

## Peace

Welcome to our last Sunday of Advent.

Over the past few weeks we have discussed having Hope in our lives – that there is something greater waiting for us. We discussed having love in our lives for one another in the same way that Christ loves us. We discussed having Joy in our lives when we put our faith in Jesus.

Today we are going to talk about Peace –

We use that word a lot, don't we? People have been wishing for peace in the Middle East for centuries.

For some of us, maybe we have been praying for peace between family members.

For me, sometimes when I hear the word "peace" I think of the hippie movement and I think of "Peace, Man".

A few years ago, before I became a pastor, the pastor of the church I attended always signed his e-mails and letters by writing Peace, and then his name.

I really thought he was just trapped in the 60's because I didn't understand what type of peace he was referring to.

All the types of peace I mentioned earlier are perfectly valid definitions, but they aren't the type of Peace my old pastor was referring to. Today I want to talk about that type of peace - it is a peace that comes over our hearts. The type of peace that can come over our whole body and changes our entire lives.

In society today, we can get worked up over so many different things. For some people, we can get upset at others for little to no reason. Maybe we don't like the way they drive, or the way they eat, or the way brush their teeth.

Maybe we get upset because the way our boss or spouse has been acting. Maybe we get upset because things are changing at our church, or in our home owners associations, and we just don't agree with the changes.

Or possibly we are dealing with the illness or injury of a loved one – or financial difficulties – or possibly more than one of these issues.

In my opinion, finding Peace in our lives today is harder than having hope, showing love, or feeling joy.

In the Old Testament scripture, that Janice read for us earlier, was a message of Hope for the ancient Jews. The Prophet Isaiah told them that someday in the future a virgin will have a holy child that will be the savior.

This message gave the Jews hope and maybe some joy – it even showed the love that God has for mankind. But where is the peace? Knowing that someday Christ would be born doesn't do anything for the here and now.

So let's look at the other scripture that Janice read for us. Here was Joseph, engaged to Mary; they hadn't been together in any romantic way, but all of a sudden, Joseph finds out that Mary is pregnant.

So much for any peace in that relationship.

Being married can be hard enough for couples that have a smooth beginning to their marriage. Finding out your fiancé is pregnant and it isn't your child – that's not what I would call a smooth beginning.

So what was Joseph going to do? He planned on quietly breaking off the engagement. He could have brought the issue up to the elders of the town and even to the religious authority, and Mary could have been punished for committing adultery.

But the Bible tells us Joseph was a good man and didn't want to do that to Mary.

I think we can learn a lesson from Joseph. At this point he thinks Mary did something wrong to him. He thinks Mary cheated on him and got pregnant. As bad as that sounds today, it was 100 times worse back then. Even punishable by death.

So Joseph could have believed that Mary cared so little about him that she found another man. And instead of punishing her for it, he simply decided to break off the engagement quietly.

How many times can we get so upset at someone in our lives for something that's not nearly as serious as infidelity. Maybe we get upset at other drivers because they are going too slow in the fast lane – maybe we get upset at our spouse because they forget to put the seat down on the toilet – maybe we get upset at our parents because they keep trying to help run our lives.

Sometimes we can get so worked up at other people that it just eats us up inside – and we can respond in a very negative way. For some people, they might start looking for revenge. Let's say the president of their Home Owner's Association did something they didn't like, so they drive by his house 5 times a day until they find one weed growing and they take pictures of it and send the pictures to everyone they know – just to get an uprising against him.

It's becoming common in our society today that if we get upset at someone, or our we get our feelings hurt by someone, we may want to lash out and hurt them back. Maybe it isn't anything that seems too severe, but maybe we just try to convince other people that they should be upset at the same person we're are upset with.

Then others start buying into that emotion, they start feeling the same hurt, maybe without even knowing the real reasons our feelings were hurt in the first place. But then they share with someone else, and before long, several people feel betrayed or rejected and possibly start looking for revenge as well – all without knowing the whole story.

Maybe we can all learn something from Joseph – who in the face of something very serious – took the high road and decided not to get upset, decided not to tell everyone he knew, decided not to try to get revenge – but simply decided to move on with his life.

But what would have happened if Joseph did get upset? Let's say he went down to the corner bar, got drunk and started talking to everyone about how Mary cheated on him. How she couldn't wait until they were married so she ended up getting pregnant by some other guy.

Then Joseph's drinking buddies would be so upset they would go home and tell their wives what Mary did to poor Joseph. Their wives would tell their brothers and sisters, and before you knew it, half the town would know how bad Mary was to poor innocent Joseph.

Then Mary would probably be banished to some far away land and we wouldn't have Christmas songs like Little Drummer Boy, Away in the Manger, O Little town of Bethlehem.

All because Joseph didn't know all of the facts. He didn't know what was going on. All because he could have reacted in a negative way – looking for revenge because he felt hurt.

Luckily for Mary, and for us today, Joseph didn't act that way – luckily he thought it through and instead of reacting in a negative manner, he decided to act in an appropriate manner. He decided to take the high road and show grace towards Mary.

Later that night an angel visited him in a dream and told him everything about Mary and the Holy Child she was carrying. That his bride to be was still a virgin – as pure as ever.

How would Joseph had felt if he would had gone out and said bad things about Mary, just to find out that God himself was bringing salvation to the world through this righteous woman?

Joseph showed a type of grace we should all strive for. Even when we think the world around us is falling apart, we shouldn't try to react – we should think through our situation and try to act with as much grace as we can.

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Responding with grace is one way for us to find God's peace in our own lives.

Now it can be hard to respond to other people with grace – but we do have some help.

Inviting Christ into our lives allows us to have the ability to find a new type of peace – a spirit-filled type of peace.

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You know, I talk about praying now and then, and praying should be something more than a couple of words we say before we eat, more than just a couple of words we say before we fall asleep.

To find a new type of peace, we should set aside some time every day to dialogue with God – and open our hearts and minds to focus solely on Him. We should open our hearts up and share our struggles in prayer, and ask for help as we work through these struggles.

Having God in our lives on a daily basis affects how we respond to others when they might not treat us the way we want to be treated, or if they don't agree with our opinions, or if they do something that we think is terrible.

If we keep God in our lives on a daily basis, when someone does something wrong, maybe we can respond with the same type of grace as Joseph did. Even after the angel spoke to Joseph, I am sure he didn't fully understand what was going on, but I am sure he tried to understand. But most of all, he didn't give up on Mary or on God.

During this Christmas season, let's all invite Christ into our lives and pray for a new type of peace to come over us so we can show some of God's grace to others, and maybe drop our own blood pressure by a few points.

Pastor: Mark Maddox  
520- 207-6453  
pastor@umcSanctuary.org  
**www.umcSanctuary.org**