**St. Paul’s Lutheran Church
Wildwood, Missouri**

**The Second Sunday of Advent**

**Isaiah 11: 1-10**

**December 8, 2019**

The life of American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was filled with sorrow during the year 1861. First, his wife of many years had tragically died in a fire. Second, what seemed a cruel insult to his already grieving heart was the start of the Civil War. Not only did he see his life being wrenched apart by heartache, but also his nation being wrenched apart by hatred. The war just seemed to be an additional punishment for him. There was no peace in his life or in his homeland.

Two years after the start of the war, Longfellow was once again saddened to hear that his son, a lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac, had been seriously wounded in the war and was near death. On Christmas morning of 1863, he sat down at his desk and heard the bells of the church ringing and ringing. And, with the peal of the bells in the cold air, Longfellow wrote down the words to one of his most famous poems:

*I heard the bells on Christmas day,*

*Their old familiar carols play.*

*And wild and sweet the words repeat,*

*“Of peace on earth, good will to men...”*

Peace. That is what Christmas is all about, isn't it? That’s what we are told each December. It is the season of peace on earth and good will toward men. But, for Longfellow there was no peace. At least there was peace that he could actually see or feel. His wife was dead. His son, who had been sent home because of his wounds, lay dying in a bed upstairs. The nation he loved was at war and was being ripped apart. How many more parents were spending their Christmas Day like him, in mourning or worrying over the fate of their sons fighting this war? It had to be countless. And so, he penned another stanza:

*And in despair I bowed my head;*

*“There is no peace on earth,” I said.*

*“For hate is strong and mocks the song*

*‘Of peace on earth, good will to men...”*

*“For hate is strong and mocks the song, ‘Of peace on earth, good will to men.’”* Every Christmas we are inundated with the message of Christmas, that of “*peace on earth*” and “*good will”* toward men. The “*spirit of Christmas,”* we are told is the *“good feelings”* we have toward one another and somewhere down the road, some reporter, some Hollywood star, someone, will say, *“Wouldn’t it be nice if Christmas would last forever?”*

Longfellow had a more realistic view. He saw the hate in men’s souls. A hatred which mocked and rejected the message of Christmas. He saw men who were not only willing to kill each other, but who were willing to kill each other over the right to enslave a fellow human being. Where is this peace of God he always heard about? Where is this peace of God announced so long ago by the angels who came to shepherds in their fields? Was it even possible to find this peace in a world so filled with malice and hate?

I am sure that the people of Israel at the time of Isaiah wondered where the peace of God was also. They were promised that peace by God however that peace always seemed to elude this small nation in the middle East. God, the Holy One of Israel, Yahweh, with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm rescued his children and brought them to the promised land. His promise for his people was that they would have peace. But, no ordinary peace, they would have *“shalom.”*

Now, most of us have heard the Hebrew word, “*shalom”* before and we have understood that it means, *“peace.”* But, shalom is so much more. Shalom is complete peace. It is a peace with everything and everyone existing in harmony. It is a complete cessation of turmoil and antagonism. It is living in complete well-being, both externally and internally; unmolested by any violence or hatred or any anxiety or angst. It is rest for our souls which are so often in a state of unrest because of sin.

Shalom sounds nice, doesn’t it? It does, however, the problem was that Israel never experienced that peace. However, the fault did not lie with God. No. He did not back out on his promise. The fault laid squarely at the feet of his people who strayed from God. Israel history as the people of God was that of unfaithfulness. Reading the Old Testament we see more times than not examples of what not do than to do. It’s is a history of one faithless act after another. And in their faithlessness toward God, with their abandonment with God, with their embrace of sin, they abandoned true peace. They gave up “*shalom.*” Shalom with their neighbors. Shalom within themselves. Shalom with God.

My dear friends in Christ, I have often said that I am a theological minimalist. I like to boil things down to the simplest explanation. Why is there a lack of shalom in this world? Sin. Sin is really the bottom-line problem. It is our own sins which permits the peace of God to elude us. It is the sinful nature of man which causes strife, turmoil, hatred and yes, even war. Longfellow, recognized this with his poem. Hatred or sin, mocks the peace of God. It takes God’s offer of peace and rejects it, choosing unrest and turmoil over shalom.

The fact of the matter is that every relationship problem we have, whether it is personal, one on one, or global, nation against nation, has the same root cause: sin. Think about it for a moment. Is there really any other cause for war? One nation invades another out of greed. Another nation attacks out of hatred. No matter what you call it, it’s still sin.

