



Sermon Advent 2, December 2, 2021

St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Coeur d'Alene

The Rev. Dr. David Gortner

[Baruch 5:1-9](#)

[Philippians 1:3-11](#)

[Luke 3:1-6](#)

Welcome, friends, to this second week of Advent. We have heard God's words of promise through the ages and sung carols and hymns that bring us to the brink of the birth of Jesus. We aren't there yet in this season of Advent, of waiting. But we are in the midst of the promises of the God of life.

During this second week of Advent, we consider how God brings peace.

Christ is our Prince of Peace.

Each week, as we gather for Holy Eucharist, right after we confess our sins and hear God's absolution and forgiveness, we share with each other the Peace of Christ.

What is this peace? What is this peace of God that passes understanding?

I remember a story from one of the inspirational devotional books that came into our house from time to time when I was a boy. There was a story about someone in deep distress, let's say Sam, who came to the town's little art museum. Who really knows or remembers now what the reason was for Sam's anxieties, fears, or frustrations; but for Sam, they were very real and deep. Entering the center hall, Sam saw an old friend who was a beloved teacher in the community, sitting in a corner next to a tall, thin painting. Next to that painting was a beautiful large landscape of a serene lake in the mountains, bathed in afternoon light, completely still. It filled half of the wall. Sam was taken by the beauty of the scene and felt a touch of calm from the painting, but also felt remote from such a calm place. Sam sighed heavily, then turned and walked over to the teacher. They greeted each other and started talking. The teacher could see there was something troubling Sam, and Sam shared some of the fears and pains. The teacher turned back to the tall, thin painting that was in the corner next to the grand landscape. "Look at this painting with me. What do you see?" There was a giant, gushing waterfall, and rocks and broken trees below. One could almost hear the roar and feel the ice cold spray of the water. And there, hanging in front of the waterfall was a nest with a small bird, in the foreground, on a branch that stretched out over the roaring water. "People come in here and talk about the beautiful landscape of the mountain lake, and say how peaceful it all looks. But I think of this painting here as more true to what real peace is. All of this going on all around, how could this little bird be okay? But the bird is fine, and has built a nest even here and is at peace."

Even with storms all around in life – with turmoil that comes that is beyond our control in our health, our safety, our security, and in the world around us full of voices and actions stirred up by currents of fear and anger and unkindness – there are the promises of God that bring hope that is a steady place to stand. And that hope brings with it peace. Even facing the moment of betrayal and condemnation and death, Jesus said to his friends, "Peace I leave you – my own peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27).

The people of Israel who were yearning to rebuild their city and nation also were in grief over the many Israelites led away to Babylon. But the promise of God came to them with a word of hope that could spark joy, and that gave them peace even in the rubble of rebuilding their world.

“Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them.

For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne” (Baruch 5:3-6).

Be at peace and carry on, trusting that they will return.

“In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was ruler of Galilee, and his brother Philip ruler of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias ruler of Abilene, during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness” (Luke 3:1-2).

In the midst of turmoil, in the time of a world that seemed cruel and filled with dictators bent on absolute control, in a time of political games and... the word of the Lord came to John in the desert. And the word was a word that leveled the playing field for everyone. “Come and be baptized, and find your sins forgiven! God wants to forgive everyone, all of us! Come to the waters.”

Now. At this moment. With all the actors and experiences of this time. Here and now. The word of the Lord comes – with a promise as ancient as any history, alive now as it was then with hope and the gift of a peace that passes understanding.

The peace of God does not come as an escape route out of the world. This peace comes to us live fully in this world and embrace it as we receive Christ’s presence. Christ is with us as light in the midst of darkness, deep inner rootedness and firm calmness in the midst of storm and strife, stillness in the midst of uncertainty.

The peace of God stills our hearts and minds, calms the waters of strife between us as we offer peace to one another, and restores balance in living.

*“Come now, O Prince of Peace, make us one body. Come, O Lord Jesus, reconcile your people” (from a Japanese hymn in one of our hymnals).
Amen.*