

Grace and peace to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ!

This greeting is commonly proclaimed by preachers before they begin a sermon-

It is a simple way to transition from the rest of worship into the proclamation,

it is taken from the epistles of Paul as he addresses various faith communities.

It goes beyond traditional greetings like “hello, or good morning”

It reminds us of the relationship between the speaker or writer and the audience.

It proclaims that the person comes not with hostility,

but in grace and peace.

It also makes clear whose name they come before the group in-

not in their own name, but in Jesus’ name.

And what an appropriate greeting for the 2nd week of Advent when we light the candle of peace.

Earlier in the liturgy we lit the candle of peace,

reminding us that God comes to us in peace.

And also reminding us that peace is something we cling to and look towards.

That despite the reality that our world has not yet experienced this peace, that this peace is a reality in God.

If I had to guess, I would say that peace might be one of the most common things people pray for.

We pray for peace within ourselves,

our homes,

and our communities.

People also take action to help move towards peace in these spaces.

Sometimes it looks like separating ourselves from people and situations that take away from our ability to find inner peace.

We have experienced again marches and protests that demand the lack of peace within systems be confronted.

Peace is not only a state within ourselves,

But it is something that needs an action to attain.

Hear these words from Traci Blackmon who speaks about preparing the Lord's path from the Gospel reading this morning:

“Preparing the Lord's path means challenging systems and structures that we have institutionalized as normal,

but that God condemns as oppressive and crooked.

It means clearing the path of self-aggrandizement,

self-absorption,

and greed to make way for a community where all of creation is valued.”

While this quote may sound a lot like we are in the season of lent instead of advent,

there is an important recognition of repentance from our own selfishness that gives

us the ability to prepare the Lord’s path.

Just like John the Baptist who taught repentance,

Both Traci and John’s proclamation may not bring about the kind of peace that

yogi’s find in their yoga practice,

but it brings the kind of peace that is reflected in the kingdom.

The kind of peace that changes lives,

that confronts corrupt systems,

and that brings about the Kingdom of heaven.

Peace that is not possible without our own ability to repent and in the way that

John describes.

This kind of repentance, “metanoia” in the Greek,

means to literally turn around.

To turn away from the ways we live to serve our own greed or desires.

We are not left here in our baptism through Jesus-

When baptized in the name of the father, son, and holy spirit, we are baptized into a community that is there to support and remind us of the ways we need to turn around.

That we are meant to turn around each day,

That this is a continual process on our journeys here on earth.

This does not mean we have the right as fellow Christians to point the finger at our sibling's sins,

after all when we point fingers there are 3 that point right back.

So here we are, on the second Sunday of Advent,

preparing for the coming of Christ in the form of a baby,

lighting a candle of peace,

and talking about repentance.

Oh yeah, and we are in the midst of a global pandemic where we have lost more people in one day this past week than on September 11th, 2001.

The amount of compounding grief and stress that hangs over us may make peace seem like a completely unattainable and lofty idea.

But peace starts from within.

It begins with the ways we turn from our selfishness daily to live in to the call of our communities.

This does not mean sacrificing all of the things we must do for ourselves and our safety-

but being intentional about what separates us from preparing the way for Christ and what may be a way that we are putting up road blocks.

Listening to the small (and sometimes not so small) voice of God that echoes within us and guides us to this peace.

This is the part of Advent that brings us back to who we are;

People of God waiting for what has been promised throughout our faith story,

A savior who comes not in the form of a warrior in a chariot drawn by horses,

But in the Christ child who comes fragile and, in the mess, and pain of labor.

Who teaches and guides not through force but in parables, healing, and love.

So may we be reminders of peace for ourselves and in our communities.

May we practice this peace in a way that speaks directly to this longing and waiting of advent.

And may we do so in Jesus' name.

Amen.