

Title: For Unto Us a Child is born
Big Idea: Peace is not a seasonal sentiment, nor a utopian visions, but rather a gift from a Person.
Text: Isaiah 9:6
Subject: Prince of Peace (Our Refuge)

- Invite everyone back to Christmas Eve service at 3pm, 4:30pm and 6pm.
- 101 Class on January 4th

Top Ten “Memories” of our Christmas Production

10. Pastor Eric Lura singing
9. Deana Rodman, Brenda Junginger and Patrice VanDussen as “grave robbers”
8. Lori Cantrell, our VP, as the angel of future
7. Tech Team pulled four nights off without a hitch.
6. Sylvester Boyd as Jacob Marley
5. VCC Team work each night as greeters and servers
4. Response to Monday night’s emergency
3. “True Grit” of this team on Wednesday night (Mike Walker)
2. Pastor Jorge as Director, Writer and Scrooge...Amazing
1. 35 people raising their hand to accept Christ

Introduction:

*Many of you know that my family and I were at Disneyland recently. We planned and paid for a family vacation earlier this year long before VCC was in the radar screen. Disney, especially around Christmas, has a magical appeal to it. Through I have been to Disney several times, it never grows old when seen through the eyes of my children. This time, our 6-year old daughter Erin braved the **Matterhorn, Splash Mountain, Space Mountain and Tower of Terror**. Lots of fun.*

One sentiment I saw throughout the park was “**Peace on Earth**”. In fact, if I recall right, it was the last words I saw on Small World. I interpret these seasonal words more as a “**prayer**” than a “**Christmas greeting**.” Certainly in our world today with all the stress, all the uncertainty, quarrels, all the conflicts and wars, all the hatred and bitterness, “peace on earth” is a noble and right aspiration.

No doubt such a sentiment is a core cry of all humanity. Other than “love”, “PEACE” IS PERHAPS THE MOST SOUGHT OUT AFTER, AND STILL THE MOST ELUSIVE, VIRTUE IN OUR WORLD TODAY. We long for peace in our thoughts, our decisions, our emotions, our relationships, our business transactions, our families and our world. Because conflict is so prevalent in our lives we long for some form of resolution, some answer, some hope...some peace.

As we address this forth and final title of the Christ-child we focus moves from traits to the mission. He is not only a Wonderful Counselor who gives us insight, our Hero God who rescues us, our Faithful Father who protects and provides, he our also our Prince of Peace, our refuge in the storms of life.

I understand that we are only a few days before Christmas and often we want to hear about wise men, shepherds, stars, mangers, and the such. Our text from Isaiah points us in a different direction. One that emphasizes not on the nature of the Messiah we find in a manger, but to the mission. And I find His mission of peace something terribly needed in our world today.

This morning I want us to cover two areas concerning peace. The first point I want us to address is 1) Where conflict surfaces in our lives. The second is 2) God’s solution for this endemic of turmoil to mankind. The big debate is NEVER that we need peace, but HOW to attain it. We will spend our time in the book of Philippians.

And in this world storms come from 3 primary fronts.

Peace WITH ourselves

Bethany student - "The voices in my head torment me." "I hate myself." "I have no peace"

As a pastor, I have found that **the greatest battle people face is the one within.** Insecurity, doubt, fear converge to form self-hatred in people. This often stems from the unfortunate backgrounds or past. Especially ill spoken words over us as children. *As a child I was taught, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but names will never hurt me."* That is a lie. Names hurt. They cut. They shape our view of our world and ourselves. "You'll never amount to anything." "We never planned for you." "You were a mistake." "Why can't you be more like...?" "What's wrong with you?" "I wish you never existed." "Why can't you go away?"

When we grow older we often interpret events of this world through this lens. Even when compliments come our way, we discard them because they don't fit into our lens. Our ability to discern what is real about ourselves is clouded by negative events and words that shape us.

I have even heard people make a vow, "Never again." Essentially closing the door to certain areas in their lives and perhaps even future relationships and ministry. By the way, such language is a form of a curse.

Needless to say, this noise causes much turmoil inside of us.

Peace WITH others

Kosovo Camp - "I am here to bring peace" "Is it working?" "As long as we have our guns, it is working."

"Peace shield" in the West Bank

But you don't have to travel oceans to see such conflicts. Siblings, family, co-workers, neighbors and yes, even marriages.

Peace WITH God

Rom. 5:1 ¶ Therefore, since we have been **justified** through faith, **we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,**
Rom. 5:2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.

