

Isaiah 11:1-9

**The Gift of Peace©**  
**December 22, 2018**

**Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

**Fourth Sunday of Advent**

Today our focus, on this fourth and last Sunday of Advent, is on the gift of peace. We have considered these Christmas gifts that will never break – the gift of hope, the gift of love, the gift of joy and today we focus on the gift of peace.

Peace in the world is something people have longed for and prayed for pretty much since Adam and Eve took the Great Fall. As much as we want peace on earth, we humans have a tendency to disagree. Sometimes to violently disagree. And so, we argue and we fight. And so, we go to war.

In the hymn “God of Grace and God of Glory” we sing: “Cure Thy children’s warring madness, bend our pride to Thy control; Shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest me miss Thy kingdom’s goal. Lest we miss Thy kingdom’s goal.

I think the passage that Bob read from Isaiah clearly reveals God’s kingdom’s goal. You’ve probably seen paintings from the description Isaiah gives – where the lamb and lion lie down side by side, the child plays next to the snake. Unlikely friends they all are but they live in harmony with one another. In fact, the artist’s title for that picture is: *The Peaceable Kingdom*.

In our Advent study book *Christmas Gifts That Won’t Break*, James Moore writes about a story that is a legend but one of those legends with some real truth in it. As the legend goes the angels in heaven are told by God that He is forming a very special heavenly choir. They would need to learn this song and practice it a lot because there was a very important event coming that they would be singing for.

The angel choir practiced long, intense hours – so much so that some of them became quite irritated and complained about how hard they had to practice. But God insisted it had to be their very best. This event would be a once in lifetime, amazing event.

And so they practiced until it was absolutely perfect. It was extraordinarily beautiful. But then God told them this was not just a once in a lifetime event that was happening but the song itself was a once in a lifetime anthem the angels would be singing. They would only be allowed to sing it only once.

Well, that shocked some of the angels. Why, after spending so much time on this song and getting it so perfect, would they not be allowed to sing it more than one time? Some of them actually had the nerve to question God about it. But God smiled and said that when the time came to sing it, they would understand.

Finally, one night, God called the angelic choir to come together over a field near Bethlehem where shepherds were watching their sheep. And they sang. Oh, how they sang!

*Glory to God in heaven! And on earth, peace, goodwill toward all.* They sang the beautiful song announcing the birth of the Lord Jesus – the Son of God. And they knew there would never be another night quite like this one.

Afterwards, God reminded them that they would not be singing that song again as an angelic choir. They could hum it to themselves occasionally as they remembered the glory of this night but they would not be coming together to sing that song.

Once again, one of the angels got the nerve up to ask God why? It was so beautiful and they loved singing it. But God's answer was "Now my Son has been born and earth must do the singing."

It's a legend with truth in it. It is up to us who have received the great good news that we have a Savior to sing that song to a world that still hasn't gotten it. It is up to us who have received those wonderful Christmas gifts that don't break to share them with others.

Because, in a world that appears often to have no hope for the future to look very bright – we have hope in Christ. We do not know what next year will bring; we don't even know for sure what tomorrow will bring. But in Christ we have a hope that is deep in our hearts; that is a faith that God is at work in the world, that we have a close relationship with our God, who has given us grace and forgiveness and the promise of everlasting life through his Son, Jesus.

We have love even in the midst of a world that is full of hatred and prejudice and violence. We have a love that is immeasurable and unconditional from God who loved the world so much that he sent his Son so that we – the world – might be saved.

We have joy – a joy that is planted into our very souls – a joy that is more than just happiness. It is like a spring that overflows within us even when things are really hard. We know we belong to God and nothing can take that away.

And we have peace – a peace that passes all understanding. Right in the middle of a war zone called the world, we who have received Christ have a peace that keeps us from breaking; that gives us a calm and an assurance that we are okay in the hands of God.

Jesus said, in John 14:27, "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."

This peace we Christians – followers of Christ – have is not the kind of peace the world could give. That peace is dependent on current situations and events and it is subject to change with the turning tide. The peace Christ gives is a peace that will not go away just because things get bad.

**The Apostle Paul wrote these words while under house arrest in Rome to the Philippians in chapter 4:4-7:**

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. <sup>5</sup>Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. <sup>6</sup>Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. <sup>7</sup>And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Did you hear that last part? The peace of God – which goes beyond anything we can understand – that peace will guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

This is a peace that keeps us from breaking even in terrible, painful situations. Paul is writing these words to a church that is under persecution, just as he himself is. This peace guards our hearts – from breaking into when people turn against us, when loved ones are taken away, when we lose everything.

This peace guards our minds from going insane thinking we have lost it all; thinking there is no hope, no reason to go on. No. The peace of Christ is a gift that will not break. Ever. It is eternal and is it ours to claim because we have received Christ Jesus as our Savior.

Friends, we are the blessed ones of Christ. We know him and he knows and loves us. In him we have hope, love, joy and peace – the best gifts of Christmas ever!

But while these gifts are ours, we are now responsible for singing the song of the angels. Christ our Savior is born. Good news has come to all. We must learn the words to the song and we must sing those words to the world. Otherwise, regardless of how nice and loving and giving we are, no matter how much we do for others, we will be no different than those who are not Christians but are very, very, good and generous people.

Our song must be different. It must be clear and intent. It doesn't have to be harsh or obnoxious, or pushy. It can be caring, loving, full of grace. But it must be a song with a message.

Jesus Christ is the Son of God – our Savior who came to earth as Emmanuel – God with us. In him we are saved from our sins and we are given eternal life. In him we are forgiven and reconciled with God. In him we know God who loves us so much that he sent Jesus, his only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish, but will have life everlasting.

It is now our turn, our responsibility to sing to the world as the angels sang: Behold, I bring you good news!

*On this night, a Savior was born who is Christ the Lord.  
Glory to God in heaven! And on earth, peace, goodwill toward all people.*

© Copyright 2018. All Rights Reserved.