

LESSONS IN ADVENT



Peace in 2020

Hebrews 12:12-16 (NRSV)

Therefore, lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with everyone, and the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled. See to it that no one becomes like Esau, an immoral and godless person, who sold his birthright for a single meal.

Teaching

The second week of Advent, we are taking our focus to peace. We remember that it is the peacemakers who will be called children of God. True peace as found in scripture is not the absence of war and fighting. It's not ignoring conflict and unrighteousness to keep our heads in the sand. True peace is what we find on the other side of working out the conflict, repenting and turning away from unrighteousness, and finding ways to bring forth health, wholeness, justice, and prosperity. It refers to the well-being of a whole person, an entire community, and even the world.

When we seek true peace as we see described by the prophets, lived out in Jesus, and written throughout church history, we see that neither domination nor passivity created peace. Instead, it's an active call to kindness and equality, living out the Gospel, where we are all part of the Kingdom of God, in our everyday lives, no matter the circumstances. When we look at this passage from Hebrews 12, we see characteristics of a true peacemaker.

1. A true peacemaker is inclusive, "pursue peace with everyone." We are not called to make peace with our friends, or people we like, or people who agree with us, or people already in our community. We are called to pursue peace with everyone. When really think about what that means, it's radical. This was originally written to those experiencing persecution from Romans, wrestling with the disappointment that the Kingdom of God didn't arrive the way they thought it would. We are called, just as they were, not to either win or leave, dominate or ignore, overpower or flee in fear. We are called to put aside bitterness and work out our differences, finding peace and unity for everyone through the Holiness of our Lord and Savior.
2. A true peacemaker is holy, this holiness is what gives others the glimpse of the Lord. When we chose to surrender our sin and woundedness to God, we are healed. When we refuse to surrender to God, refuse to admit our brokenness and allow Christ to heal us, we cannot show the holiness of our Savior. If we are holding onto our own sin and refuse to be at peace with ourselves and God, how can we expect to be at peace with those around us? Allowing the presence of Christ to reconcile us with the Creator creates a path for peace that we could not make on our own.
3. A true peacemaker doesn't judge or blame others, "*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled.*" Bitterness comes up when we hold grudges and blame others for the mistakes in our lives and the world. No matter has happened between you and another person, no one is ever 100% to blame. Each of us play a role in how our lives turn out, that's what happens when we have free will. Even if someone is totally to blame for what has happened, there is always a

part we can play to repair the situation. Holding onto bitterness in your heart spreads to others so quickly and easily. It's like when you put too much salt in your food and the bitterness of the salt is all you can taste! You bring your own flavor to your life and the lives of those around you. What flavor you chose to bring to the table will directly influence the way you treat others and others treat you. Being a peacemaker means choosing to let things go, even when it's hard, even if the other doesn't ask for forgiveness. Being a peacemaker means living a life that spreads peace to others and can work towards reconciliation.

Discussion/Reflection

- How is true peace defined by scripture different than the peace found in the world?
- How does it feel to know we are called to make peace with everyone?
- What steps do you need to take in your life to be holy and at peace with yourself and God?
- What can you do to stop the spread of bitterness in your life and the world?
- What is one thing you can do today to be a peacemaker?

Prayer

Prince of Peace, we live in a world of strife and violence. During Advent, we remember your promises of hope and peace. Help us to find peace in our own hearts and work for peace in the world. 1 Amen.

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