

Christ Presbyterian Church
Edina, Minnesota
December 16 &17, 2017
John Crosby
The Promise: A Promise to Bring Peace | Isaiah 12

We are in this Advent season as we prepare for Christmas, listening to a voice that spoke 600 years before the birth of Jesus. The prophet Isaiah has been speaking to us as he spoke to his compatriots. It would be as if somebody born in the time of Shakespeare started to walk the streets and talk to us. How would it work? Would they even be in the same world as we're in? Today, we want to talk about peace—something Isaiah talked about a lot—but one of the things that Isaiah had to contend with were false prophets. They were like fortune tellers; they would always be glad to take your money to tell you what was going to happen. But even if you're a prophet to the king, you would be asked things like: Will we win this war? Is my illness going to get better? Does she really love me? Will we have peace? And these false prophets, these fortune tellers, would say *absolutely, of course, you're going to live, of course, you're going to win, you are the best, wisest, most everything king*. And while the king or queen would love to hear that, they didn't know whether they could trust it. In contrast to that were the real prophets who never seemed to say anything nice about anybody, anytime. One of them was Jeremiah who said, "You know how you can tell a false prophet? This is how you can tell a false prophet. They'll say peace, peace, but there is no peace."

And that's what happens today. We talk about Christmas as a season of peace, but our hearts and minds feel under assault. Peace comes and goes. I might have a little peaceful feeling right now, but by the time I have to fight traffic out on Highway 100, my heart and mind is often robbed of peace. Peace is depicted in the Bible in this beautiful, giant tree reaching to the sky with roots that go deep, and my peace is more like the picture of this tree (shows picture) which has been battered by the storm and is in place, but not alive. Guilt, worry, threats, confusion, uncertainty...they all threaten not just my peace, but our peace. Take just a minute. What stops you or me from being described as a peace-filled person? I think if we're honest, we'd say part of it is that we have an inability to reconcile with that person. It's a broken reel . . . *whenever I think of them, I get angry. How can I be peaceful?* For others of us, maybe a little more honest, we'd say, *I can't have peace as long as there's such a lack of equity. That doesn't mean equality, doesn't mean we have to have the same thing, but it means there needs to be justice. There shouldn't be one set of rules for them and another for us. It makes me angry.* Some of you might say that you lack peace because you're a little greedy. You don't look greedy, but it bugs you when he buys so many gifts for those kids. Will we have enough? You compare whether we spent more on this one or that one. The greed comes out in always wanting a little more or being afraid of giving. That stops you from being filled with peace. You're filled with worry.

In a world filled with discrimination where we judge one another on our political views, or on our gender, our age, our religion...peace is hard to find. If you're peaceful 24/7,

every day, every week, I want whatever drugs you use. None of us are. And at the root of that, I think fear is what often cheats us of peace. We fear the other, the one who is different from us. We fear a loss of what we have. Whatever small privilege we might have, we fear that the future will bring change and that change is never good for us. We fear being thrown out of the circle of people who like us. What might we do that will lose us those friendships? I fear being taken advantage of and that robs me of peace. And if I were alone with one of you and we trusted each other, I might say that at the root of my loss of peace is pride. *It's not working out the way I wanted. I'm not getting my way. If she gets her way, then I'm not getting my way.* At the root of a loss of peace is fear and pride, and it will never be better by hearing a cute song on the radio and thinking that will last all day.

The prophet Isaiah is a real prophet who wants to tell you this advent season how peace comes to you. In chapter 11 he said, referring to that broken ugly tree there, "A shoot is going to spring out of the tree, and in the future, the spirit of the Lord will rest upon it." And then he describes what peace will look like without even using the word. This is what he says peace will feel like in that far-off-day. He says,

- ⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling together;
and a little child will lead them.
- ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.
- ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.
- ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea. [Isaiah 11:6-9]

In that day . . .remember last week we said *in that day* refers to the prophet looking far into the future.

- ¹⁰ In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. [Isaiah 11:10]

That's what a peace-filled world would look like. And Isaiah talks about that because he already describes the triggering event that will bring peace. He talks about one who is to come in chapter nine. He says, "Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end." In other words, wherever his government is, there is peace, and wherever his government ain't...finish the sentence.

But you and I, we haven't seen that day when peace comes in and fills the Earth like the waters cover the sea. Now we live, even in the shelter of Christmas, we live where we

feel like the Grinch has stolen Christmas again. Somehow the Grinch has stolen the peace of Christmas and replaced it with an ever-growing mound of presents and credit card bills, and peace seems foreign to us.

I was talking with one of my friends before the service and we almost couldn't help but get sucked into talking about our world and what's going on. I'm a policy junkie. I hate turning on the news now. What would it be like to turn on the news in a world where peace ruled? What would Fox, CNN, MSNBC, or ABC lead with? What if all of a sudden they said today was international trash day; millions of volunteers went out to pick up trash in our world and didn't find any?

