

The Way of Peace
First in Advent Series
The Son of man is coming at a time you don't expect
Matt. 24:44
December 2, 2018
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There are two kinds of stories people tell: the story everyone remembers and the story everyone forgets to remember. It seems so often in today's culture we forget the story we need to remember the most. A story that begins this first weekend of Advent.

We are on our way. Ready or not and whether we feel prepared or not, we are on our way to Christmas. How is it the first weekend of December already?

We all know what that means right - we are on the way to long lines at the mall, shoppers on the lookout for bargain at walmart, Barnes and Noble, and kohls. On the way to bringing out the decorations, dusting off the nativity, and seeing which strand of lights in the long string of lights needs replaced. On the way to finding the perfect gift, staying within budget, and dealing with impatient crowds.

But what if it didn't have to be that way. What if we could find a way to a better way? What if we could cultivate a way within ourselves that

leads us to peace, justice, fearlessness and faithfulness. What if those could be our gifts this year?

Sure there would still be lines, decorations, tangled strands of lights, price tags, letters to Santa, pine needles on the floor, and grumpy or impatient crowds, but all of that would be on the way to something bigger, something greater, something far more meaningful / longlasting.

Would you join us on such a path?

This Advent we hope to prepare not only for the event of Christmas, through all the cultural trappings and traditions, but also to prepare ourselves at a deeper level to know not just why we do all the crazy stuff we do and why we try so hard at Christmas, but to know why it matters in the heart - the heart of individuals, communities, families, and the heart of God - the heart of the manger and the child in it.

We need to prepare not just for the way of Christmas but for the way Christmas changes our lives, perspectives, hearts, minds, and purpose. We need to value this time and intentionally wait, prepare, pay attention, and allow ourselves to be transformed.

In her book, *Prepare the Way*, (SLIDE) Pamela Hawkins provides scripture, prayer and thoughtful reflection on cultivating a heart for God throughout Advent. What makes this book somewhat unique is that

Hawkins uses not only the traditional gospel lessons of Matthew and Luke, but also the powerful voices found in the prophets, like Isaiah. She helps us recognize the elegant and essential bridge of Advent built on God's prophetic word. The words of the prophets alongside the beauty and grace of gospels creates a much richer advent experience.

When we allow God's prophets to speak a word to us, alongside those of the Gospel writers, we discover an even more stellar gift in the manger: because of the darkness, the Light comes to us. Because of sin's death-dealing ways, the life-giving was of faith in Jesus reassure us that "all things are possible" because God is Emmanuel - with us. It is a discovery of darkness against light, despair against hope, and fear against love.

Over the next four weeks, we invite you to invite the Holy Spirit to walk us in such a way we discover peace, justice, fearless and faithfulness.

We begin with the way of peace.

Isaiah 2:1-5 tells us, "There's a day coming when the mountain of God's House will be the Mountain - solid, towering over all mountains. All nations will river toward it, people from all over set out for it. They'll say, come let's climb God's Mountain, go to the House of the God of Jacob. He'll show us the way he works so we can live the way we're made. Zion's the source of the revelation. God's message comes from Jerusalem. God will settle things fairly between nations. God will make things right between

many peoples. They'll turn their swords into shovel, their spears into garden hoes. No more will nation fight nation; they won't play war anymore. Come family of Jacob, let's live in the light of God.

Perfect isn't it? The picture perfect scene of peace. No more war. People sharing, working, giving, receiving, doing and being all from a place of peace. Like a painting or piece of music that takes you to a place of serenity and calm. A place we all long for in some way yet never quite attain on our own. Notice however, it doesn't say there won't be tension, disagreement, or opposing ideas.

Those things will still exist as long as we humans are involved. It does say though that God will settle things, not us. God will make things right between people. We don't do it on our own or by our own volition, we are the vessels by which it can happen. It is God that can pull off and put together things in a such way that peace presides.

Peace. What is it?

Does it look like this? (SLIDE of police line at a rally).

Is this what the walk to peace looks like? (SLIDE of refugees).

Is this how we pass the peace? (SLIDE of young boy on a boat).

Are these the faces of peace? (SLIDE of peace summit)

Are these the future of peace? (SLIDE of children)

And finally, could this be the truth of peace (SLIDE of peace quote) and if so, what does that mean for how we live our lives?

We say we want peace, but I fear we want it on our terms, within our own boundaries, and on our own time frame. You know as well as I, it doesn't work that way. It didn't in the times of the prophets, those first followers of Jesus, and it doesn't work that way today.

Read Matthew text: (SLIDE) "Nobody knows what day or time this will happen. The angels in heaven don't know it, and nor does the son; only the father knows. You see, the royal appearing of the son of man will be like the days of Noah. What does that mean? Well, in those days, before the flood, they were eating and drinking, they were getting married and giving children in marriage, right up to the day when Noah went into the ark. They didn't know about it until the flood came and swept them all away. That's what it will be like at the Royal appearing of the son of man. On that day there will be two people working in the field. One will be taken, the other will be left. There will be two women grinding corn in the mill. One will be taken, the other will be left. So keep alert! You don't know what day your Master will come. But bear this in mind: if the household had known what time of night the burglar was going to come, he would have stayed awake and wouldn't have let his house get broken into. So you too must be ready. The son of man is coming at a time you don't expect.

I don't get the same warm fuzzy, all will be well, "lion and the lamb" kind of vibe from this text that I got in the Isaiah text, do you? Here we find a text indicating a constant unsettled state for God's people - a sense of dis-ease, disconnectedness, and in some cases despair.

Phrases including, “no one knows,” “they knew nothing,” “one will be taken and one will be left,” “you do not know,” and “an unexpected hour” paint a picture of anxiety-brewing vulnerability and angst for the people. It is a song of angry rhythms and clashing discord.

Sounds like the way many in our world live today - in that unsettled state where anxiousness brews - as we watch the political scene unfold or fall apart, as more and more time, resources and attention are given to things that matter to very few, while less and less are given to things that matter to a great many. We live in turbulent and dangerous times.

Recent survey results indicate we are an anxious people - majority of people living in constant flux, frustration and fear. Look around and you will see so much of our chaos is rooted in fear. Fear of being different. Fear of appearing weak. Fear of making someone mad. Fear of losing control. Fear of what is different. Fear of what is unknown. So many of the decisions being made, and choices being implemented are fear based.

That is not how we are called to live as followers of God and Jesus. That is not the advent message found in Isaiah and Matthew. For it also says, “keep awake, therefore,” “understand this,” and “you also must be ready” - words that are not a threat or meant to condemn and scare us, but words that can guide us toward a readiness for Jesus’s coming. These words call for an active waiting, and active expectation of something worth waiting for.

This Advent do not sit idly by - Wake up! Seek out the way of peace - even in the walmart parking lot. Open your heart to what it takes to live in peace even with those you don't agree with. Surrender that which keeps you from knowing peace - even if it means apologizing or accepting an apology. Pursue that which promotes peace for all people - even when others around you do not. Cling to the promise "all things work together for good" and "nothing can separate us from the love of God" and "all things are possible with Christ."

That is the gift of Advent, of pursuing peace with God, and cultivating a heart more willing and ready to give and receive that which we find in the manger. And that is definitely worth waiting and preparing for.

AMEN