

“God’s way”

By Rev. Frances Savill

December 8, 2024 | Second Advent

Readings:

Luke 1:57-79

Because we live in a world that is longing for peace, Prince of Peace is a wonderful name.

The world is not just longing for peace but is also worrying about whether it ever will or can achieve real peace.

Todd Wilson in his sermon on Jesus the Prince of Peace says: *I'm reminded again this year of how much presidential candidates, describe themselves and what they'll do for the country as though they were the child being described in Isaiah's prophecy.*

It's a remarkable thing when someone running for President of the United States can, without blushing, promise that if elected, he or she will "keep America safe," "make America great again," "restore our standing as leader of the free world," "fix the mess in the Middle East," or "usher in a new American century."

The candidates might as well be saying to the American people, "Hey, vote for me, I'm the person in Isaiah's prophecy, that's me! I'm the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and Prince of Peace! Put the government on my shoulders, and see what happens. Of the increase of my government and of peace there will be no end!"

His point is: "In presidential politics, the rhetoric gets messianic; the language gets almost eerily prophetic as candidates offer hope for the future that only God could ever deliver. That is perhaps why presidential races in America are such a toxic mix of intense hope followed by anger and resentment as we come to realize that another would-be Messiah promises more than he can deliver."

There is, though, one who never overpromises or under-delivers but always makes good on precisely what he says and what he promises.

Jesus is the child described in the passage, the one Isaiah prophesied about many centuries ago. Jesus is the Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, and Everlasting Father, and the Prince of Peace.

He is the one who actually brings peace into the world and into our lives—God's "shalom."

What a wonderful word shalom is; it has all the connotations of peace in English but includes so much more.

It means a holistic sense of fulfillment, well-being, and flourishing.

That kind of comprehensive shalom-peace is what the Old Testament prophets, like Isaiah, envisioned for the future.

They dreamed of a new age in which human crookedness would be straitened out, rough places made plain.

The foolish would be made wise, and the wise, humble.

They dreamed of a time when the deserts would flower, the mountains would run with wine, weeping would cease, and people could go to sleep without weapons on their laps.

People would work in peace and work to bless everyone.

Lambs could lie down with lions.

“All nature would be fruitful, benign, and filled with wonder upon wonder; all humans would be knit together in brotherhood and sisterhood; and all nature and all humans would look to God, walk with God, lean toward God, and delight in God.”

Shouts of joy and recognition would well up from valleys and seas, from woman in streets and from men on ships (Plantinga, *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*, pgs. 9-10).

"The webbing together, of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom."

This is the peace we long for, this is the peace that is promised when Jesus sets all things right.

We do not live in that time yet, but we work for peace, we do the things that make for wholeness and healing in our lives, and the lives of the people and creation around us.

In this time, the peace we enjoy through Christ is not necessarily circumstantial; that is, it's not the case that the Prince of Peace will fix everything in your life or mine.

There will be continued difficulties and hardships we have to face, conflict we have to endure, and broken relationships we seek to reconcile.

The Prince of Peace doesn't promise perfection in this life. What he does promise is deep personal and spiritual peace even in this life.

Jesus talked about that kind of peace with his disciples; he promised them just that kind of peace even in a world he knew would be hostile to them.

In Jesus' last teaching before he was betrayed and crucified, he leveled with his disciples.

He told them plainly that the world wouldn't take kindly to followers of another King whose reign disrupted the powers and patterns of this world.

"In the world you will have tribulation," he said to them candidly (John 16:33).

He also told them, "I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace" (v. 33).

Earlier, he told his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" (John 14:27).

When Jesus appeared to his disciples after the resurrection, do you remember his first words to them? "Peace be with you" (John 20:19).

That is what the Prince of Peace offers his followers, and it isn't just pie-in-the-sky peace but is the kind of peace that steadies in storms.

This is the kind of peace that sustains us, the kind of peace we long to have when the world teeters out of control, or when circumstances in our lives take a turn for the worse.

This is the kind of peace that Christians have always known in hard times, the kind of peace we have celebrated in our lives, and have sung about in songs.

Those of us who have been reconciled to God now enjoy peace with God.

Because of this peace with God, we can enjoy peace with one another, with those who are united to Christ as members of his body, his church.

The vertical peace we have with God translates into a horizontal peace we can enjoy with one another.

Paul celebrates this horizontal peace in Ephesians 2:13-16

But now, in Messiah Jesus, you have been brought near in the Messiah's blood—yes, you, who used

to be a long way away! ¹⁴He is our peace, you see. He has made the two (Jews and Gentiles) to be one. He has pulled down the barrier, the dividing wall, that turns us into enemies of each other. He has done this in his flesh, ¹⁵by abolishing the law with its commands and instructions.

The point of doing all this was to create, in him, one new human being out of the two, so making peace. ¹⁶God was reconciling both of us to himself in a single body, through the cross,

Christians are then to embody this peace in our relationships with one another in the body of Christ.

The church is to be a place of peace, not a place of conflict, petty politics, broken relationships, or other kinds of rivalries or infighting.

Instead, as Paul goes on to say in Ephesians chapter four, we're "*to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*" (v. 1-3).

As we embody peace in our relationships, we proclaim peace to the world.

You and I are called to be partners with God in being peace-makers, healers, who help bring wholeness to the people and world around us.

It begins with the peace of Jesus, the Messiah, The Prince of Peace, ruling in our hearts, and learning to walk in His ways.

Let us pray: Jesus you are the Prince of Peace, there is no other who can bring peace-shalom wholeness to our lives and to the world. We seek your peace, we see you to be our peace. We long for the day when your peace-shalom will be established over all. Amen.