

All I want for Christmas is to be free from conflict - Unwrapping Peace

An Advent Sermon by Pastor Rob Hamilton

Delivered on December 5, 2021

Part of the All I want for Christmas... unwrapping the gifts we really need this year.

Colossians 3:12-17 New Revised Standard Version

12 As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Preamble

Hello. I am sorry I haven't introduced myself to those joining us for the first time, yet, I am Rob Hamilton, Senior Pastor here at The United Methodist Church of Geneva where we seek to love God and Neighbor as Jesus commands his followers to do. While we are far from perfect in that pursuit we do wholly lean on the grace of Jesus Christ to forgive our failings and to help us when we aren't strong enough for the journey.

It's our prayer that you encounter that grace of Jesus Christ through our time together today. For our regular worshippers you know this already, but last Sunday we started the season of advent. Advent isn't just a countdown to Christmas. Its a season of intentional waiting and preparing our hearts for the light of Christ to come anew. We cling with hope that Jesus dispels the darkness in our lives and in our world by the power of the Holy Spirit in us, around us, through us and even in spite of us.

This advent season we are focusing on the gifts we really need this year, like how Jesus comes in our despair so that we may live in defiance to despair as those who live with hope. Today, for the second Sunday of advent, we consider how Jesus brings peace in the face of conflict, violence and suffering so that we can be free to be peacemakers. I recognize that peacemaking is a tall order. Not something we can do on our own. It is something we need Jesus to help us with, so before we go any farther, let's turn to Jesus for some help. Please join with me in prayer. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath and set your hands in your lap palms up or arms out and palms up as if you are ready to receive what the Spirit of Jesus might offer us.

Prayer of Illumination

Prince of Peace,

We admit peace is not a natural state of mind or emotional posture for us. Anxiety, proud, scared, self righteous, struggling for control: that sometimes better describes us. Jesus, we are willing to give your way a chance in our lives. To surrender and let go and open ourselves before you. Even if that means giving up all the false securities we hold onto if that means gaining your peace in our lives and in our world. Speak to us through the power of your Holy Spirit through your scriptures and maybe even my words today to that end. Amen.

Sermon

Today, as we unwrap peace and look to Paul's writing to his church in Colossi for a Christian-recipe-of-sorts of peace, I think we need to begin with a definition of peace that is derived from the Scriptures. In the Bible, the Hebrew word for peace is **shalom**, doesn't just mean an absence of war or conflict. In Hebrew it means wholeness. For example, Moses in Exodus 21 & 22 is giving instructions to the people about what to do when someone causes material loss or in the case of theft of property. When that loss or injury occurs, the owner is considered lacking or not complete. The one responsible was to make things right. In the translation of Exodus 21-22, shalom is translated as "make it good", "shall surely pay", "make full restitution" or to "restore". The ancient Hebrew meaning of shalom was "to make something whole". Not just regarding practical restoration of things that were lost or stolen. But with an overall sense of fulness and completeness in mind, body and estate. In Genesis, when Jospheh is the prince of Egypt and his brothers still don't know who he is, Jospheh inquires of his father's shalom, if he all is well with him; if he is whole and the brothers respond he is not because of his grief over Jospheh these many years.¹

In Greek, the language Paul's letter written in, the word for peace (Air - ray- new) **eirēnē**, and it, like the Hebrew word shalom, has a wide range of meanings including the notions of totality or completeness, success, fulfillment, wholeness, harmony, security and well being. So as we can see the peace that comes to us in Jesus is more than the absence of war and feeling secure. **In Jesus, peace is becoming whole.** Having a feeling that all is now complete, fulfilled and there is harmony. I like harmony because that retains difference within unity to make something beautiful, like music.

It's the holidays and getting together with family and friends can be difficult if we lack this kind of peace. Maybe there are people we avoid not just at the holidays because there is brokenness in our relationships. The brokenness often comes from conflict, perhaps that conflict is old and cold or some is it hot and fresh or some its just lurks below the surface and we do a delicate dance or self-medicate to make it through without incident. None of that is the kind of peace we learn about from Paul.

Paul offers us a prescription to unwrap peace in our lives, but I'll be the first to admit it takes a lot of courage to open this gift. We heard it read earlier, Paul tells us to "*clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. 13 Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.*" I mean who wants to do that. If we have to be compassionate, mean,

¹ https://firmisrael.org/learn/the-meaning-of-shalom/?gclid=CjwKCAiAv_KMBhAzEiwAs-rX1Br5F2yD0zzPUMroM9rbZ4xyC8_S4KRiCW7XKbZ_P5k92bZtA-erLBoCLOYQAvD_BwE

humble, kind, patient and forgiving... it's easier to keep fanning the flames of animosity and strife right? Let the fire of conflict keep consuming us and keeping us from peace.

But maybe this is the year, Jesus calls us to be courageous and try to change ourselves, because we can't change anyone else. Maybe the bells of Christmas ring and ring, because the world demands peace and we need to hear that echoing reminder that all is not well with us but God wants it to be well with us, **God wants the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts.**

How do we answer this call? How do we let the Spirit start the long, courageous and difficult work of unwrapping peace in our lives? Well, forgiveness, compassion, kindness, meekness, humility, and patience need to take the forefront in our lives and Debbie Baigrie's story is one such illustration of how this actually gets played out in real life. Let's Watch ([Play video](#)).² *An article related to the story in the video is attached for those who cannot play a video.*

The trauma or conflict in our lives might not match what transpired between Debbie and Ian. If we're the victims we might not have had enough healing to receive an apology; if we are the one in the wrong we might not be aware enough to realize how wrong we are. It takes the right timing to find peace. To put on all that Paul describes and to seek forgiveness and make it right... but until we let Jesus's Spirit start the healing work in our lives, the peace of Christ will find it very difficult to rule in our hearts.

I suspect some hearing this message are very uncomfortable right now. I've touched a sore spot and I am sorry for that. I do not mean any harm. I also know that pretending there is peace, when things aren't all right is not doing any good.

So this week and this Advent and Christmas season, I pray for you, for me, for all of us that Jesus' gentle, compassionate love might help us unwrap the peace we really need and let peace truly come in to us and on earth this season. Amen.

² <https://www.upworthy.com/when-he-was-13-he-shot-her-in-the-face-20-years-later-she-helped-get-him-his-freedom>