

## The Paths of Peace

Sunday, December 3, 2021 at The First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

2nd Sunday of Advent, Year C

Luke 2:79 "To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

- *Introduction*

I found this old story about peace that seems appropriate for this day in age. It goes like this: "Long ago a man sought the perfect picture of peace. Not finding one that satisfied, he announced a contest to produce this masterpiece. The challenge stirred the imagination of artists everywhere, and paintings arrived from far and wide. Finally the great day of revelation arrived. The judges uncovered one peaceful scene after another, while the viewers clapped and cheered.

The tensions grew. Only two pictures remained veiled. As a judge pulled the cover from one, a hush fell over the crowd. A mirror-smooth lake reflected lacy, green birches under the soft blush of the evening sky. Along the grassy shore, a flock of sheep grazed undisturbed. Surely this was the winner. The man with the vision uncovered the second painting himself, and the crowd gasped in surprise. Could this be peace? A tumultuous waterfall cascaded down a rocky precipice; the crowd could almost feel its cold, penetrating spray. Stormy-gray clouds threatened to explode with lightning, wind and rain. During the thundering noises and bitter chill, a spindly tree clung to the rocks at the edge of the falls. One of its branches reached out in front of the torrential waters as if foolishly seeking to experience its full power. A little bird had

built a nest in the elbow of that branch. Content and undisturbed in her stormy surroundings, she rested on her eggs. With her eyes closed and her wings ready to cover her little ones, she manifested peace that transcends all earthly turmoil.\*" Jesus, the Scriptures say, is the Prince of Peace. Let's consider that at the end of this famous prophecy by the father of John the Baptist.

- *Set the stage.*

The backstory of the verse we're considering involves Zacharias, the aged priest who was father to John the Baptist. He, like Mary, had met with the archangel Gabriel but Zacharias was struck dumb by the encounter. Eventually, when asked to write his choice to name his son, he wrote, "his name is John", and then was able to speak, and promptly spoke a prophecy so famous that it has its own name, the Benedictus. Though it mentions John, Jesus is the subject of the statement. Our verse for today is the last one, particularly the idea that Jesus will "guide our feet into the way of peace." That begs the question, "how so?" What is this peace like? It seem that there is a peace that is the result of the Presence of God, and peace that is made by peacemakers during the journey through the years.

- *"Peace is the result of the presence of God.*

Verse 78 describes Jesus as the "Dayspring from on high has visited us; to give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death." The image is striking. Travelers in those days did not like to be out on the road at night. Night was

very dark, and it was hard to see and there were robbers who left no witnesses, making the roads at night very dangerous. Those who found themselves out on the road at sunset had to get off the road, find someplace to hide and lay low, and wait until sunrise. The shadow of death was like that darkness, dangerous, scary, and hard to navigate and Christ is like the sunrise which represented security and a clear way home. As people grow in the ways of Christ, they should become more like Him, particularly as expressed in the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-"love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness and self-control. Some get to the point in which the peace of Christ is so strong that the shadow of death does not disturb them. A great example of this was the case of Nicholas Ridley. "In 1555, Nicholas Ridley was burned at the stake because of his witness for Christ. On the night before Ridley's execution, his brother offered to remain with him in the prison chamber to be of assistance and comfort. Nicholas declined the offer and replied that he meant to go to bed and sleep as quietly as ever he did in his life. Because he knew the peace of God, he could rest in the strength of the everlasting arms of his Lord to meet his need."\*\* There is a similar example in Acts 12, Peter was imprisoned, in a situation that could very easily have cost him his life, but he is spared by an angel and released, but the angel had to wake him. Peter was so relaxed that he dozed off in prison. The peace of God is very powerful.

- *"The way of peace" is the way to heaven as peacemakers in a dark world.*

Wonderful examples of God providing a sense of peace to people in difficult situations aside, perhaps another way that the Lord leads us in the paths of peace is to make us peacemakers. Such are among those blessed by Jesus in Matthew 5:9 and are desperately needed in this world full of warfare and strife. Here's an interesting quote: "The Society of International Law, in London, states that during the last 4,000 years there have been only 268 years of peace in spite of good peace treaties. In the last 3 centuries there have been 286 wars on the continent of Europe alone."\*\*\* We cannot take over the role of governments, but we can be peacemakers in our own circles of influence. The ultimate place of peace is heaven, but we can be peacemakers along the way.

- *Application: Look to the Word as you would light in a dark place. Then ask not how much peace you feel, but how much peace others feel around you.*

For an application, ask yourself, or better yet, make it a matter of prayer to examine not how peaceful you feel, but how peaceful do other people feel around you. Are you a good listener, someone who can encourage and comfort people. Can you help sort out miscommunications, which are often the source of conflict? Those are characteristics of peace that the Holy Spirit develops in people on the road to peace.

- *Conclusion*

In conclusion, we read this great prophecy, the Benedictus, given by the Holy Spirit through Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, about Jesus. At the very end he mentioned that

He would lead us in the way of peace. Peace is a characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit, and can be a tremendous comfort in troubled times, but I believe that people led on the way of peace tend to become peacemakers, who are sorely needed in these troubled times.

\*Berit Kjos, A Wardrobe from the King, pp. 45-46.

<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/peace.htm>

\*\*Source Unknown. <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/peace.htm>

\*\*\*J.K. Laney, Marching Orders, p 50.

<http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/peace.htm>