

Looking for Peace

Last week, we lit the first candle on the Advent wreath and discussed how it represents “hope.” This week, we lit the second candle, and we prayed the Prayer of Francis of Assisi as our prayer for peace. You’d think we would look for and pray for these things year-round, wouldn’t you? I believe in many ways we usually do look for them, but our awareness is heightened in the season of Advent.

Speaking of Advent, I read an article this week by my friend, Rev. Dr. Ruth Shaver, where she quotes one of her Theology professors who claimed, “Advent is weird.” She wrote that you must circle around the readings to get to the heart of the matter so that we could understand the promise of the coming of the Savior. Her professor reminded her that you had to look at all the readings in one week for Advent for things to even begin to make sense.

Isaiah, in flowery language, reminds us that the Savior is indeed coming. The Savior will have the Spirit of wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and a healthy respect or awe of the Lord. For those of you who were not with us last week, I will review that the

book of the prophet Isaiah can be divided into three parts. Today, we read from the first part, which was written before the Babylonian exile. Basically, it reminds us to live the life that we have been given by God so that we can enjoy it. There are warnings throughout, but not in this reading.

This reading provides us with the blessings that will come from the Messiah and how the poor will be uplifted, bringing peace to the land. Many of the original hearers of Isaiah were not wealthy; they needed to know that God heard their pleas and would send someone who would come to their aid. Isn't it wild that this prophet could foretell what the message of Jesus would contain? It contains the promise that God would indeed send a Savior.

It is the same Savior that John the Baptist preaches about in today's reading from Matthew. The Baptist sums up the theme of Matthew's Gospel in that Jesus is indeed the fulfillment of the prophecies from the "Old" Testament. The original audience for Matthew's gospel was Palestinian Christian Jews, people who were Jewish but also followers of "The Way" as they called early Christianity.

These people were still under Roman rule and suffered atrocities at the hands of the Romans and may have even been “turned in” by their own. These early Christians truly needed the peace of the promised Messiah. To get there, however, meant that some work needed to happen.

John reminds the people to repent and make his paths straight. I believe we talked about this last year in Advent, but it bears repeating. The original audience would be aware of what it meant to make straight the paths because they were admonished to do this whenever a visiting dignitary from Rome was expected. They would work to fix the roads upon which the dignitary would travel to not only make a smooth passage, but to not have mud splash up on them, their chariot/carriage, or the horses that pulled them. This admonishment would signify that something very important was about to happen. John does not spare the Pharisees and Sadducees, the religious leaders of the time, even in front of the others.

For us to enjoy the “peaceable” reign of God, we, too, are called to make straight the paths of our own lives and “bear fruit worthy of repentance.” If we are going to enjoy this peace, we must show that we

are truly ready for Christ to be re-birthed in our minds, hearts, and souls. In the midst of the hustle and bustle of the season, we have to purposefully make time to do this, even if it does seem different or weird to us.

Rev. Shaver concludes, “The weirdness of Advent is a circle because of God’s promises.” The same readings come out to us, time and time again. We hear the “calling out those who abuse power like John, working for the newness of the Peaceable Realm by raising up leaders with the intentions of David, and then calling out those flawed leaders who, like David, start to abuse their power, rinse and repeat. We do this every year because we are still waiting for this circle to be broken for once and for all. God promised. And God never breaks a promise.”

It is here that we find our peace, in the knowledge that God never breaks a promise. Of this we can rest assured. However, Shaver ended with “It just might take a while to come to fruition.” We can be part of that hope. God’s promise involves our living in peace. We can be part

of that peace. It is certainly within our grasp. Let us continue to do our part to bring hope and peace to the world in which we live.