

"Depart In Peace"

Luke 2:28-32

December 28, 2014

1st Sunday After Christmas

Well, is there a little more peace at your home now? Christmas with all of its busyness - special services, parties, traveling, and visiting - is, for the most part, over. We now have a little bit of peace and quietness. But is it really peace that we are experiencing now? Or, is it just a short respite before the next onslaught of busyness, noise, and conflict?

It all depends on how you define peace. For many of us in the western world, peace is defined in terms of what it is not. Peace is not war, not conflict, not noise, not busyness. Peace is thought of as a lack of something -- a lack of fighting, a lack of conflict, a lack of noise, a lack of busyness. If that is how peace is defined, then perhaps we do have some sort of peace now because those things are now lacking in our lives at the present time.

But that is not what the Bible means by peace. The Biblical word for peace, *shalom*, is defined differently. The Biblical concept of peace is not a lack of something in a negative sense, but the possession of something in a positive sense. *Shalom* is a perfect and complete sense of well being for body, mind, and soul. Now, by that definition of peace, do we really possess peace in our world and lives? No. We experience times when we may not have as much of the things that disrupt peace, but we don't have that complete, perfect, and enduring of well being for our bodies, souls, and spirits.

At one time, mankind did have that perfect peace. God created man and woman to live in that perfect peace with Him and with each other. Into that serene world of total well being of body, soul, and spirit, sin came crashing in like a boulder through a plate glass window. Sin is so insidious because it is not merely a series of wrong or bad actions, but it is a condition in which we find ourselves which disrupts that peace which God intended for His creation. Sin destroyed the peace that existed between God and people. The destruction of that peace between Creator and creatures also destroyed the peace among creatures. And while we may long for that total well being again, all

our efforts to repair that peace by merely getting rid of sinful actions or trying to do better is as futile as trying to repair that plate glass window smashed by a boulder. At the very best such a peace is weak and it is never complete.

It is to this world lacking peace that the Messiah - Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was born. And what did the angels say would be the result of the birth of this child: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." Jesus Christ was born into this world to restore peace. I remember reading a newspaper editorial which said, of those angels' words, "Those immortal words are the expression of an enduring hope for humanity, not the facile assertion of a fact." In other words, according to this newspaper's editorial staff and in the minds of many people, peace is not a reality, but only something we can hope for.

If Jesus Christ came into this world to achieve some sort of military peace wherein there would be no more wars, killing, and bloodshed, then He failed miserably. History shows us that there have been many bloody wars and conflicts since the birth of Christ. Our own country has been in several major wars just in the last century and we are currently involved in a seemingly unending war in the Mideast.

But this is not the kind of peace that Christ came to create. If Christ came merely to still conflict, that would be like a doctor giving aspirin to a cancer patient for the pain he was experiencing. It would only be dealing with a symptom while not affecting the disease itself. Jesus Christ did not come to heal the symptom which is the lack of peace among His creatures. He came to heal the root cause: the lack of peace between God and His creatures - you and me - who are constantly at war with Him because of our sinful nature and our sinful actions.

At this task, Jesus was very successful. In describing the Messiah, Paul says in Colossians, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross." What this holy birth signifies and which would later be accomplished on the cross by Jesus'

death and resurrection is that the war initiated by Adam and Eve by their sin and which had been carried down from generation to generation was now over. God, the mighty Victor does not force peace by demanding the submission from humans who started the war. Instead, He creates peace. And He creates peace, not by killing His enemies - people who had sinned - but by the killing of His own Son who had not sinned for the sake of His enemies. That which accomplishes peace is not our blood shed which would be richly deserved, but the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. As Ephesians 2:14 says, "For he himself is our peace."

Thus, peace between God and the people of this world is not something to be hoped for. It has been accomplished through the perfect offering of the Prince of Peace upon the cross. By putting your faith in Him, the war between you and God is over and the peace becomes yours personally. Scripture says, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ," Having peace with God is all important. Nothing else ultimately matters.

In our text for this day, a man named Simeon recognized this. Like many in Israel, he had been waiting and longing for the appearing of the Messiah. He had been especially blessed because God had revealed to him that he would not die until he had seen the promised Messiah.

