

14 December 2011
Advent 3 Midweek

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church
Greenspring Village, Springfield, VA

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“Peace on Earth?”

Text: Jeremiah 20:1-6; Romans 3:10-18; Luke 2:8-14

Jeremiah should have been pleased. His preaching had done some good. King Josiah was a good king and had enacted many reforms in Israel. There was a revival of religion. God’s Word was again being preached and people were going to church. The false gods had been swept out of the temple and the religious establishment was flourishing again in Jerusalem.

And at the head of that religious establishment was a priest named Pashhur. He was the chief officer of the temple and when you saw him, you felt good. He spoke well. He was always positive. He was enthusiastic and affirming. He always had a word to say to make your day brighter. He was probably the most popular preacher in Jerusalem at that time.

And what Pashhur preached was peace - that everything was alright. We are God’s people. He is working out His purposes in us and He will bless all the people on earth through us. He preached about Moses the liberator, Joshua the conquerer, David the psalmist, and Solomon the wise man, and how God was working things out for them now. So no worries! And you believed Pashhur. You *wanted* to believe Pashhur.

The problem was, *it was was all a sham*. Yes, the temple was now running smoothly again, they had polished up the silver and gold and brass and cleaned everything up, but the people’s hearts hadn’t changed. Sure, it was popular to go to church again, but it was an open secret that all the old fertility rites and false worship were still also going on - they had just been moved out into the country, out of sight. But crime and injustice were getting worse and the people’s hearts were hardening. Perhaps it was even more dangerous now, as the people were being lulled into a false sense of security.

Well, you can be sure Jeremiah wasn’t going to let them get away with that! He continued his preaching of repentance, of *true* reform and revival - not just on the outside, but on the inside. Not just of activity, but of faith. Not just of thoughts, but of deeds. Not just on the Sabbath day, but every day.

And this is Jeremiah’s preaching to us today as well. He’s not going to let you get away with it either! If this is true for you, then repent. If you act one way in church

and another way outside of church, repent. If you look good on the outside but your heart is a cesspool, repent. If your faith is just thoughts and feelings but makes no difference in your life, repent. Jeremiah's goal is to topple us from our pedestals and make you realize: there is no bargaining with God, no shortcuts, no easy ways. There is only one way: the way of the cross. For that is the way of peace.

And so the season of Advent calls us to this way, the way of peace. We have prayed this season: *Stir up our hearts, O God!* Advent is the season to sweep out our hearts and lives; a time not to ignore or cover up the problems and sore spots, but confront and combat them; to repent and confess and receive the forgiveness and life and faith that gives peace. True peace. Real peace. Peace with God, and peace with one another.

And that's significant, especially now, as we draw ever closer to celebrating Christmas. Because if there's one phrase you hear over and over at this time of the year; one thing that people all over the world wish for: it's **peace**. Peace on earth. But for many people, it's a wish that goes unfulfilled or only temporarily fulfilled, because as St. Paul said: ***the way of peace they have not known***; they don't know how to get it or where to find it.

But Jeremiah knows. And as we have been hearing on Sundays, John the Baptist knows. And as we heard tonight, the angels know it, too. And so when Jesus is born, they cannot contain themselves! After the one angel-messenger tells the shepherds that their Saviour is born and where to find Him, all the heavenly host then burst out in joy: ***"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*** Which doesn't mean peace for some and not for others; peace for those who please Him and not for those who don't. No! Jesus comes to give peace to all. Those with whom He is pleased to come and dwell among are the sinners. People like you and me and the people of Jeremiah's day. People who need His forgiveness, who need His peace.

And with His dwelling on earth, there is peace. For Jesus has come to deal with our sin. Not to ignore it, or make it okay, or pretend everything is fine - but to deal with it. To take it upon Himself on the cross so that we have peace in the forgiveness of our sins. That's the only true peace there is. For when you are forgiven, there are no skeletons in your closet that are going to pop out later and get you! No. Jesus' forgiveness is complete and whole. When you're forgiven, you have peace with God.

And so Jeremiah was right: the only path to peace is through repentance. To plunge from that pedestal we like to put ourselves on so we can look down on other people, and acknowledge the truth: that no matter how we look on the outside, there's problems on the inside. Sometimes that's a hard word to hear, and Jeremiah

got put in the stocks for it - and became a laughing-stock to the people! But hard words can be good words, and that was certainly true for Jeremiah. For Jeremiah knew that getting what we want often means missing out on what God wants for us. And that's the only thing truly worthy of our fear.

And what God wants for you is to look to the manger with new eyes, and see there the God who dwells with sinners. To see there the God who loves you so much He came to deal with your sin. To see there the God of life who came to die, so that we who die might have life again. To see there your peace. And then to see how this same God, this same Saviour, this same Jesus is dwelling among us sinners still today. Coming to you in the mangers of His Word and baptism and Supper to give you forgiveness and peace.

And so we pray: Come, Lord Jesus! Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Stir up our hearts, O Lord, and come. Come to us that we may come to you. And in the end, come and take us home. And in the end, that's what Advent is all about. Our Lord is coming to take us home. He is faithful. And He will do it.

Come, Lord Jesus!

In the Name of the Father and of the (+) Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.