

St. David's Presbyterian Church
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"ePace"
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Advent II

My piece about peace: Once upon a time, everything was in harmony. Human beings lived in peace with wild animals and the garden was as beautiful as could be. It was a real place in the Middle East, probably and ironically somewhere within the bounds of modern day Iraq. We do know that rebellion gives birth to rebellion, and although we don't know all the details about a rebel angel, one chose to rebel against God.

This one appears as a snake in the garden and has a few things to whisper in the human's ears. You don't believe everything God tells you, do you? God knows that you will be more like him if you disobey him, choosing for yourself. Of course, we hear this today and we know this is a lie. Eve did too. The snake goes on, "You won't die if you go against God's ways, you'll just become something better (and what he doesn't say is that they will become something more like the devil)."

And we know the rest of the story. Disharmony is introduced to the garden. A new cacophony, bad sounds are now resounding over the symphony that once played, something like Highway to Hell played over the string section of the orchestra. Violence and murder weren't far behind in Adam's family. Sibling rivalry began with Seth and Cain. Cain became the first urbanite, or city dweller.

But rather than turning back to God and God's ways, people began to bind together against God's ways. God wanted to destroy them and kept back one family and a host of creatures during the flood. He then promised he wouldn't destroy the whole population ever again.

Yet even with this promise, human beings continued to rebel. God confirmed that human beings could build Babel, an engineering feat of the day, against His desire and will. So God introduced new languages, instead of that proto-Indo-European language or proto-Semitic language they all spoke. The project was abandoned and people tried to find others who they could understand.

The rest of Genesis and the rest of the Scriptures are really an ongoing journal of God's attempts to make lasting and permanent relationship with a certain people and then with everyone. He had friends, who were far from perfect, Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Deborah, David, to name a few. He identified himself with a certain family, Jacob's, who later was renamed Israel, and the nation which came from his family was similarly named.

The Old Testament is largely an account of the attempts at keeping relationship with God, how a few individuals would turn whole heartedly toward God, again not perfectly but whole-heartedly. Still, most would rebel. So God would try to teach and legislate, send prophets, priests and kings, but to no avail.

Still God's heart is exactly expressed in Isaiah 40, where God wants to comfort his people. How can this be done? People are like grass, ephemeral, their lives not only short (in comparison with world history), but weak as well. So God speaks again, and through the prophet, he prophesies that He will find a way, to make the crooked straight, and the rough plain. He chooses to come himself, the Shepherd becomes a lamb, the Creator becomes the created. As one of us, he shows us the way to peace, which is not a new political way to peace, but a new relationship to God, a relationship to him, the Messiah. By grace and as a gift, Jesus does what the prophets, priests and kings of old could not do.

He shows us the way to peace, and is peace itself. I told the story at the beginning of the sermon as a way to get at the fact that peace is relational. It is not the absence of conflict, nor even the absence of anger. It is knowing the One who is peace, reflecting on his life and passion. It is choosing to serve others, and choosing to love.

True peace is essentially being in healthy relationships, first of all with God through Jesus, secondly with those in our daily living, and thirdly with everyone else. We live in a world fraught with violence, and certainly violence against women. Domestic violence is one of the most common crimes, and is almost always men against women. This flows from the frustration that comes in unhealthy and unhealed lives, Christians included. It comes when we cannot and do not acknowledge the hatred we experience, whether it be against our parents, our siblings, our spouses, our children or ourselves.

It is hard to admit when we find the anger and the hate come up within us. But as we do, we need to acknowledge it being there, and then ask trusted ones to help us. Similarly, victims of hatred and abuse need to exercise their ability to call up the law to help them, to call the police, for their sake and the sake of the one perpetrating the violence.

Hatred and the ensuing behaviour is a difficult topic to address, because it is a part of that dark part of ourselves that we do not like to explore. It means looking again at forgiveness issues, who I must forgive for my sake and the sake of the one who has hurt me. It means exercising the patience needed to get help and to change from explosive and violent ways to others ways of expression.

The Scripture in 2 Peter 3:9 talks about God being patient with us. Jesus sees our rebellion, but rather than immediately judging us, he speaks to us and invites us to get to know Him better. Such patience is a hallmark of his godly attitude. We too, I need to develop this attribute more and more. Some say that as we age we become less patient people. I trust that does not have to be true, but as God transforms we might know a greater degree of patience.

Part of our impatience is the pace of our culture. Some might call it "electronic pace" of ePace, such as the title of this sermon. But the frantic pace, the lack of quiet, the anxiety inside, the loneliness, all contribute to a culture that seems to always be on the run. It is hard to slow down. Unfortunately it often takes a loss of a loved one, or a loss of one's health, or of a loved one to slow down.

So I invite you to slow down this season. That might not be possible, you say. But it is. Take the time that you do have to talk to God about anyone you need to forgive. Take the time to talk to God about anyone you might need to ask their forgiveness. Maybe there are outstanding issues of hatred whether against someone else or against yourself. Ask God to bring to the light what might be happening inside you. And as you do, share with a trusted person in your life what you find.

Peace in the world begins as we take responsibility for our own inner issues. As we do that, then we can address issues in our culture, as we grow to love men and women, when we previously hated them, as we grow in God's love for each of us, when we previously may have hated ourselves.

Let us look again to the One who can install the peace which passes all understanding.

Let us pray.