

“An Altogether Peace” - Luke 1:26-38 - Rev. Jeffrey B. Childs

The sermon series for Advent comes from a study book that Todd Humphrey is using with the 9:30 Sunday School class. It is based on a sermon by John Wesley entitled “An Almost Christian.” He described a person who had an appearance of godliness, but yet lacked the personal relationship with Jesus. Our message today was based on chapter 1 by Magrey R. DeVega.

Imagine you're going on a lengthy car trip on the Interstate. After many long hours behind the wheel, you first see a sign that shows the name of your destination and how many more miles it will take until you get there seeing for the first time that sign with your destination and distance always feels like a twofold message. First, it's good news. It reminds you that every passing mile gets you that much closer to your arrival. Your destination is coming. But it's also sobering news. You aren't there yet.

Likewise, every Advent we have destination and distance signs on the road to the Manger. They say Peace, Hope, Love, Joy. With every passing Sunday we might have the same response: our destination is coming, but boy, oh boy, we have a long way to go. In this message we see the destination and distance sign: “Almost Peace.” It doesn't take much to realize how many miles we have to go before we get to the destination of “An Altogether Peace.”

It should be no wonder that each of the characters in Jesus' birth narrative had very similar struggles the gospels would want to remind us that none of Jesus' closest family and associates had perfect trouble-free lives when he was born that's why for each of them the angels' first message was “Don't be afraid.” Mary, Joseph, and even the shepherd in the field all heard those words.

In his sermon “Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount” John Wesley unpacked the beatitude “Blessed are the peacemakers” by offering a plain spoken no nonsense definition of what it means to be a peacemaker. Wesley's understanding of what it means to be a peacemaker may be summed up in two words: “do good.” As a Boy Scout I learned the motto, “Do a good deed daily.” One a day may be good for vitamins, but not for Wesley, who wrote, “Peacemakers do good all the time, in every way. Doing good, not of one particular kind but good in general, in every possible way; Employing herein all talents of every kind all powers and faculties of body and soul all good fortune interest and reputation desiring only that, when the Lord cometh he may say, “well done, good and faithful servant!”

Jesus said, “My Peace I leave with you.” Peace was Jesus' last gift to his disciples before he died it was not the peace of Rome - *pax Romana* the peace of Christ - *pax Christi*. The peace of Rome simply meant the absence of war. This was done by power and might that defeated other armies or quelled any uprisings. Though it might have been a time of Roman Peace, still Jesus was crucified, and the early Christians were martyred. So, this was the definition of “peace” at the time of Jesus. So, when he made his final plea to his disciples on the night before he died, he told them that the peace he was leaving them was not like Roman peace. He said, “my peace I give to you. I give to you not as the world gives” (John 14:27) Jesus' peace would not be sustained by fear or oppression. It would

not be born of anger or revenge. This peace would not be through the accumulation of power. It would be born of love. Jesus's idea of peace would have been an understanding derived from the Hebrew word *Shalom* which we often translate as peace. But it is much more than that. *Shalom* comes from the word *Shalam* which means to be completed, to be healthy or uninjured, or to keep peace.

Jesus said, “*My peace I give to you.*” By saying this he is offering a part of himself - his peace. He is leaving them a part of who he is as they took them through their troubled times. Remember, Jesus was able to sleep on a boat in the middle of a storm. He showed these disciples how to be calm amid the storms of life and how to settle the waves and wind with just a sink word he was giving them that peace from within himself. Jesus was able to stare death squarely in the eye at the graveside of Lazarus and at the bedside of Jairus' daughter. He spoke a word of comfort to the grieving and a word of hope about the resurrection. Jesus was giving them that kind of peace, that ability to name your grief and acknowledging your loss, and to know that death is not the final word. Do you have that peace in your heart and soul? If not yet, then let's keep moving forward as we follow this Advent journey to see Jesus. Watch for the signs up ahead. *Shalom*, Peace be with you. Alleluia and Amen.

Mary, the Angel Said, Don't Be Afraid

Jeffrey B. Childs 11/21/2024

(Tune: The Wheels on the Bus)

“Mary,” the angel said, “Don't be afraid.”
Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid.
“Mary,” the angel said, “Don't be afraid.”
That wondrous night.

Mary asked the angel, “How can this be?”
How can this be? How can this be?
Mary asked the angel, “How can this be?”
That wondrous night.

“Mary,” the angel said, “God loves you!”
God loves you! God loves you!
“Mary,” the angel said, “God loves you!”
That wondrous night.

Mary told the angel, “Let it be so.”
Let it be so. Let it be so.
Mary told the angel, “Let it be so.”
That wondrous night.