December 4, 2022 ~ 2nd Sunday of Advent ~ Live in Harmony

I speak to you in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

We lit the candle of peace this morning, the 2nd candle in our Advent circle. I encourage you to do the same. Light the first candle, the candle of hope, and then light the 2nd candle, the candle of peace.

The phrase Peace and Quiet speaks to all of us. When we desire peace, we often go to peaceful places, places of stillness and beauty. I like to take Wally for a late afternoon walk at the off-leash dog park at Centennial Park. On Friday evening, I felt the peace of the bubbling river beside my walking trail. The warm evening, the stillness until dogs ran up to Wally, the sound of the river were balms of peace to my soul.

We live in a world where we are very aware of our external environment and we often go for peaceful settings when we wish to be filled with peace. A gentle bubbling brook, a summer campfire, an evening sunset, a small child sleeping in our arms, a quiet evening all fill us with peace.

The prophet Isaiah speaks of a world of peace where traditional enemies live in harmony with one another. The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid (all from Isaiah 11) paint a picture of a world of peace, a world where in the words of the apostle Paul from his letter to Christians in Rome, we live in harmony with one another (Romans 15:5).

Now, it is easy to feel peace when we see the world of the Creator and all its beauty in the magnificence of a summer sunset, or gently falling snow. On Friday, Jouni and I went to purchase our Christmas tree from Kiwanis and as we drove up in the early evening, the snow was gently falling upon the trees leaning up against wooden support. I looked up at the sky and falling flakes were quiet and gentle. There was a lovely feeling of peace.

The challenge, of course, is how do we receive inner peace especially when the world is flowing around us with conflict and storms and real struggles. How do we stand up to anxiety and keep ourselves centred in God’s peace? That is the challenge and the real picture of peace, isn’t it?

If I were to describe the peace of God, it would be of a child sitting calmly under a large oak tree, while a storm raged around them. A storm of power and strength. If I were to hang a painting in my home of God’s peace, it would be of a mother bird keeping her babies safe under the shelter of her wings while a wild storm raged around her. That is what peace is, the peace of God that passes all our understanding. It is easy to experience peace and reflect what we are experiencing in nature when our physical environment is calm, soothing, and beautiful. The challenge is to have inner peace when we are drowning. The challenge is to have inner peace when no one agrees with us or when people are yelling at us or when we lose our jobs. It is this peace that comes from the Holy Spirit, that is a blessing from God.

What is this peace that the Prince of Peace gives us? God’s peace doe not deny the realities of life. God’s peace does not sugar coat real challenges and real issues. God’s peace passes all our understanding and Jesus says it best:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. John 14:27

The current Pope Francis reminds of the importance of holding onto God’s peace and here is what he has said;

"'We must enter the Kingdom of God through many tribulations'. The grace of peace – of not losing that inner peace. Regarding this a saint said, 'The life of the Christian is a journey between the persecutions of the world and the consolations of God' (St. Augustine from the 4th century). May the Lord make us understand well what this peace is which He gives us with the Holy Spirit. "

My hope for little Marguerite who is being baptized this morning is that she will truly experience the peace of God which passes all our understanding and live in harmony with her family, with her school friends, with her church family, and with her community.

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.

Recently, I had been struggling with a situation outside of my family and the church in which people are not living in harmony. Whenever I reflected upon this particular situation, I became upset and distraught. I started to pray for peace, God’s peace. And I must tell you that I have received this most precious gift of peace. The situation no longer upsets me. I can be an agent of peace. I can think about the people involved and I have this bubble of peace filling me and I know that it comes from God and not from me. It is a gift through the Holy Spirit.

I went to visit a parish couple last week. And as an aside, please let me know if you would desire a pastoral visit for prayer or communion. The husband who is in his late 70’s is very sick and spends most of his time in bed. His loyal wife also has health challenges. However, their faith and their love of God and their prayer life means that they have been blessed with peace. Their bedroom, where I was privileged to give them communion was filled with the peace of the Prince of Peace. This couple exudes the peace that passes all our understanding. I anointed them and prayed with them and gave them communion and I experienced the peace of God right there in that bedroom with a hospital bed and signs of severe illness and the reality that death is approaching.

I pray the Old Testament Blessing of Aaron at the end of every home or hospital communion service and it ends with this promise:

May the Lord lift up his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

Peace is so essential to our well-being as disciples of Jesus that we share the peace during the service. Be very intentional this morning as you say a prayer for every person you exchange peace with, for every person you say “Peace be with you.” My prayer for you this week is that *the peace of Christ will rule in your hearts* (from Colossians 3:15)

I ended my sermon on hope from the first Sunday in Advent with a verse from Paul’s Letter to Christians in Rome and I will end again with the same verse and this time, the 2nd Sunday of Advent, our focus is on peace.

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and* ***peace*** *in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*. Amen.

(Romans 15:13)