

**Title: Yearning for Peace**

**Series: Advent 2012 – Yearning for God**

**Scriptures: Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 and Isaiah 40:1-11**

**Date Used: Second Sunday of Advent, December 4, 2022**

**Focus: We find ourselves yearning for peace – an inner peace and peace in our relationships. God’s peace comes in the form of our salvation and the extension of this salvation to others.**

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My parents dreaded the day after Thanksgiving. That is when life seemed to become more difficult for them. And because life became more difficult for them, it became more difficult for their three offspring as well.

My father served as the postmaster in my hometown, providing mail delivery and mailboxes for the town’s 800 residents, in addition, to oversee two rural routes. Black Friday was always the day when the Christmas cards and holiday promotions began to pile up. It also marked the day each year when people began calling the post office or stopping by the window to speak to him. And most of the time it was not to say, “You are really to be commended for your 99% accuracy you have when sorting the mail,” or “With all of the extra mail you have to sort this time of year, I can understand why it’s not in my box as soon as it usually is at other times during the year.” What he generally heard was, “Why isn’t my social security check in my mailbox yet? Your office has already been open for ten minutes.”

My mother worked as a credit supervisor at the Sears department store in the Belden Village Mall in Canton. She dealt with so many happy people. “What do you mean you won’t extend my credit limit? Why not?” When she told them “Why not” most of the time they never said, “You’re right, I am a terrible credit risk!”

To top it all off, dad was the choir director at my home church. So, there was always extra music to be prepared during the Advent season. And then, he would also take turns with another choir director leading the community Christmas cantata.

In addition to this, my parents had three children to deal with over Christmas break, which generally started about a week before Christmas; three children who had incredible respect for one another’s boundaries and personal space. For some odd reason, dad did not like to come home at lunch and referee fights.

Tensions ran fairly high in the Lewis household from late November into the new year. Now I know why mom never let us own a gun. It wasn’t out of fear of what we three kids might do to each other. It was out of fear of what she and dad might do to us!

I always thought it was rather ironic that one of the main messages of the season was “Peace on Earth”. Because life in the Lewis household was anything but peaceful during the month of December.

But that Christmas message of peace represents one of our deepest longings, does it not, our desire for peace. We do not simply long for the absence of tension, conflict, or war, but for a peace that reflects the meaning of the Hebrew word “Shalom” – complete physical, emotional and spiritual well-being; a sense of inner-peace, and peace in all of the relationships in our lives.

Both Psalm 85 and the passage from Isaiah 40 we heard this morning come from the time of the Babylonian exile.

In the 85<sup>th</sup> Psalm, the psalmist captures the desire of the people of Judah to have God remove God’s anger from them and to restore their lives. They call upon God and ask the divine to speak a message of peace to God’s people, to forgive their sins, and for God to assure God’s people who now seek to be faithful, and to assure them of God’s peace and salvation.

The 40<sup>th</sup> chapter of the book of the prophet Isaiah captures a message the prophet received through a vision. It is the vision of a conversation the prophet overhears taking place between God and the members of the heavenly court. He overhears a message about restoration.

God’s message to the people of Judah before the exile to Babylon had been “I am not your God and you are not my people.” It is in essence a divorce decree. God basically told them, “You no longer have any claim upon me. I am done with you!” But now the message that Isaiah overhears begins with God saying, “Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.” God is in effect saying that God’s covenant with the people of Judah is being restored. God is now their God, and they are God’s people. As a sign of this restored relationship, the time to end Judah’s exile in Babylon has come.

Isaiah overhears a voice proclaiming that a second exodus is about to occur. God is about to build a road across the wilderness – a road where the valleys will be lifted up, where hills and mountains will be leveled, a straight road that will be easy for people to travel. This road through the wilderness will make it easy for the exiles to travel home to the land of Judah.

As God did centuries before at the time of the Exodus from Egypt, God will once again come with power and might to rescue God’s people. God will bring God’s people out of Babylon. And God will care for them as a shepherd cares for his flock. God will save and restore God’s people.

In both texts, there is a connection built between the ideas of peace and salvation. It is clear, that it is through God's initiative that people find salvation – and in this context salvation refers to God's power to forgive the sins of the nation of Judah and to restore their lives, to bring them out of exile and bring them home to Judah. And this peace comes about as a result of God's life-saving activity. Peace - complete physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being; a sense of inner-peace and peace in all of the relationships in one's life – comes out of God's saving work. Peace is the outcome of God's saving work.

From the psalmist and from the prophet Isaiah we learn that we can have peace because of the initiative God takes to give us peace. It is out of God's desire to restore us, it is because of God's life transforming grace, that we can find peace.

Peace becomes a reality in our lives not because everything is free from turmoil or stress, but because it is something God gives us. It is a state of mind, a state of the soul, that comes about through God's saving grace. It is the inner assurance that all is well in our relationship with God, and this peace in our relationship with God allows us to live at peace with others. And this inner peace, that comes from knowing that our salvation rests in who God is and not in what is going on around us, allows us to maintain an inner calm no matter how hectic life may become.

Mary dreaded the thought of spending another holiday season with her in-laws. Her brother-in-law was always bragging about his successful restaurant. His parents smiled whenever he spoke as though every word from his mouth was of infinite worth. Mary's husband, Bill, on the other hand had worked in a steel mill for several years, until the mills went under. Now, he works as a fix-it man. And while his job was not a huge money maker, it provided enough to meet their basic needs.

Mary disliked the holiday get-togethers with Bill's family because she had the feeling that everyone else in the family looked down on she and her husband. She felt so judged by them. Whenever she was with them, she never said a word for fear of saying something they would make fun of, or out of fear of making someone angry. Every year before Christmas, she had to get herself psyched up to go to her in-laws.

A few years ago, as she turned the calendar from November to December, Mary was overcome with this feeling of dread. She knew that the annual trek to the in-laws was coming. The thought of going just made her sick.

In the weeks leading up to Christmas she shared her feelings with a friend who asked her, "What do you need from those people, Mary?" A little confused by the question Mary replied, "What do you mean?"

Her friend asked, “Do you need something from them? Does their opinion of you really make a difference in who you are?”

Mary had to think about it for a while and replied, “I guess it does.”

Again, her friend kind of pushed her and asked, “Why?” She continued, “They don’t have the ability to give you anything you really need in life. What you emotionally and spiritually need comes from God.” She said, “Mary, live in your relationship with them like the child of God that you are.”

That Christmas was still kind of difficult for Mary. But she kept working at it, learning to stay centered in God’s saving grace, allowing the peace that comes from living in that grace to really find its way into the relationships in her life.

A year ago, when she went to her in-laws for Christmas, she felt at peace within herself. As the day progressed, she found that she was able to take part in conversations and speak kind words to others. Even at the end of the day, she still had this inner peace about her – this feeling of being at one with God and at one with the people in her life.

That inner peace she had longed for had finally come, through God’s saving grace.

In this season we are reminded that peace is available to us as well.