

ADVENT II-THE ANSWER TO HATE IS PEACE!

(12/09/18)

Scripture Lessons: Galatians 5:22-26
1 Corinthians 14:33
John 20:19-22

“God is a God not of disorder but of peace.” (1 Corinthians 14:33)

Today is the second Sunday of Advent. The first Sunday of Advent we lit the candle of hope and reflected on the gift of hope that entered the world in Jesus. As the words of our opening hymn remind us, Jesus was “long-expected.” The world of Jesus’ day had been waiting for his birth. They needed someone to lead them out of bondage to the Romans, just as Moses had led his people out of bondage to the Egyptians. Though they may not have realized it, they also needed someone to lead them out of bondage to sin, out of bondage to themselves, and into the freedom that comes to those who place Jesus in the center of their life.

The candle of hope, which we lit last week, symbolizes one of the powerful themes of Christmas. A Christian lives his/her life with hope. A Christian is able to have hope, even in the darkest times, because he/she is aware of God’s presence in the world. As I mentioned last week, Desmond Tutu, who knows something about the darkness of prejudice and hate, tells us, “Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.” If we have hope, we know that wherever we go in this life and whatever befalls us, we are never beyond the reach of God’s love and care. Christian hope is not founded on wishing, but on an awareness of presence.

This morning we lit the second of our Advent candles, the candle of peace. We proclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the Christ, the Prince of Peace. We pray that a peace that is grounded in justice will come to our world. We pray that peace will come to us as individuals. Individually and collectively, we long for what Jesus called the “peace that passes all understanding.” We long for that deep experience of peace that will heal or remove or counter or serve as an antidote to the hate that is sweeping across our land and across the world, that hate that has the power to poison not only our communities but also our souls.

Several weeks ago, I saw a bumper sticker that has come to serve as the focus of our reflections this Advent season. The bumper sticker called us to:

Fight hate!
Teach tolerance!
Promote diversity!

I like the sentiment of this bumper sticker. We need to teach tolerance to our children. We need to promote diversity in our schools and in our communities. I am just not sure about “fighting” hate. There is something about declaring war on hate that doesn’t sit well with me. It’s sort of like “fighting fire with fire.” I have never been able to understand that approach; I would rather fight fire with water or by cutting off the oxygen or fuel supply that feeds the fire. I would rather have us try to *heal* our hate with hope, peace, joy, love, and light. I think this approach is more in keeping with the true spirit of Christmas.

As we heard in our gospel lesson this morning, immediately following his resurrection, when Jesus meets his disciples in the upper room, he says, “Peace be with you.” His presence calms their fears. He then makes it clear that the peace that he gives to them is meant to provide a base or grounding for their apostleship, for their ministry in the world, for he says,

“Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” (Jn. 20:20-23)

It is clear from this passage that Jesus’ presence, the presence of the Holy Spirit, has the power to bring us that special kind of peace that leads to apostleship, that leads us to interact with the world, to engage the world in a loving, healing, reconciling way.

The peace that is promised to us by Jesus appears to be elusive. I see more fear than peace when I look carefully at what is going on in the world. So often it appears that what is behind the ubiquitous hate that is spreading across our nation and our planet is fear. Fear leads us to do strange things. It leads us into hurtful and destructive thoughts, feelings, words, and actions.

When we see someone who hates, e.g., hates the members of certain groups, we don’t have to look very deeply to find the cause. Nancy Gibbs, the former Editor-in-Chief of *Time* magazine, is one of my favorite columnists. I suppose this can at least partially be attributed to the fact that I agree with everything she says. In the November issue of *Time*, Ms. Gibbs said,

Hate, among all our base instincts, is the most distinctly human. In animals, violence and venom are tools of survival; in humans, of supremacy. Small, scared people hate, self-hating people hate, bullied and betrayed people hate, as though hate will make them large and safe and strong.

