

Date: November 30, 2025 (Advent 1, Year A)

1. Texts: Isaiah 2:1-5; Ps. 122; Romans 13:11-14; Matthew 24:36-44.
2. Subject: peace.
3. Topic: meaningful promise of peace.
4. Aim: educate and model the struggle with Scripture.
5. Proposition: "All of Scripture is authoritative, so we have to figure out God's promises of peace."

## PROMISES OF PEACE?

All of Scripture is authoritative. But all of Scripture requires interpretation. After all, no one ever took this command of Jesus literally:

"If your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life maimed or lame than to have two hands or two feet and to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out and throw it away; it is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into the hell of fire.<sup>1</sup>

Or this one:

Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.<sup>2</sup>

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This includes the passage from the prophet Isaiah, which we read this morning:

Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.<sup>3</sup>

This is only one verse out of a longer promise of a meaningful peace, delivered to a people who were soon going to be conquered and exiled. The Babylonians were soon to bring war to the Israelites and ultimately destroy their temple and capital city. Isaiah promised that peace will come as God's faithful people return to his true worship and to true knowledge of God.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 18:18-19.

<sup>2</sup> Luke 14:26.

<sup>3</sup> Isaiah 2:4.

The prophecy did come true, sort of. After the Babylonians conquered Israel, they were conquered in turn by Persian. King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return to Israel, rebuild their temple and administer the Persian province in his name. So, while the promised peace was delayed, they stayed at peace for a couple hundred years.

Until Alexander the Great conquered everything around the Mediterranean and all the way to India. After him the Romans came to Palestine. Then the Muslims. Then several colonizing powers. Then... So, sure, Isaiah promised peace, but it is clear that such peace is not to be understood as permanent or even as possible in any one generation.

The promised peace—which might be of great support to the Ukrainians, the Sudanese and the people of Mali—requires interpretation. Scripture is authoritative, but we need to interpret it.

First of all, the Bible speaks of two kinds of peace. One is the absence of violent conflict. The other is an inner assurance of calm and steadfastness in the midst of turmoil. Isaiah was writing about peace in the face of war.

Peace will come, he wrote, when all people return to the true worship and the truth of God. Well, we cannot hope to convert all the world to Christianity, let alone to Anglican Christianity. We cannot hope to find peace in religious uniformity. Even Christian empires have initiated wars.

Isaiah was writing about peace as the absence of war. But even in his own day, the fulfillment of the prophecy had to wait for somewhere between 50 and 70 years. And the peace that the Jews eventually found was not permanent. The peace of any Christian empire has not proven permanent. Within a generation after WWI, the world returned to war. Within half a generation after WWII, the Korean conflict brought war to the front of the world's attention. Then came the Israeli wars of independence, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Rwanda... There seems to be no hope of a meaningful and lasting peace in the world, no matter how much people believe and pray.

The reality of the world and human existence forces us to turn to peace as that inner assurance of calm and steadfastness in the midst of turmoil. You know:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.<sup>4</sup>

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.<sup>5</sup>

The reality of human existence may prevent a meaningful and lasting absence of war, but we can find an interior peace in God through Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Such peace is not the absence of conflict, just as peace cannot be the permanent absence of war. It is a quality of the soul, based on the knowledge and experience of Christ himself. By the night of the Last Supper, Jesus knew what was going to happen to him. By the time they gathered in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus begged God to take away his death. But by the time the spikes were driven through his palms, that divine peace which surpasses the human ability to comprehend had filled his experience.

Such peace springs from trust. The faithful person trusts God to be God. The disciple knows through faith that God will be present and be with him even in the midst of pain and fear. Peace does not arise from some male-dominated understanding of courage or bravery. Peace comes from relying on God to be God in and through your life. Peace comes from trusting God and taking him at his word, when he promises to share in your life.

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you.

And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age."<sup>6</sup>

So, even at the end of life, the Christ has promised to be with us in all our circumstances, even the most fearful ones. Peace comes from trusting God, from

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<sup>4</sup> John 14:27.

<sup>5</sup> Philippians 4:7.

<sup>6</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.

relying on him and from believing that his love fills and motivates you. Peace is the result of trust and faith in God.

This is not easy. God designed us to have fear. It is for our protection. We survive as individuals and as a species because we can fear. But we choose to trust God. That is, we take actions based on the reality that God is with us whatever is happening to us. This choice is not always easy. Maybe it is never easy. We push ourselves to trust that God is with us always and in all ways.

So, all of Scripture is authoritative, but all of Scripture requires interpretation. There is no such thing as “blind faith”. We read all of Scripture while saying to ourselves, “This must have something meaningful to say to me now.” We then have to do our best to figure out what 2500 year-old words have to say to us now.

Today, we’ve discovered that peace arises from trust in God and that such trust is a choice that we have to make day by day. We’ve learned that the promises of God often have to push up against the freewill of humankind. But we choose to believe that God is working through us and for us throughout our lives and despite the choices of others. This is what Scripture is saying to us this morning.

And thanks be to God. AMEN.