Most unsaved people do not think of themselves as enemies of God. Because they have no conscious feelings of hatred for Him and do not actively oppose His work or contradict His Word, they consider themselves, **at worst, to be “neutral” about God. But no such neutrality is possible.**

Apart from salvation through **Jesus Christ**, every human being is at enmity with God, spiritually at war with Him regardless of what his feelings about God may be. The Bible says the sinful man is hostile towards God (Romans 8:7). The mind of every unsaved person is at peace only with the things of the flesh, and therefore by definition is “hostile toward God” and cannot be otherwise (Rom. 8:7).

In the same way, **the person who is justified by faith in Christ is at peace with God**, regardless of how he may feel about it at any given moment. Justification means that past, present and future sins are gone. Legal declaration of innocence that paves the road for a relationship to happen. Through his trust in **Jesus Christ**, a sinner’s war with God is ended for all eternity.

James, the half brother of Jesus, summarizes this triad of conflict in us by saying.

James 4:1 ¶ What causes fights and quarrels among you? **(Peace with others)** Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? **(Peace with ourselves)**
James 4:2 You want something but don’t get it. **(Peace with ourselves)** You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. **(Peace with ourselves)** You do not have, because you do not ask God. **(Peace with God)**
James 4:3 When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.

James 4:4 ¶ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God **(Peace with God)**.

James 4:5 Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit he caused to live in us envies intensely?

James 4:6 But he gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." **(Peace with God)**

James 4:7 ¶ Submit yourselves, then, to God. **(Peace with God)** Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

How do we attain Peace?

The big debate is NEVER that we need peace, but HOW to attain it. This morning I want us to talk about God's solution for this endemic of turmoil to mankind. We will spend our time in the book of Philippians.

Phil. 4:7 And the peace of God (harmony and good order, when all parts of life are working according to God's plan and purpose; the shalom of God),

which transcends all understanding,

will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus ().

The verb *φρουρεῖν* is a military term picturing God's peace as a detachment of soldiers "standing guard over" (cf. 2 Cor 11:32) a city so as to protect it from attack. Philippi in Paul's time housed a Roman garrison (see Oakes, *Philippians*). Thus the metaphor would have been easily understood and appreciated by the Philippian Christians who read it:

God's peace, like a garrison of soldiers, will keep guard over our thoughts and feelings so that they will be as safe against the assaults of worry and fear as any fortress.

1. Peace is a gift granted from a Person

Phil. 4:7 **And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**

Perhaps the summary of all New Testament theology can be found in this one prepositional phrase - **“In Christ Jesus”**. Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. He graciously gives His peace to those who have accepted him. That is to say, only in union with Christ, **“in obedience to his authority and submission to his will”** can anyone have the secure assurance that he is indeed the object of the protection of God’s peace. Jesus freely grants **“the shalom of God”** to all those who call upon His name. He had done it in the past and He longs to do it today.

This truth is the quandary of our day. Let me illustrate with a view cultural examples.

Culture’s View on Peace:

Yet before we address our text this morning, I feel the need to take an honest look of our culture’s look on peace. In doing so, I will bring us some iconic events and moments in our world. **I do so cautiously, but I want us to see how we are forging a form of peace that has no room for Jesus Christ.**

As we step into culture, I want us to **watch our attitudes and actions.**

“You will never reach that which you demonize.”

“You will never pray for that will you deem evil and unredeemable.”

“You will never care about that with you condemn.”

Culture is simply the prevailing thoughts of the day. We need to understand how it shapes us. We need to join with it when it is correct. We need stand against it when it wrongly promotes injustice, immorality and unrighteousness.

We need to prepare our children to walk with clear minds and the Spirit's discernment. Too often, all I see Christians attack culture and never teach children how to navigate. The reality is that one day they will have to step into it, work in it, live in it and if they bear the name of Christ, bring the gospel to it.

You can never fulfill the Great Commission without engaging in culture.

This being said, we need to analyze culture both for its message, its veracity and its impact. So I want us to take a brief cultural tour about "peace."