However, think about this more personally. Consider for a moment the lack of peace in your own life. What is the bottom-line cause? Think of someone with whom you are displeased or dissatisfied. Shoot, let’s be blunt. Think about someone with whom you are upset or angry or who you hate. What really is the bottom line of the problem? Why is there no peace between you? Sin. It is either theirs or yours and most often both. We often try to justify those feelings, to make believe that our feelings are proper in their indignation. We even go so far as to says we have righteous anger. But that’s wrong. We can call it what we want but it is still sin.

It’s all sin and all of it damning. All of it mocks the peace God offered the world on Christmas Day and all of it is in need of repentance. Isn’t it funny . . . no, isn’t it sad . . . how we choose sin and consequently inflict unrest upon ourselves instead living in peace.

Paul in Romans 7, looking at the human condition, states our problem most clearly, *“O what a wretched man am I! Who will rescue me from this body of death.?”* Who will rescue me, who will rescue us from this body of death? Who will bring us peace? St. Paul goes on and gives us the answer, *“Thanks be to God – through Jesus Christ our Lord!”* And that is the same answer Isaiah gave to the people of Israel. Rescue and peace come through Jesus.

*“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse.”* Jesus Christ is the shoot from the stump of Jesse who would come to bring peace to an out of control, sinful world and to a distressed people. He would come, and as Isaiah tells us, he would be fully equipped for the job to bring peace. The Spirit of the Lord rested upon him without measure. He was filled with divine wisdom and understanding so that he would know the very heart and the very mind of God. He was filled with divine counsel and power to accomplish the saving work he was sent to do. And, he was filled with knowledge and the fear of the Lord so that he would be obedient to God Almighty, the Holy One of Israel, in all things, including, being obedient to death on the cross. And my friends if you want to see the peace of God, if you want to know the peace of God, then look to the cross because you will find it nowhere else.

It is the death of Jesus, the righteous branch of Jesse, which brings us the peace of God. Isaiah, describing the branch of Jesse again in his fifty-third chapter writes, *“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; and the punishment which brought us peace was upon him and by his wounds, we are healed.”* The peace of God is found for us in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God who bore the burden of all of our sins so that God would not punish us as his enemies, but love us as his children. Because God punished his one and only Son, you and I may live in peace knowing that he will not punish us for our sins.

Jesus won for each of us peace with God and that is where true peace begins. To have peace with our fellow man we need to have peace with God first. Jesus has settled that matter with his all-availing sacrifice for sin on the cross and now, we live in that peace which surpasses all understanding right now. It is ours. Christ has assured us of that. Peace with God exists and what flows from that peace is peace with each other. I can forgive much because I have been forgiven much. I can love much because he has loved much. I can look past the faults and sins of others, because he has, for the sake of Jesus, looked past my faults and sins.

We do have that peace now, however, Isaiah tells us there is much more to come. “*The wolf will live with the lamb. The leopard lies down next to the goat. The calf and the lion and the yearling all eat together out of the same manger and a little child shall lead them.”* A child shall lead them as if they were his pets, his play things*. “The cow will feed with the bear....and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on my holy mountain.”* Isaiah pictures the complete reversal of sin. Natural enemies will live in harmony. The world will be as it should be. We shall be as we should be. For you, there will be no more anger between you and your family. There will be no more fighting between husband and wife, there will be no more hatred toward people of other races. There will be no more strife or dissension. There will be no more war. There will be peace and only peace. Someday, for all who believe and trust in Christ our Savior, there will be *“shalom.”*

Dare we picture this sort of world? Yes, because it is the promised peace won for us by our Jesus on the cross who died for our sins and overcame sin, death and the devil. Yes, because it is the hope for all who believe and trust in our Savior, our Redeemer, our Peace, Jesus our Lord. And as people of faith, we cling to this picture because the world around us will continue in sin and unrest until our Lord returns. But, we also announce this peace to everyone until he comes to take us home. We proclaim the message of Christmas that God and man are reconciled through a baby born in a manger and “shalom” is available for all who believe.

And that is exactly what Longfellow did. His poem did not end with that disheartening and discouraging second stanza, he continued:

*Yet pealed the bells more loud and deep;*

*God is not dead, nor doth he sleep.*

*The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,*

*With peace on earth, good will to men.*

We will announce the message of the peace of Christ more loudly and deeply as did the bells on that Christmas Day in 1863. Our God is not dead . . . his is risen, he is risen indeed . . . and although this world is still filled with unrest, he will prevail. He will bring the good work he has begun to completion. He came to bring peace and we will have complete peace both between man and man and God and man, in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Complete peace will be ours, and it will be ours forever. Shalom! In Jesus’ name. Amen.