

Ser20-47 “Be the Peace to Others You Want for Yourself” 12-6-20 **Advent 2**

Theme: “The Good News Gift of Advent: PEACE!”

Scriptures: Isaiah 40:1-11; Ps. 85:1-2, 8-13 & Mark 1:1-8

Advent Candle: PEACE

We just don't ever think about the time of advent, or Christmas or the coming new year without hearing something about hope, peace or joy. For sure, we cannot turn on CNN, MSNBC, or FOX or the evening news or open the morning paper without reports or stories about the challenges, growing each day it seems, of the Pandemic., or news about the wars in Afghanistan, or the political wars still raging about the outcome of the election. It does seem that the more we hear the word, PEACE, the more we realize there is no peace to be had in the world of nation states or even in own communities. Or between battling parties in the political arena. Or squabbles between neighbors.

And so I have to ask: How is it with your peace of mind this morning; in these closing days of 2020? We love to sing the song, *“Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.”* Why? If for no other reason, it makes us feel good and warm and maybe even hopeful. We yearn for peace...in all things, everywhere, and in small things right here in our own small part of the world.

We yearn for the peaceful kingdom we read about in the 11th chapter of the prophet Isaiah: *“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.⁷ The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.”*

But did you hear what Woody Allen says about the lion lying down with the lamb? **Continuing Text:** *“I've always liked 'the lion will lie down with the lamb', but the lamb won't get much sleep.”* – Woody Allen

I love this typically honest Woody Allen quote. Indeed, just as there is no peace, there is no peace of mind. Not even for the lamb, especially for the lamb. For the defenseless, the weak and vulnerable. This is why in Isaiah chapter 40 “words of comfort and images of a God who ‘will gather the lambs

in God's arms" moves us to feel a sense of peace. We love to hear the alto solo aria of "comfort, comfort my people" from Handel's Messiah. Makes us feel warm and at peace.

Even more so, we love to sing "*Let there be peace on earth...*" But do you really pay attention to the lyrics, to the honest challenge of this song? SING: "*let there be peace on earth and LET IT BEGIN WITH ME.*" WITH ME. Not you. Not my first cousin. Not the other person sitting next to me. No. No way. Let it begin with me.

I know as well as anyone that even with our best intentions, we can rob ourselves of this sense of peace when we hold on to guilt about something we've done to another person or hold on to a grudge we have about something another person did to us.

So one of the gifts of good news in Advent comes in our gospel lesson this morning: the gift of repentance. In Mark's gospel John the Baptist is calling us to participation in what God is always desiring for us...repentance: "letting go of those things that make it impossible to us to receive what is always trying to give us...forgiveness and love.

Repentance is not something we demand of one another or that the church as an institution extracts from us. No, it is this wonderful graceful process of letting go of that which prevents us from experiencing the peace that was meant to be.

This beautiful song we wish we could sing today was created out of a personal search of both repentance and for peace of mind of the composer, Jill Jackson. In an interview on an NPR program, *Humankind*, Jackson shared her story: "*When I attempted suicide [in 1944] and I didn't succeed,*" Jill Jackson said, "*I knew for the first time unconditional love—which God is. You are totally loved, totally accepted, just the way you are. In that moment I was not allowed to die, and something happened to me, which is very difficult to explain. I had an eternal moment of truth, in which I knew I was loved, and I knew I was here for a purpose.*"

This realization was followed by years of exploring her spiritual life and her relationship with God. Jackson discovered her love for writing, and began writing songs with Sy Miller after they married in 1949. In 1955, she wrote the lyrics for "Let There Be Peace on Earth" while her husband wrote the melody. The song was introduced at a California retreat to a group of young people who were from a wide variety of religious, ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. The young people had come together for a weeklong experience devoted to developing friendship and understanding through education, discussion and working together. The song's focus on peace and God made it easy to cross many boundaries.

Sy Miller in speaking about the effect of the song said, *"One summer evening in 1955, a group of 180 teenagers of all races and religions, meeting at a workshop high in the California mountains locked arms, formed a circle and sang a song of peace."*

Then in all 50 states at school graduations, PTA meetings, holiday gatherings, Veterans Day, Human Rights Day and United Nations Day. Kiwanis clubs sang it, 4-H clubs, United Auto Workers, the American Legion, the B'nai B'rith and the Congress of Racial Equality, Maoris in New Zealand and Zulus in Africa. The whole world was singing this song of peace. But, there is still not the peace envisioned by Jill Jackson-Miller, much less those 180 young people in the mountain retreat decades ago.

And then we sing: **Let there be peace on earth..."The peace that was meant to be."** What is this peace that was meant to be? What is its source? What does it look like in these days of our lives?

And so we sing: *"Let peace begin with me, Let this be the moment now; With every step I take, Let this be my solemn vow: To take each moment and live each moment In peace eternally. Let there be peace on earth And let it begin with me."* May it be so for you, for you and for you and for you and for me and for all of us in this place in this moment. Indeed let it be so for the world this day. Amen.