

Message: *PUT ON PEACE*

May God's Grace and peace be with you this day!

Happy New Year! It is a new year in the church calendar (year A, Matthew) AND a new season... the season of Advent. Briefly, for those who may be interested, the church has a 3year cycle which features one of the synoptic gospels (Mt, Mk, or Lk); all share passages from John. The church year begins with Advent, moving through seasons of Christmas, Epiphany, Lent, Easter, and Pentecost. Each season is marked by a particular color and theme. Advent is purple or blue and is known as a season of reflection, repentance, preparation, and waiting for the coming of Christ.

In certain seasons, it is common for Churches to provide topical instruction & bible study to augment the on-going biblical instruction. Here at Saint James/Rockland, we are offering just this sort of opportunity, to *Prepare the Way: Cultivating a Heart for God in Advent*, on Wednesdays at Saint James, 1145 am & 5p; and *Under Wraps*, at Rockland on Thursdays, 10am. All groups are open to anyone, books are available, and a journal & a bible are helpful tools to bring.

In addition, each Sunday of Advent will have a core word upon which to reflect and embody. In the coming weeks we will consider are Justice, Fearlessness, and Faithfulness. Now, let us 'put on PEACE'.

Thinking on the word, Peace, for just a moment, we'd probably all like a little bit of 'Peace', after spending time with food & families, wouldn't we? My mother often replied (when asked what do you want, Mom?), 'a little peace and quiet!' Raising 6 kids, of which 4 are boys, peace & quiet was a rare commodity for quite a while.

Peace has come to mean the time when there aren't any wars. But in Hebrew peace, *shalom*, means fullness; in Frederick Buechner's wording 'shalom' means 'having everything you need to be wholly and happily yourself' (*Beyond Words*, 307).

Thinking about Peace in the context of Advent, the coming of Christ, we remember that one of the many names for Jesus is 'Prince of Peace'. With this in mind, let's look to our scriptures for this day from Isaiah 2 & Matthew 24.

First, the book of Isaiah is composed by several persons over a span of 200 hundred years or so. Second, the passage we read today is from First Isaiah (ch 1-23) and presents a view of God as great & powerful, centered from Jerusalem. In fact Jerusalem is a special city and highly favored. Isaiah theologically holds that for all that God's people may do wrong/ in disobedience, God promises to deliver them, for they are loved by God.

In this vision, God serves God's people, settles disputes among the nations, and transforms their ways from war to plentitude,('swords into plows & spears into pruning tools' v4). God's people will learn the ways of God... and we will walk in God's paths.

So in reflection, the questions we must ask are these: how is 'war' being learned today? Who or what are the instructors of 'war'? How might peace be learned/ or taught... within us, in our community, in our family?

In the Matthean text, Jesus has ridden into Jerusalem on a donkey, symbolic of 'coming in Peace'. The passage read is the final apocalyptic teaching. In this text we are reminded to be ready for the return of Christ is unexpected. God's people will be (and should be) doing their everyday tasks...at work in the world.

Who among us hasn't been impacted by a phone call or text message giving a sudden word of news...either positive or tragic. None of us knows what news the next phone call may bring. So Jesus says, be ready... So in reflection, the questions we must ask are these: What must I do to be ready... what do I need to do to have peace in my heart? How can I embody the vision of peace in the world around me... in my community... in my family?

I invite each of us to reflect on the idea of 'putting on Christ', as was read from the Colossians 3 scripture last week, and apply it in this season of Advent... to prepare and cultivate a heart for God. Let us prepare for the God who comes to us unexpectedly, 'under wraps', in swaddling clothes, the Prince of Peace. Let us put on Peace.

May it be so! Amen.

RESPONSE TO WORD & AFFIRMATION FOR ADVENT