through town to the lake. We will have a picnic there, we’ll play Frisbee, we’ll swim.”

They must be much hardier than this preacher. Have you been to Maine? Even in the summer, it’s sweater weather.

Phillips continues with his story: “As this is my hometown, I’ve seen the Farmington roadside go by thousands of times, and I tell our driver to stay straight on Route 4 until we hit the next town. All the familiarity seeps in, I am drifting...”

“As we pass the diner, my eyes lock on the spinning blue lights of a police car. And there, in front of the diner, I see my wife. She is running with purpose around our car to the backseat where I know our three-week-old baby girl is strapped in. The police car is behind hers and the officer stands, looking helpless, next to the car. An ambulance brackets our vehicle from the front. Panic shoots through me. “That’s my wife,” I say to nobody in particular.

We need to turn around. We need to turn around!

The most dreadful possibilities race through his mind in the seconds it takes to turn around and go back to the scene. Was there an accident? Did the baby choke on something? And he prays, please God, let everything be OK.

And by turning around, they became fully informed about what had happened.

He says this incident reminds him of how we receive the good news about our lives and faith. People tend to talk about choosing to embrace the Christian faith, or any other faith, as though it is an intellectual exercise.

Our Reformed and Presbyterian understanding is that we don’t get to choose whether God loves us, but we do get to choose whether we will turn around from whatever path we are on, like Phillips turned the church van around that day in Maine, and live into that marvelous love of God.

We don’t get to decide whether God loves this or that person, whether or not they are worthy of love, but we do get to help the world turn around and live into that love. Living into God’s love should take us down the road that leads to peace. Going down that road often calls for change.

This is John's message in the gospel text. He calls the people to repent, turn around, for the kingdom of heaven is near.

This account is also found in the gospel of Matthew. Matthew uses the Greek word, *metanoia*, which is translated "repent." *Meta* means change and *nous* means mind. So, John is calling us to change our minds...go in another direction.

This idea of turning around is not new to our New Testament characters. In Hebrew, we find the word, *shuv*. It is translated "repent," and it, too, means to turn around, to change our ways.

Last week Ed and his brother were watching a basketball game. Their team was lagging behind. They were headed toward a loss when they should have been winning considering the team they were playing. I heard one of the spectators shout at the television, "You've got to turn this around, boys!"

Indeed, they needed to change their strategy before they were defeated. Apparently that was the message they heard in the locker room at half time. Because when they took the floor for the second half, they turned the game around and won it.

We aren't all basketball players. But we all make decisions every day that define our lives. What kind of emotional climate do we set for the day? What face will we wear when we greet the other people who live in our home? How will we approach the day's tasks? How will we respond to an emergency? Or a disappointment? Or the governor's press briefing? I usually appreciate those press briefings. A few days ago, he referred to the residents of West Virginia as frogs and that we are "proud of our pond." I'm still thinking about that one...

Most of us will not make the decisions the governor faces each day. But we will be affected by his choices. We all hope he takes us down the road that leads to success in all the ways that impact our lives as West Virginians. This year, the decisions have been critical life or death choices. Sometimes those choices produce anxiety and sometimes they are more reassuring. We receive them with a sense of peace.

The bottom line is we are always on a quest for peace. When we lay our heads on our pillows at night, we don't want to toss and turn, worrying about the day's events, the day's choices. We want rest. We need peace.

What are some ways we can find peace now, today? I can only speak for myself. I'll crack the door on the climate in our house. I have been known to wait until everyone goes to bed and then clean the house, or do the laundry or some other task because it is unacceptable to me to go to bed if there are dishes in the sink or crumbs on the floor. I am as addicted to neatness as some are

to alcohol. I have learned that they are both destructive. Both are methods that are meant to ease anxiety. But, in reality, both rob their practitioners of peace.

Frederick Buechner reminds us that, “The real turning point in our lives is less likely to be the day we win the election or get married, than the morning we decide to mail the letter or the afternoon we watch the woods fill up with snow. The real turning point in human history is less apt to be the day the wheel is invented or Rome falls, than the day a child is born in a stable.”

Can you imagine, if we had been in that church van in Maine the day Nathaniel Phillips saw his wife’s car surrounded by emergency vehicles? We, too would have been compelled to stop and turn around. We would have turned around for that baby.

And we would have found what Nathaniel did that day: that the baby had worked herself up into such a lather that his wife was concentrating more on taking care of the baby’s needs than the speed she was driving. We’ve probably all been there. She was near the diner when a police officer pulled her over. She pulled into the diner parking lot right behind an ambulance already parked there. Apparently the EMTs were taking their breakfast break.

Nathaniel was compelled to turn around so he could be with his wife and children that morning in Maine. He had to turn around.

So, what about us? Can we turn around from whatever is distracting us to be fully present for the baby in the manger? When will we stop, turn around, and think about the life of that baby? WE we consider how he grew in wisdom and stature, accepted his mission from God, his father, and eventually exchanged his swaddling clothes for a robe that was gambled over and a crown of thorns on the head his mother had kissed?

These things he did for us. These things he did for love. These things he did to bring us peace. And even if we don’t choose him, he chooses us. His arms are always open. In them we will always find peace.

May it be so for all of us. Amen.

Pastoral Prayer and the Lord’s Prayer

O God, our Peace,

On this Sunday of preparation, this Sunday that celebrates your peace,

help us so to live that peace may be found in our lives, homes, workplaces, and our church.

May we do our part to usher in peace in the world and in the Village of Barbourville.

Where we have sinned, move us to repentance,

and help us to muster the courage to make amends with those we've harmed in thought, word, or deed. Where others have sinned against us, may we find a sense of forgiveness and trust that you will reconcile all things in your time.

We pray for all those who face violence daily, for all in need, for those near and far away who are sick or troubled, for all suffering due to the pandemic, for those who mourn, for all leaders everywhere, that they may seek the welfare of the city, nation, and the world.

Make us all new in the One to whom John pointed, Jesus, our Savior and friend, praying as he taught us, saying, Our Father...Amen.

Hymn O Come, O Come, Emmanuel

6 O Come, thou Dayspring, come and cheer
thy people by thine Advent here.

Disperse the gloomy clouds of night,
and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

7 O come, Desire of Nations, bind
all peoples in one heart and mind;
bid envy, strife, and discord cease;
fill the whole world with heaven's peace.

Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

Blessing

Go now: wait and work for the coming of the Lord.

In the wild places prepare a straight path for our God.

Lead lives of holiness and godliness,

strive to be found at peace,

and speak freely of the Lord's comfort and promise.

And may God our shepherd gather you in loving arms,

may Christ Jesus reconcile justice and peace within you;

and may the Spirit fill you with holy intentions.

Postlude

*Day1.org

Announcement

We welcome your participation in our Advent/Christmas worship. Please contact Cinda Harkless to make arrangements.

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