

The Purpose of Christmas – A Time for Reconciliation 2 Corinthians 5:17-21

This sermon was preached by Pastor Heather Wigdahl on Wednesday, December 16, 2009 at Trinity Lutheran Church.

¹⁷So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. ²⁰So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Tonight we conclude our Advent series the Purpose of Christmas. Over these last couple of weeks, we have considered the purpose of Christmas as a Time for celebration, and a time for Salvation...And tonight we ponder how Christmas is also uniquely a time for Reconciliation.

That is, a time for PEACE, for receiving the gift of PEACE from God, for knowing, experiencing and living out of that PEACE in our daily lives, for then CREATING peace in our world, in our relationships, making peace with others. Tonight we consider together how the purpose of Christmas is indeed to know peace and to create it. Christmas is a time for Reconciliation.

Reconciliation, means to be restored, to know peace in a relationship. Reconciliation happens when a broken relationship is restored. From the Greek, in the New Testament, reconciliation (**kat-al-las'-so**) means to return to favor with another, or to bring into harmony.

Holy Harmony, you might say, is the fullness of Peace, in the midst of whatever else is happening around us. It cannot be understated that in our world and in our lives, PEACE is often lacking. Throughout written history, there have been nearly 15,000 wars, and these are only the ones we know about. And at this very moment, there are 32 large and small wars going on in the world.

And there are very own little wars raging too: in our families, with our ex's, between children and parents, political parties, within neighborhoods, and always in the very body of Christ that is the church. We too, find many things to fight about. PEACE? There is not a lot of it in our world.

One of the titles, of course, by which *Jesus* is known is the “Prince of Peace”. But what makes him so? Is it because he is ever so passive? Meek and mild?

Sometimes we develop that kind of picture of him, especially at this time of year, a baby, glowing and lovely in the manger. But this baby WILL grow up to overturn money changer tables in the temple, in a fit, I might add.

And he even will tell his disciples at one point, that he did **not** come to bring **quiet passive peace**, at all, but rather challenge, conviction, passion for justice and truth. That’s what he means, by the way, when he is talking about the “sword.” For his first disciples, it was religiously and politically dangerous to follow him. (“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Matthew 10:34). Jesus didn’t come to be meek and mild, and he does not call us to be so either. He calls US to compassionate service, and mercy and justice.

Jesus tell those same disciples, the last time that they eat together before his death...that he will leave with them his peace. He says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27).

Are these statements contradictions? OR is the peace Jesus which brings, something bigger than passivity? Is the peace that Jesus brings, something grander than just the absence of struggle, or fear or loss? And is it perhaps possible that this Prince of Peace gives us a kind of peace that can exist and take hold of us, even in the very midst of all of those things?

Frederick Buechner, a witty Lutheran writer, would say that for Jesus, “peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle, but the presence of love.” Or as the coffee cup I drink out of every morning reminds me: Peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.” A friend of mine gave me that—he knows me pretty well, and that seems to be a good reminder for me every morning!

The PEACE which Jesus brings, is a kind of peace that can exist in the midst of both joys and struggles. In both pain and wonder. Through both certainty and doubt. PEACE—eipnvn (air-ray-nay), in Greek, comes from the Hebrew idea of **Shalom**—Shalom means “*wholeness*,” being

at one with God, with ourselves, AND with our neighbor. It is more than just the absence of **conflict** or war, the peace that Christ promises is *a connecting peace*.

When we **share the peace** during worship—this is more than just a formality, it is intended to be a physical *enactment* of MAKING PEACE with one another: Breaking down whatever “walls” divide us; actively seeking to forgive and accept and heal the hurts we’ve caused one another.

Jesus as our Prince of Peace, invites us into his peace—into his “Shalom”: to be at peace with God, with ourselves, and with others.

First and foremost, Jesus offers us “Peace with God.” This is really a “spiritual” kind of peace. By grace we are saved. Jesus makes peace with God—connected us fully TO God. We need not worry about our salvation, for through faith we are saved. It’s a done deal. Jesus makes PEACE with God for us.

And Jesus plants IN us peace, too. This is sort of an “emotional” peace. We are not alone in our struggles. We will not be forgotten. So we then have some freedom to choose how we will respond to what comes our way. We can worry, or instead, worship. We can panic, or instead, pray.

I remember, I will never forget, when in fourth grade, while on a field trip, I was left at a gas station. The bus literally drove off without me. And I panicked. For a split second, I was certain I would never get home again. But then I remembered: my friend Deanne. She was my seat partner. She would notice I wasn’t there. And sure enough, the bus hadn’t even made it to the end of the block, and Deanne was screaming. We are not forgotten. The peace of Christ in us rests on the promise that we are never and never left alone to entirely fend for ourselves.

Peace with God. Peace in ourselves. And then, Peace with others—“relational” peace. God calls us to BE peacemakers. To be reconcilers. We are given this ministry, and are equipped to do it, because of the peace already gifted to us. I love how our preschool here at Trinity teaches our children to “Be Peacemakers.” Eleanor, at the age of 3, is already NAMING the ways she is being a peacemaker at home. “I’m picking up my toys, momma. I’m a peacemaker.” And you know, that does actually make some peace at home!

But isn’t it true that in big and small ways, we all are equipped to be peacemakers. We can be

more gracious to one another. We can compliment instead of criticize so much. We can cut people just a little more slack. And we strive to forgive, we can try to rebuild, we can risk letting go of angers or resentments or hurts that have all too long claimed us. We can seek to let the peace of Christ ever more claim us, and fill us.

Isn't Christmas the perfect time—isn't any time—isn't this very time, the perfect time to let the peace of Christ claim us, dwell in us, pour forth from us? May the Prince of Peace, bless you this Christmas, this night—with peace, in peace, and for peace—Amen!