1. Imagine by John Lennon

Imagine by John Lennon

Imagine there's no Heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people
Living for today

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people
Living life in peace

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world

You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

2. Prayer of America after 9/11

On September 23rd in Yankee Stadium, mayor Rudolph Guiliani called a special gathering and called it the "Prayer for America." The stage was cluttered with Sikhs, Hindus, Muslims, Jews, Roman Catholics and Greek Orthodox. I find it ironic that the "Prince of Peace" had no seat to a gathered billed for peace and unity. The only worship we could come up with is "You are the wind beneath my wings" sung by Beth Midler. America needed a preacher that day and the best we could do was Oprah Winfrey who boldly proclaimed that all those who lost their lives on 9/11

were immediately added to heaven's spiritual roster as angels. A lovely sentiment, but as pagan as the druids celebrating Halloween in Salem, Massachusetts. The message was clear: "You don't need Jesus. You just need to die a tragic or noble death and it will all work out in the end."

John Lennon says we need no religion. Mayor Guilani says we need all faiths except for Jesus. Neither one identify the core problem. The world sees peace as a "sentiment", a dream, a goal to which it has no clear road to achieve. God sees His creation in turmoil because of human sin and longs to bring back His shalom to it through a system of justice that satisfies His own righteous requirements. Theologically and practically, there is no peace for the human heart without a Savior.

Even though we have Christ, peace is not automatic. The connector "and" (or as a result) separates this promise from the conditions that precede it.

THROUGH PEACE IS A PROMISE FOR THE BELIEVER, IT IS NOT AUTOMATIC.

2. Peace requires Proper Focus

Phil. 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!

Notice how the will is engaged. Far too many people view peace as circumstantial. Like the weather, we surrender our emotions and moods to the changing climate. I often tell people: "Be a thermostat, not a thermometer." Thermostat set the tone of the room. Thermometers simply reflect what is in the room. Your will must turn the channel.

Biblical theology does not deny circumstances. Believers feel the pain of this world. It's rejection. It's calamity. It's disappointment. **But the will turns the channel and the focus. First, we choose to focus on God.** That means we turn

away from our circumstance and turn our eyes to him. **Second, we have the audacity to rejoice in His goodness (Westbank story and letter to my kids).**

We change the change from ourselves to God. We change the channel from complaint to praise. We also filter our thinking.

Phil. 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – if anything is excellent or praiseworthy – **think about such things.**

I guarantee you when you are in conflict, you fail the test of this criteria. Conflict is typically about complaint. 3 houses and 2 loans in 6 weeks have tested me on this. I think I probably got a “D”. We are what we think. The mind is the gateway to the heart and the battleground of the believer. Every sin that is every committed is first thought about in the mind.

3. Peace requires Surrender

Phil. 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

This may comfort you, it has me. There are no straight lines in nature. Yet, we live life with the expectation, there will be straight lines. Not so. I don't care how “Spirit filled, charismatic, educated, or churched” you are, the walk of faith is more of a zig-zag than a straight line.

How I wish it were not so. As a engineer, I long for efficiency. I can't stand in line at the DMV without thinking how to make this process better. Even getting an loan for my house, I called the FHA. There was a hurdle and I tried to get an exemption. Never got a person who had the authority. So I asked for Barak Obama. He promised change and a government that would work.

There must be a letting go. Let go of controlling the situation. Letting go of timelines and what you and I think the end should look like. Letting go of the manner

you feel things need to be done. Surrendering to the reality that we are not in control of our own destiny.

4. Peace requires Trust

Phil. 4:7 And the peace of God, **which transcends all understanding**, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

which excels all human planning.” Paul now describes this peace by a participial phrase, lit. “which rises above every mind.” This phrase is open to more than one interpretation: (1) the peace of God “surpasses all human understanding”

so marvelously vast that no human mind can ever fully comprehend its significance. (2) God’s peace is able to produce exceedingly better results than human planning, or it is far superior to any person’s schemes for security, or it is more effective for removing anxiety than any intellectual effort or power of reasoning (Plummer).

Conclusion:

Pastor Eric Hansen song before we pray together (What sin?)

A few years ago, Fremont celebrated a milestone in its history. I think it was the 50th year of the city. The city leaders decided to commemorate the date with activities, entertainments, guest speakers and then culminate with a ceremony where people would create a 3 and one half mile human chain that would surround Lake Elizabeth. People would join hands around the lake to demonstrate that 137 languages could gather in peace.

I support such endeavors because I believe the church needs to be a player in the community. It is impressive and noble to see such efforts succeed. But I am here to tell you that joining hands together for a few minutes around a lake does not bring: 1) Peace with Ourselves, 2) Peace with Others or 3) Peace with God.

Our world buys into the lie that peace is merely “the absence of conflict”. The Bible tells us that God’s peace goes much further. Peace is not only the absence of conflict with Ourselves, Others and God, it is the Presence of a Person.