

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Acepe"
Dr. J. Dent

December 4, 2011
Second Sunday of Advent

The universal quest for peace is more than simply an end to war or an end to the military. We know it is a desire for inner peace. We cannot control what others go through. Even the greatest dictators and totalitarians never really controlled every individual within their states. Jesus came in the time of the huge empire of the Roman Caesars, but neither they nor the local kings and governors could control his fate or destiny.

We can merely influence that which happens inside ourselves. At times, we appear to not even be able to control our own thoughts and actions. Something pops into our heads that is not in line with our best selves. We say something or do something we regret later. Our lives are not as manageable as we once thought. So many of us come back to God.

We seek peace within, but often settle for distraction or denial. We think at a sub-conscious level that if we find something else that will take up our time or our attention that we will make us feel good about ourselves, or give us a purpose or a larger goal, we might have the comfort we need in the midst of much of the human chaos we experience. Many of us deny how hard our lives are, or have been, and then spend a good part of our time running away. The running from God is called sin or rebellion in the Bible. It is a part of us all, me for sure. But how do you know you are even running, when you are not out of breath? Perhaps mostly in how we experience our losses, our lost loved ones to death or estrangement, a lost job, loss of hope, loss of the wonder of childhood, lost health, what have you lost?

Besides our losses, our lives and our thoughts can be scrambled even as the letters of peace are scrambled in the sermon title. Just as the letters are scrambled, so can the peace we seek be deeply elusive. Finding God's peace, the deep inner peace, the peace that passes understanding is a priority concern. Ironically, it is in this anxious, neurotic season that we take a deep breath and wonder out loud about the peace that we long for, the peace that seems just around the corner, or perhaps in a better metaphor, just a small dose here and there, leaving us wanting more.

For all who feel even the slightest turmoil within, to those who can hardly contain the lack of peace, the prophet Isaiah comes again, speaking comfort and peace. He says if we think we have to continue serving a jail term of inner turmoil; freedom is near. He continues with image after image of helping us when we cannot help ourselves.

Just when we thought we could not get through the roughest of terrain, the most of barren of barrens in our lives, God provides a way, a highway through the roughest parts of our lives. Even the worst mountains that seem to loom against us will be leveled plain by God, the worst obstacles to peace will be taken away.

Not only that...the scariest of realities, the reality of death will be overcome. Even though our lives seem to go away as fast as grass and flowers, just a short season and we are gone. And the end of the world will come just as the end of our lives will come as a mystery, like a thief robbing your house when you least expect it. But death does not have the final say. God does. And Jesus comes as one of us and understands what it's like to go through this.

He cares for us and opens his arms to us as a Shepherd cares for sheep. He hauls us out of the ditches we find ourselves in. He feeds and loves us when others cannot or will not.

And so at Christmas we come back to the Good Shepherd. We gaze into his eyes filled with love and compassion. We still cannot understand why we go through all that we have to go through, but we marvel with gratitude at this life, a life we did not set up, nor can we control. But we can say "yes" to the One who has indeed set it up, and will finally make all things right.

We can say "yes" to the musical gifts he gives us and the wonder of the community coming together to sing of God's amazing love for us when we could not even know how to love or be loved. We celebrate together because we need one another. We need God.

So listen again this season, to praise the Lord, sing Hallelujah, and he shall reign for ever and ever. Hear him when he encourages you to fall on your knees, to worship, to hear the angels singing, urging us once again to come back to the One who can give us the peace we desperately need, but cannot

give to ourselves. Know the One, worship the One who gives us purpose, meaning, help, wonder and gratitude.

Know the peace of God that passes understanding, and let your hearts and minds be guarded and guided by such peace.

Let us pray.