

First Sunday in Advent  
Sermon Text: Psalm 122  
Date preached: December 1, 2013

Today marks the beginning of a new year in the liturgical calendar. As many of you know, the liturgical calendar is based off of and helps connect us to the life of Jesus Christ.

Advent is the season of preparation. It is a pregnant time of expectation. The Advent season has great value, especially now when it is very easy to become distracted. We invest a lot into the celebration of the Christmas holiday.

While we may see signs that read “Jesus is the reason for the season” or “Keep Christ in Christmas” we are still susceptible to the extra busyness that December brings. Such busyness can serve as a distraction from the main point. Christ is coming.

While it is appropriate to celebrate the first arrival of Jesus into this world, Advent reminds us of a promise made by Christ. That promise is his return. Even the prophet Isaiah notes this as we heard it read earlier in Isaiah 2:4. “He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

The image that we have of the coming Christ is one of peace. The theme of peace is long associated with the coming of Jesus, whom Isaiah will call “The Prince of Peace.”

One of the holiest places in the world is the city of Jerusalem. It was here that King David brought the Ark of the Covenant. It was here that the Jews would come to identify as their home. It was here where God himself would dwell.

Under David’s son, King Solomon the Temple was built. In all its grandeur and beauty, this would be the home of God. This becomes a place where people would feel closest to God. Jerusalem is the place of judgment and mercy. It is the center of worship and justice.

It is with delight that those who hear Psalm 122 go to the house of the Lord. There in the house of the Lord is peace.

As we know from history and from current events, Jerusalem has known a lot of unrest. Both in Biblical times and in the centuries since, Jerusalem has been known as a place of war, oppression, persecution, and a city to control. Indeed, the greatest gift for peace as we know it will be when as stated in Revelation 21,

the new Jerusalem is ushered in like a bride adorned for her husband.

Yet we don't have to look far to see conflicts that are much closer to home than Jerusalem. Divorce, bickering over issues ranging from the triviality of sports to more serious issues of morality, religion and politics, not to mention the lack of personal responsibility and you have bloodshed, violence, persecution, bigotry and a host of other sins right here in America. There are a great many sins of which we are guilty.

Among those who believe in Christ this comes as no surprise. Additionally, Jesus warned the disciples and the crowds that following him will lead to conflict. As followers of Christ we wear a target for those who do not believe or are hostile to faith. Those haunting words from passages such as Matthew 10:34-39 illustrate that such conflict or hostility may even occur within families.

One of our many sins is that we look for peace in the wrong places. We confuse peace with perfect agreement on topics. We confuse peace with the feeling many of us get on a golf course, a tree stand, the beach or looking out the window with a blanket and cup of hot chocolate basking in the beauty of freshly fallen snow.

If we look for peace in this world we will not find it. True peace is a gift that comes in the person of Jesus. It is a gift he gave to the disciples on the night of his arrest. From John 14:27 Jesus says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Peace in our lives is Jesus forgiveness of our sins. Peace is being wrapped in the garment of Jesus’ righteousness. Jesus is the true peace we have with God for every season of our lives, no matter what issues are before us.

As death approaches, there is peace. This life will end. We will die. The peace is that we who believe die in the Lord. The peace is that bound to the death and resurrection of our Lord through baptism, we live in God. We will be raised up to new life.

This is how so many throughout the church endured persecution, open hostility, mockery, and torture because these things are but temporary. The conflicts in our lives do not last. What does endure is the saving Word of God in which we live in peace.

AMEN.