I totally agree. In relation to some of the recent hate crimes in this country, she goes on to say,

The twisted writings of this latest class of attackers suggest they felt called to their hatreds as a duty. Robert Bowers allegedly blamed Jews for their outreach to refugees and vowed to repel “invaders” moving north through Central America as he set off to the synagogue: “I can’t sit by and watch my people get slaughtered,” an account matching his name posted, like a martyr dispatched to a massacre. Accused mail bomber Cesar Sayoc stalked George Soros, the billionaire Holocaust survivor and Democratic donor, who conspiracy theorists claimed was funding that invasion—never mind that those armed invaders were nearly a thousand miles away and that the main thing in their arms was their children. “Whites don’t kill whites,” a witness quoted Gregory Bush as saying; he was arrested in the murders of two black shoppers at a Kentucky grocery store, allegedly having failed to get into a predominantly black church nearby.

There are more than enough examples of hate in the daily newspaper, not just in our country but also around the world. For example, the number of hate crimes in Canada last year increased 40%--mostly in Ontario and Quebec and primarily targeting people who are Jewish, Muslim, or black. I never would have thought this of Canada! It just goes to show that the increase is not totally due to the expressed views of our current president!

What I find particularly troubling is the hate that drips from the pens of people whom I know in their social media posts. When I try to understand what this is all about, time and time again I come up against the dynamics that Nancy Gibbs so eloquently articulated: “small, scared people hate; self-hating people hate; bullied and betrayed people hate.” These people not only need to look down on others to bolster their low self-esteem and fragile identity through delusions of racial or gender or religious superiority, they need to persecute those whom they mistakenly believe to be the source of their fear. *The real source of their fear lies within.*

This is why I don’t believe it is helpful to think about fighting hate—or fighting with people who hate. What we really need is something to heal the wounds that lead to hate. This brings us back to the message of Christmas and the gift, the medicine, the antidote of peace.

The apostle Paul tells us that inner peace is a “fruit of the Spirit.” It is a state of being that comes when we feel Jesus’ presence, the presence of the risen Christ within us. In the words of our opening hymn, the indwelling presence of Jesus sets us free. It sets us free from the “fears and sins” that imprison us. One of the “sins” that imprisons us is our hate. If, like the apostles, we can experience inner peace, we may be able to bring peace to the world. At the very least, we can bring peace to our little corner of the world.

The quantum physicists tell us that who we are and how we feel not only influence our perception of the world, they actually affect or shape the world. They impact the world around us more deeply than we know. If we are at peace within ourselves, if we center or ground our life in the presence of Christ, we can have a profound effect on the outer world.

This truth is illustrated in the legend of the Rainmaker of Kiachau. Richard Wilhelm, the noted sinologist, witnessed an example of the kind of synchronicity that can be explained from the perspective of quantum field theory when he was living in China and working on his translation of the *I Ching*.

There was a great drought in the section of China where Wilhelm lived. For months there had not been a drop of rain and the situation became catastrophic. The Catholics made processions, the Protestants offered prayers, and the Chinese burned fire-works to frighten away the demons of the drought. Nothing made the slightest bit of difference. Finally, the Chinese said, "We will fetch the Rainmaker."

From another province a little old man appeared. After a short period of talking with the people of the region where Wilhelm resided, the old man asked for the use of a little hut in the mountains where he secluded himself for three days. On the fourth day the clouds gathered, and then a torrential rain burst forth.

Wilhelm, who was stunned by what seemed to be much more than a coincidence, went to ask the Rainmaker how he did it. In true western fashion, he asked the man to tell him how he made it rain. The little Chinese man said: "I did not make the rain, I am not responsible."

Wilhelm asked him what he had done the past three days. The man replied, "I come from another section of the country, a place where things are in order. Here they are out of order; they are not as they should be by the ordinance of heaven. Therefore, the whole country is not in Tao, is not centered, and I also am not in the natural order of things because I am in a disordered country. I had to meditate for three days until I reestablished my inner order, and then naturally the rain came."

Richard Wilhelm told this story to his friend and colleague C. G. Jung. Jung thought the story was important enough to direct his students to open every meeting of the Wednesday Analytical Psychology Club with its retelling.

