

## **Peace**

The Rev. Mark Wilkinson, Rector  
St. Aidan's Episcopal Church  
Virginia Beach VA 23452  
Second Sunday of Advent 2018

Last week I preached on the theme of Hope, which is one of the four themes for the Sunday's in Advent. Now I've found several different lists of which Sunday in Advent stands for what. This is in part because the Advent wreath and candles are relatively recent and there is no one standard that I can find. Several places listed that this Sunday is the one for Peace, so I'm going to focus on that concept today. This is because for most of the week Peace in the biblical sense has been on my mind and in my prayers.

Last Sunday afternoon and evening I played the part of the rabbi at the Bethlehem Walk. As each group walked in I greeted them with the word Shalom. Most everybody who walked through treated it as a greeting, which it is, but there is much more to that word which translates into English as peace.

On Tuesday morning I was looking at the hopes that we placed on the Christmas tree and I was struck by a very strong central theme. Almost without exception they were prayers for Peace in some way or another.

Peace, shalom has a very deep meaning. It means peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, tranquility all words that are about our inner state as well as our outer state. They are also words that stand for something that is in short supply in our world today.

We get a hint of it in the traditional blessing that is at the end of the Rite 1 service. May the peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord; and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with you now and forever. The peace that passes all understanding tells us that this is something deep and special and most important has God as the source.

We refer to Jesus as the Prince of Peace at which point I want to cue the Hallelujah Chorus from the Messiah. We hear the word, we share the Peace during the service, but do we really consider what we are actually saying?

What is this peace and how do we begin to understand and then how do we attain it? That, my friends, is a lifelong journey, but one that is well worth the effort.

First of all what does this peace look like? To begin with we should examine what it is not. This is not peace that is simply an absence of war, fighting or contention. The first century world knew the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. In a series we

watched in the Wednesday night bible study Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan spoke about this. This was a peace through victory and often only lasted as long as there was an army in place to enforce it. Often more true than anything else it has rarely lasted in their world or to be honest in ours.

The PBS special on President Bush last Tuesday evening talked about how he worked for world peace by building relationships. His time as UN ambassador allowed him to build incredible relationships around the globe that helped peaceful transitions happen in much of the world. Now that wasn't always true, but when you look at how the map of Europe changed during his presidency I firmly believe he understood peace in the biblical sense more than in the Roman sense. He worked on a peace that was built more on relationships than on power. Ultimately we cannot have physical peace until we begin to develop the sense of shalom that Christ promises.

I did a word search for peace in the bible. The word peace appears 322 times in the NRSV and is in almost every book of the bible. Almost every time it refers to shalom, peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare, tranquility. Peace is something we can receive and in many verses it is something we give to others. Often it is something that is said to come from God. For example, Jesus greets the disciples after the resurrection in the Gospel of John by saying, "Peace be with you," two times in the upper room. Jesus tells the disciples to offer peace to those whom houses they enter. And if that peace is rejected he tells them to shake the dust off their feet and move on.

John the Baptist quotes ancient scripture and speaks of preparing the way for the Lord. We are called in some sense to prepare the way of the Lord by preparing ourselves to be people of peace. So how do we go about doing this? How do we become people of peace? The way is best prepared if we strive to find peace within ourselves first and foremost. Only with inner peace can we begin to work for peace outside of ourselves.

We can start with what started this whole line of thinking and that was my time as the rabbi on Sunday at the Bethlehem walk. Part of the script for the rabbi is to teach the people coming through the Shema from Deuteronomy 6. Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might. Then add to that the second great commandment from Leviticus that Jesus taught, to love your neighbor as yourself.

It can be a challenge to develop a sense of inner peace in today's world. What may help you is a concept that St. Ignatius taught which is of holy indifference. Now this does not mean that you don't care, but that you are not going to allow yourself to get all wound up about something or someone. A spiritual director said to me it is about greeting the world with equanimity. Another talked about being a non-anxious presence when faced with a difficult situation. This is not easy, but is something that is worth working on.

I find some daily meditation time especially helpful, in particular prior to a difficult meeting or challenging task. As Jesus says, go into your room, close the door and pray. Walking the labyrinth in our prayer garden may help or taking time to go for a slow walk, maybe with some relaxing music. Chant in particular will help stimulate brain waves that create that sense of peace.

I have found that using some sort of breath prayer is particularly helpful. At a seminar this summer where we talked about how our brain, in particular the part called the amygdala can hijack this peace the first thing to remember to do is breathe! I find using a breath prayer based on the sacred Jewish name of God is quite helpful. Breathe in on the Yah and out on the weh. It comes very naturally. Start this for 5 or 10 minutes and build up to 20 to 30 minutes at a time of day that works for you.

Then you can add the Ignatian Examen at the end of the day when you look back to see where God has been in your day.

This week Richard Rohr's daily email will be about contemplative prayer and I will post them on the church's Facebook page so you can read them. Now this is all focused on inner peace, but then we must move outside ourselves into the world. You can have your inner peace all together and then you must face the world. It reminds me of a prayer someone once told me. Dear Lord I thank you for this day. I haven't gotten mad at anybody, I haven't made any mistakes, but Lord the alarm clock is about to go off and I have to get up and face the world. The world can shatter our inner peace if we let it.

I wish to go back to something I mentioned a couple of weeks ago and that is the word Namaste. The divine in me sees the divine in you. If you have done your work on your inner peace and gotten in touch with the divine in you, then you have a good chance of going out into the world and seeing the divine in others. In all of those prayers for Peace on the tree at the back of the nave, progress can be made on many if not most if we could just look for and seek the divine, to see the Christ in each other even if the person isn't a Christian. Christ as the cosmic Christ is a power that transcends all and is found in all whether they call it by that name or not. Try relating to everyone on that term and see if you don't make some progress in your prayer for peace.

How you work for peace is very individual, but I sense this is something that is on the hearts of many if not all of us, this Advent. I hope if nothing else this Advent, your wish, your hope for peace in whatever form is something that you can find.  
AMEN