

*... May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing and of you, who are ROCK, REDEEMER, and COMFORTER of us all. Amen.*

The final point of focus within our season of Advent is Peace. And it comes in partnership with a remembering that peace comes with a dawning of Light. Within the prophetic text and the gospel text, light and peace are interconnected.

If you were to seek the definition of ‘Peace’ you would find statements in our western culture dictionaries that reflect an absence of war, conflict, violence, disorder, and the like. However, in Hebrew, peace (*shalom*) means fullness... which, in the words of Frederick Buechner, is ‘having everything you need to be wholly and happily yourself’<sup>1</sup>; in other words, to have a measure of contentment, safety and well-being.

On this week of “peace,” we encounter the prophesy from Isaiah that lays out the qualities of a just and righteous ruler. In Isaiah’s time, the “authority” that rests upon the shoulders of good rulers is dependent upon the “endless,” or substantive, peace that they can provide for their people, where the weak are protected from the strong who may perpetrate violence against them and “lord” privilege over them.

There has been debate about what “child” Isaiah is describing: is this possibly Hezekiah, a descendant of David already born, or a child yet to be born? Or, are these attributes referring to God?

What is certain is the description is in keeping with other instances in Hebrew texts that describe a peace that is not false or one in which people are muzzled and silenced in order to “keep the peace.”

There is no doubt, in the mind of the writer of this Gospel, that Jesus is the fulfillment of this “child” who has come to bring peace. Jesus, the Word, was in the beginning with God and present throughout human history.

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<sup>1</sup> Buechner, Frederick. *Beyond Words*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004. 307.

John's Gospel is written later than all the rest and is meant to inspire people to faith, to see Jesus' story as the origin story from the beginning of time. In short, this gospel is intended that we might 'Believe' in the Light that illuminates Peace.

And so it is logical that Jesus would be described as light—the first act of creation, which begins the establishment of order in the midst of chaos. This light then becomes flesh and makes a home among us, gifting humankind with a well-lit space in that 'house' and a clear vision of the pathways to enlarging the peace—enlarging the houses of God that we create to be inclusive of all people. Jesus even summarizes his identity and mission in the various 'I Am' statements, specifically saying, 'the light of the world' (8:12).

Jesus himself spoke of this peace later in John's gospel, 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid' (14:27). Further, after Jesus' resurrection, appearing to the disciples in the locked room, Jesus says, this: 'Peace be with you. As the Father sent me, so I am sending you' (20:21).

Remember the words Nancy read to us... '*A man named John was sent from God. He came as a witness to testify concerning the light, so that through him everyone would believe in the light. He himself wasn't the light, but his mission was to testify concerning the light' (1:6-8).*

Like John the Baptist, we are to testify to the light—the light that is Jesus and in the way that light shines now in others.

Honestly, in this time of added sadness in the death of our dear sister in Christ, Bonnie, I have witnessed the light of peace in the many expressions of comfort and support; for the Inkman family, for myself, for the church staff and colleagues, and for the congregation.

I witnessed the light of peace offered as I shared the news of the heinous acts of violence and racism against several Churches in DC and a response that was non-violent and full of prophetic witness in the collective prayer vigil in support of these churches.

Where have you witnessed the “light of peace?”

When have shared the light of peace”?

The children sing & sign the song, This little light of Mine...I’m gonna let it shine. Last week the verse asked, ‘Hide it under a bushel? NO! I’m gonna let it shine!’ And today the final verse proclaimed, ‘Let it shine all over the World I’m gonna let it shine. That’s a statement of purpose and mission!

Letting our lights shine is a way of remembering there is hope, there is love, there is joy, and there is peace in the midst of a pandemic.

This is the challenge of our day... to keep shining a light... rooted in love... not letting our light blow out in the midst of difficulty, loss, & grief. ...Let your Light & Hope, Love & Joy Shine as you share Peace with all you meet!

May it be so. So be it. Amen.

Let us join in the Litany of Belief... In times when humanity disappoints,

Perhaps when even our own thoughts and behaviors disappoint, it is an important act to call out, name and claim, the consequences of our wrongs. And in times of distress it is a prophetic act to call out, name and claim, our belief in the promise of PEACE. Let us join together in these statements of belief:

*PASTOR: I believe that humans seem to have a penchant for conflict AND*

***People: I believe that we are capable of learning non-violent ways to negotiate difference.***

*I believe that we have perpetrated deep suffering upon each other AND  
I believe that we can face up to the facts of privilege and work for equity.*

*I believe that our fear has told us that we must “win” in order to survive AND  
I believe that “winning” at the cost of others can be called out and changed.*

*We believe, even when we are discouraged.*

***We believe, that when we are discouraged, raising our voices for justice will offer us peace!***