The Legend of the Rainmaker suggests that if we are ordered within ourselves, we bring order to the world around us. If we are dis-ordered within ourselves, we bring dis-order to our relationships and our surroundings. If we are centered, we bring a centering presence to the world around us. If we are not centered, if we are scattered or anxious, we bring this energy into whatever situation we encounter. If we experience peace within ourselves, we bring peace to those around us.

The story of the Rainmaker is a teaching about connections. We could not have an effect on nature if we were not deeply connected with nature. But we *are* connected with nature; we are a part of nature. The quantum physicist H. P. Staff has said, “An elementary particle is not an independently existing, unanalyzable entity. It is, in essence, a set of relationships that reach outward to other things.” In other words, even a photon is, in essence, a set of relationships. This reminds us of the teaching of Nagarjuna, the second-century Buddhist philosopher, who said, “Things derive their being and nature by mutual dependence and are nothing in themselves.” We could not have an effect on those around us if we were not deeply connected with them. But we *are* connected with them, connected on a very deep and profound level! We are connected with each other in and through God!

In the words of our opening hymn this morning, Charles Wesley speaks of that inner peace for which we long when he prays,

*“Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free;
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.”*

Wesley suggests that the Jesus for whom we long, the Christ-child whom we invite and welcome into our hearts, has the power to release us from the fears and sins that hold us in bondage. He tells us that we can find our rest, not only in the afterlife but also in this life, when we not only invite him into our lives, but actually enter into him.

Jesus experienced inner peace. He experienced inner peace because he was grounded in his relationship with God. He experienced this inner peace even when times were difficult, even when his life was difficult. When he was betrayed, denied, and deserted by his companions, he was still at peace within himself. This is because he found his peace through his connection with God, a connection that could not be broken, a presence from which he could not be separated.

When people came into contact with Jesus, they felt this great inner peace. By touching the hem of his robe, by listening to his words, by simply being in his presence, they experienced this peace in their own lives. They experienced what it means to be centered in Christ. This inner power, this inner presence led to healing. Demons that had plagued them were banished into the darkness. Their eyes and ears were opened. Their sicknesses were healed. They experienced a force of life that was even strong enough to call them back from the dead.

After his resurrection, Jesus bestowed a gift on his disciples. He gave them the gift of peace. This gift led to transformed lives; the disciples became apostles. Not only the disciples, but also the other people whose lives were transformed by Jesus experienced “the peace that passes all understanding.” We, too, can experience this inner peace. This is because we, like the disciples, are connected with Jesus. We are connected with Jesus when, in the words of our hymn, he rules within our hearts.

This is why, in this church, we believe in the power of intercessory prayer. Every week for many of us, every day for some of us, we pray for those whom we know to be in great need. We know that our prayer makes a difference. Our prayer can activate a healing power within the person for whom we pray. It may assist a physical healing; it may bring courage to face what needs to be faced. If in some small way our prayer helps the person to live and love with a very difficult situation, our prayer will have accomplished a lot.

The people of Jesus’ day longed for peace. They longed to be delivered from that which bound them, that which kept them from being free. This is true of our day as well. We long to be delivered from the darkness that surrounds us, the darkness that covers the nations. We long to be delivered from our anxieties, our fears, our addictions. We long to be delivered from our expectations, those expectations framed as hopes that keep us from accepting, affirming, and finding joy in our present life. We long to be delivered from our hatred and the hatred we experience in the world.

Every Christmas season we sing the hymn that Philip Brooks wrote in 1868: “O Little Town of Bethlehem.” This hymn addresses our “hopes and fears.” It holds forth the hope of “peace to men on earth.” It promises this if we can become meek enough to receive Jesus, to let him into our hearts. It promises us inner peace, the peace that passes all understanding, if we can allow our Lord to “be born in us today.”

In this Advent season, let us return to Jesus. Let us open ourselves to his presence both within and among us. If we make room for him in our heart, if we give birth to him in our lives, he will bring us inner peace. Then we can bring peace to those around us and even, in ways far beyond what we can grasp, to a world that desperately needs it.

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