What if every Friday they talked about the cure of the week and showed people living to 120 and babies who didn't die? What if the news reported that there will be a parade tomorrow for old people—that we will celebrate them and make them feel special instead of pushing them aside? What if the back page of the newspaper said, "Once again, no child was afraid of being picked on at school; they ran to their classrooms with joy." What kind of a world would that be? That would be as if that dead stump had a little branch grow out of it and all of a sudden there exploded a Christmas tree, and the Christmas tree brought light to the world. That's what Isaiah is talking about, but it's important to realize that while Christmas is a story of peace, the peace comes second. The reason we know that is because right in the heart of the Christmas story, in Luke chapter two, the angels come to the shepherds, and they sing, "Glory to God in heaven on high, and on earth, peace to those on whom his favor rests." So first and foremost, Christmas, when this child is born to bring glory to God, and then second, important but second, after glory is given to God, then peace spreads everywhere that this child is received. Peace spreads everywhere the child is glorified, and peace spreads only where the child is glorified and honored. These are the great purposes of Christmas—that people would see God and give God glory and praise, and as that glory went to God, then peace would come down to a broken earth.

When I think about glorifying God, part of me goes back to being a stupid little Irish Roman Catholic boy who went to mass four days a week. I hated every second of it because I was forced to go to mass. When I think Christmas is the time where we give glory to God, I think *oh no I have to go to church again*. I don't think that's what it's about. I think what happened out on that hillside was not somebody saying, "Let's go to synagogue." It was somebody saying, "Do you hear what I hear? Do you hear that?" Giving glory to God started with hearing the music, hearing the music of heaven and saying, "I want to hear more of that."

There was another prophet called Zephaniah and he talked about worship in a completely different way. Zephaniah says, "God will dance over you. God will dance over you with songs of joy." That's what giving glory to God is like. Having God see you and instead of judging you, loving you and calling you by name, delighting in you and saying, "Come dance with me. I want to teach at this new song." To glorify God is to join in the dance, to come into the presence of God and find peace, and sense His joy and His love. It's the party of heaven and you are invited. So, that's why the angels sing at

Christmas, because Christmas is one of those seasons where, even though the sounds of the earth get louder and louder, it's one of those seasons where the music of heaven swells a little and reaches down toward earth, and it stills our pride and our fear for just a second. And for anybody who cocks their ears and listens, they start to say, "I sense God is close."

John Piper is one of our local theologians, and John described Christmas this way. He says, "There is no better way to sum up what God was about when He created the world, or when He came to reclaim the world in Jesus Christ. His glory, our peace, His greatness, our joy, His beauty. When we behold His beauty, our pleasure comes to life." God's purpose is to give you peace. You do not get peace by seeking peace. You get peace by seeking the God of glory.

Five times in the New Testament, God is described as the God of peace. Jesus says, "My peace I give you." The Apostle Paul says, "Jesus Himself is our peace." That means that the peace of Christmas, the peace of God, the peace of Christ, can never be separated from Christ Himself. If you want peace to rule in your hearts, and not be here and gone, then Christ has to rule in your life. God's purpose cannot be to give you peace separate from Himself. It's like giving you a drink but holding back the water.

God's purpose is to give you peace by letting His glory shine upon you. The key to peace for me this Christmas is keeping together what the angels keep together. They call out on the hills, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth to those who believe and trust." Peace to those who believe and trust, because our hearts, our minds, our lives are under assault every day. Guilt, and worry, and threat, and confusion, and uncertainty... they all threaten the peace. They'll steal away peace. You feel peace-filled here and now when you hear this music, but the apostle Paul says that goes away. He says, "Don't be anxious about anything." Anxiety actually is the opposite of peace, right? "Don't be anxious about anything, but let God know all your fears in prayer. Let God know all your fears in prayer and the peace of God, the peace that passes all understanding will guard your heart."

The peace of God will guard your Heart in Christ Jesus. God wants to guard your heart this Advent. He wants to give you a peace that will last because only when your heart is guarded with peace can that peace possibly lead to peace with other people. Fearful, prideful, angry people do not spread peace. We spread what comes from the inside, and if our hearts have been guarded and our minds have been filled with peace, only then is it possible to live like the apostle Paul says: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." That's going to require humility. Christians are great for saying, "We'll have peace if you agree with me." That's not the contract. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God." When you and I give glory to God and peace descends to earth, we start to hear the voices of the angels again.

I'm going to ask Billy and Simple Gifts to come up and let us practice hearing that music

again, hearing the music of heaven, and on those days when you have no peace and you can't sing along, just hum the tune.

Lord Jesus, I thank you that You did not come so that I would have more presents under the tree. You didn't even come so that I would feel good when I see my children's faces. You came so that I would see that there is a God, and that when You draw close, when I turn to You, all my fears, and all my pride and all of my sins are washed away by Your peace.

The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.