

“Come, O Prince of Peace”

Peace be with you. If you responded, “and also with you,” I thank you. Peace is the theme for our second candle and something I’d like to reflect on today with you. Today, so many of us search for peace. We sing “Let There Be Peace on Earth”; in the ‘70s some of you might have sung, “Peace is Flowing Like a River.” The Eagles sang “Peaceful Easy Feeling” in the early ‘70s as well. We also heard from the band, “Boston” to have some “Peace of Mind.” What other songs about peace or have “peace” in the title do we know?

Early on in my teaching career, I worked with second graders in church school classes. Second graders are still fun as they will sing and do hand motions with you, especially around Christmas time. In case you were wondering, you have a 50/50 chance of getting them to do the same hand motions by the end of second grade. One of the songs I taught the children was “Come, Lord Jesus” with hand motions. It was a simple song, but it incorporated some of the title we give to the Savior, especially when we would sing, “Come, O Prince of Peace, come and be born in our hearts.”

The prophecies of the coming of the Savior all happened when the Hebrew people were not living in peace. Not only were they people who lived in hope, but they were people who strived for peace. Last week, we heard from Jeremiah who wrote during the Babylonian exile. This week, we hear from Malachi, with his book at the end of the Old Testament.

Malachi's unique position as the final book of the Old Testament offers a glimpse into the hearts of Israelite men and women, members of a nation that had been specially chosen by God, descendants of Abraham, and inheritors of the rich tradition of the Jewish people. Their history told of glories like the exodus from Egypt and the faithfulness of God to King David. But they had also experienced the judgment of wandering in the desert and the shame of exile from the Promised Land.

At the time of Malachi, well over a thousand years after Abraham's era, the Israelites had the advantage and weight of history on their side; they could see the shining rewards of faithfulness and the punishments associated with judgment, even to the point of being uprooted from their land. But even then, with all that perspective, the

book of Malachi teaches us that they still strayed from the Lord's path. They needed God's intervention as much as ever, so this book, as a final statement of judgment in the Old Testament, anticipates God's saving work through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

Much like Malachi, John the Baptist tells us to come back, repent, make straight the paths, etc. echoing the words of the prophet Isaiah. This may be a funny thing for us, but the people who heard "make straight the paths" were expecting someone very important. In those times, whenever it was announced that someone important, like royalty, would pass through their area, the people would gather to repair the paths or roads that had been established. They'd fill in holes and maybe even fix the edging, much like what some people do to their lawns today. Our Gospel reading today introduces Luke's readers to John the Baptist, someone many of them may have heard about around the time of Jesus. Luke makes the connection of John and Jesus earlier on in the Gospel and we will hear that story on December 22.

You may wonder what Malachi and John the Baptist have to do with peace and Christ as the Prince of Peace. Both the prophet and the

Baptist remind us to get ready, to turn our lives around, again to make straight the paths, repair what needs to be done, so that we can hear the Gospel message and receive Christ in our hearts. What they may be trying to tell us is that unless we do these things and receive the Savior, we don't stand a chance of finding true peace.

We want that peace. We pray for peace. We pray for peace in our world and in our country. Sometimes it feels as if things could pop at any minute. We also want an inner peace and sometimes it is that peace that is beyond all understanding. When and if it happens, peace will take us a while to become adjusted. It is almost like when we lose a spouse, friend, child, etc., and through our grief, we also have to get used to a new sense of peace.

Our sense of inner peace is not dependent on things around us. Peace for us comes from knowing God's love for us, that unconditional love that we have talked about in the past. Inner peace allows our calms and worries to lessen and, often times, cease. I believe that we are called to actively pursue peace in our own lives and the community. However, we can't do for others until we do for ourselves.

Our Advent time is a journey for ourselves in which we reflect on hope and peace as represented in the Advent candles. Later, we will have to opportunity to reflect more on joy and love. This week, I encourage all of us to consider how can find that inner peace that the world does not give but which comes from Christ. This may sound almost daunting at first but consider this: like the prophets, we do what we can. And maybe, then, we remain present, believing in an embodied love that will not be denied and a grace that cannot be earned.

The preparation of Advent, for this week, is to kindle the flame of peace:

- Peace in our own lives.
- Peace in our relationships with other people and with God.
- Peace in communities and for creation.

Much like those second graders, we can be also sing our song with motions: Come, O Prince of Peace! Come, O Prince of Peace, come and be born in hearts.