

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Casting for Peace"
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December 9, 2007

You know how you wake up from a dream and you are surprised that it wasn't real. Some day this life of ours will be the dream and we will have awakened to a new life. We will remember this life and many of its details, but probably very much like we remember our most vivid dreams.

And so God urges us to dream for His reality of justice, peace, hope, love, joy and Jesus' way here in this life, as a prelude to its reality in the next. If you believe in the resurrection, you believe in something new coming. If you believe in Jesus, and you believe he will come again, then I hope you trust in the importance of changing your mind in God's direction. More importantly, that you indeed will change your mind in God's direction. That's one definition of "repentance:" a 180 degree turn toward God away from the rebellion of sin. That was John the Baptizer's message.

More than his unusual fashion sense, or the lack thereof, and more than his unusual diet which was completely organic, John's message remains to today. Choose God's way and be baptized. This promise is for you, your children, and all who are desperately in need of a change. He challenged those who were religious, and even leaders in the religious institution of the day.

What he said was offensive to some. Let me try and translate. He would say something like, "Don't put your trust in many generations of ancestors in this church. Don't be proud of your own many decades of faithful attendance. Rather, change your mind toward God, choose His ways, and be active in doing what He wants you to do, rather than relying on something that does not have to do with this central relationship question between you and God. God could make followers out of the rocks on the ground. And of course, if He did, you know what they would called. Rock stars. ☺

Christianity at Advent, at Christmas, throughout the year, has to do with knowing Christ, dedicating oneself to Christ, and pouring out oneself into Jesus' ways and will for this congregation and this community. All of us, me too for sure, need to recommit ourselves or commit ourselves for the

first time, to Jesus. Without this our church work is a waste, our presence in the community is a social one at best, and our message is confused and weak.

We cannot lead others to find peace where we have not found it ourselves. We cannot comfort others where we have not been comforted ourselves. The peace and the comfort comes from the Prince of Peace. Every song in this season, every decoration, every ornament, every light should lead us back to the One for whom the season is dedicated.

And when we come back to this One, we reveal ourselves to Him, good and bad, beautiful and ugly, wonderful and horrible, all that we are. And as He takes us by the hand, He leads us in His ways, changes our hearts and our minds and transforms our character to reflect His.

This is the One of whom we hear:

11:2 The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

11:3 His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear;

11:4 but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

11:5 Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.

And so we are encouraged to be led by the Holy Spirit, to be full of wisdom and understanding as we read the Scriptures and are more and more informed about our faith, as we gain understanding, to be counselors and strong, knowledgeable and deeply devoted to God. The fear of the Lord is a heart felt devotion to God, which acts out in ethically beautiful ways, caring for the poor, helping those who cannot help themselves. And in the end, Jesus as the righteous judge will set all things right, settle every account and faithfully accomplish everything in line with his justice and love.

In that day, all our fear and insecurities will be turned on their heads, just as if voracious wild animals would mingle together with domesticated ones. Even children could play with poisonous predators without any fear or harm.

That's how much of a change there will be in the new life, that life that now appears to be a dream, but then will be the reality and this the dream.

And so we have a choice in how we live our life. We can choose this life as the only one and only reality there is, or we can choose to live in light of heaven, in light of the time when every neighbour will treat each other with kindness and truth, when God's light will be enough for all to see well.

There used to be a saying that someone was "so heavenly minded that he or she was no earthly good." I haven't met very many like that. What I find is that most of us don't even reflect on the beauty and glory of heaven enough to impact our hearts and our minds.

We each have a sphere of influence in this life. We each have an audience, as I mentioned last week. The question is where we will be leading and guiding those who look to us for care, for love, for encouragement, for purpose, for hope, for joy, for lots...

We sometimes think that peace is the absence of conflict, the absence of bad feelings, the absence of aggression and difficulty. Peace is a wholeness that comes from a life-giving relationship with God through Jesus Christ, which not only transforms one's personal life, it also affects everyone around. Whether you're a preacher or debator or communicator or not any of these, you speak from your heart, and you act from your heart. If your heart has been changed by your faith, then don't struggle against naturally speaking of what happening inside of you by the gentle touch of God.

Those who love sports talk about sports. Those who love cars and transportation devices of all kinds can talk for hours about such things. Those who are in love, and consumed with the one they have chosen to give their life to, might also speak quite readily of the one they love. So why is it that so many of us are reticent or reluctant to speak of the God we know.

In our speaking and in our doing this season, we are challenged to live in harmony with one another, and to glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul also in Romans encourages us to welcome one another. Perhaps this season is becoming so full of performances and events that we don't have the time to visit, or listen to the mummings.

Time is so precious. So I encourage you to take the time to be quiet. To take in the peace from God that you need, as well as to give away the peace that you receive from this extraordinary source.

Sometimes we think that we have to go fishing for peace like we might go fishing for hope. So we cast a line out. But really the line is inside and we are the ones that need to be caught by this amazing fisherman.

The peace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Let us pray.