One day, the Holy Spirit moved Simeon to come into the temple. Mary and Joseph brought the Baby Jesus into the temple forty days after his birth to follow the requirements of the Jewish Law. These requirements had been in effect since the days when God freed the people of Israel from slavery in Egypt. God had killed the first born son of every family in Egypt, but spared the first born son of every Jewish family. Therefore, from that time on, each first born son belonged to the Lord. The parents were required by Law to pay 5 shekels of silver to "buy back" or redeem their son. So, ironically, on that day, Mary and Joseph were in the temple to give the offering to redeem the Redeemer, their first born son, Jesus.

Immediately, the Holy Spirit revealed to Simeon that this was the One he had been waiting for: "the consolation of Israel", the Savior, the Messiah, the Christ. Notice Simeon's reaction. He says, "Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word." Simeon's life is now complete. He is ready to die. Why? He says, "For my eyes have seen your salvation, that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples."

Simeon had encountered God's salvation in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. It was revealed to Him by the Holy Spirit that this was indeed the Savior of all people - Gentile and Jew. And he believed that. Nothing more was needed. Nothing more was important. Nothing more mattered. All was accomplished. The language that he uses here is the language of a slave being released by His master. Simeon had been released from his sin by his master, the Lord. He is at total peace with God. Death was no longer a fearful barrier to destruction, but a joyful gate to a life of total well-being with God in heaven. He was ready for it.

This is the same attitude that you may have as you approach death. This Savior whom Simeon encountered and who made him at peace with God is also your Savior. As Simeon noted, this child is "a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." You, too, have encountered Him. He came to you in your baptism and washed away your sins by virtue of His death and resurrection. He has put you at peace with God.

Death is never a good thing. God never intended for people to die. Yet it is a reality in our sinful world. Because of the Savior, Jesus Christ, death does not have to be so bad. You are ready for it. Because you trust in Jesus Christ, you have been released from your debt of sin and are at peace with God. You can face death confidently, knowing that you depart this life in God's peace and will pass through death to eternal life and lasting peace in heaven. What comfort that can be for you or a loved one on a death bed.

Now, some of you who are younger may be sitting there and thinking, "Yeah, but so what? I don't plan on dying for many years." Aside from the fact that none of us knows how long we will live -

any of you young people could die in a traffic accident on the way home from church today - the hope of Simeon is also your hope. For I have been holding back one important detail of the story: no one really knows how old Simeon was at the time of his encounter with Christ. We have the image of an aged Simeon, probably from Sunday School materials we have seen while growing up. And those materials were probably drawn that way because it was assumed that any one who was ready to die must have been old. However, the text never says that Simeon was old or that he was young. It is silent in this matter.

Perhaps this is to indicate that the peace which Simeon has with God and his readiness to depart or die in this peace is one for all people, old and young. This sense of peace and readiness to die and meet the Lord are not just for old people who might be a little closer to that happening just because of their age. Because God made peace with you through the shed blood of Jesus Christ and made that peace yours at your baptism, it means that you are continually in a state of peace with Him.

Every time you come to this church, you are reminded and renewed in that peace. Some of you may recognize the words of Simeon as being a part of the liturgy called the Nunc Dimittis (or Song of Simeon). In the communion service it follows immediately after the distribution of the Lord's Supper. Why were these words taken from Scripture and used there? Because at the Lord's Supper, you again encounter the Savior in His body and blood, just as Simeon encountered him. God again grants you forgiveness for your sins and renews your peace with Him. After receiving the Lord's Supper, you can say with Simeon that you, too, have seen God's Salvation, that you have touched it, tasted it, and experienced it. The same could be said after the reading of the Gospel and the preaching of the Word. In these places, Christ comes to you personally, forgiving your sins and reminding you of your true peace with God once again.

It doesn't matter if you are old or young, sick or healthy, on your death bed or just beginning to live. You are always ready to die and meet Him, whether that death occurs expectedly at the end of a

long life or unexpectedly at an early age. You are always ready to depart in peace because you are always at peace with your God.

Therefore, whether these days feel very peaceful or not, whether there is domestic peace in the villages, towns, and cities of our country, whether there is political peace in our world, the most important peace is already yours. You, who were enemies of Almighty God because of your sin, worthy of and deserving His anger and destruction are now at peace with Him. The Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ was born into this world at Christmas to bring this peace and initiated that peace by shedding His blood on the cross. He made it your peace with God at your baptism. He continually invigorates and renews that peace by His Word and by Holy Communion. This peace is not just something for you while on your death bed. It is a grand and glorious possession that is yours all your life. May you always continue to live your lives in that peace, as well as always ready to depart your lives in that same peace. Amen