

**Sunday, December 6, 2020**

**Sermon: “Advent: Advent is a Protest Movement”**

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**Clackamas United Church of Christ**

*Today we light the Advent candle of Peace. Advent peace is not a passive sitting back and letting things happen. No. Advent peace is a protest. It proclaims that things are not right. And it works to make things right. Everyone is welcome at Clackamas United Church of Christ. So we invite everyone to come and join the protest movement that is the Good News of Jesus Christ.*

Today we lit the Advent Candle of Peace. Peace is something that we all want. Peace with our neighbors, peace with ourselves, peace with God, peace with those living on the other side of the world. Peace seems like such a scarcity these days and the Gospel, I hope, has a message of peace for us today.

I want to highlight a few things from our Gospel passage that I think are interesting and important. We call Jesus the Prince of Peace and I believe that he is the Prince of Peace, but there are a few things about peace that we need to know. I want to start off by quoting the very first verse from the Gospel of Mark, it says this, “The beginning of the good news, the gospel of Jesus Christ, the son of God.” We could spend hours talking about this one verse and what it means but I just want to highlight a few things. We gloss over these passages not realizing how the original audience would hear this.

The first word that comes to mind is the good news which in Greek is Evangelion. The evangelistic message of good news is reported here. If you heard this during the first century, you would know that the good news, the Gospel, was not something that Christians originated but actually the Roman Empire originated. The Gospel, according to the Roman Empire was also a Gospel that was said to bring peace. This is the pax romana, the peace of Rome. And how did the Roman Empire spread peace through the sword? By defeating their enemies, by killing people who disagreed with them, by destroying cities that got in their way. The good news according to Caesar, according to the emperor, was bad news for anyone who got in his way. You see, Rome tried to create peace through violence. Jesus creates peace through love and non-violence. Jesus wants us to have a peaceful world but we have to be honest that Jesus does not make peace with the ways of violence. He does not sit back and say, “Yes, you can go ahead and kill people in order to create your peace.” The peace of Christ does not work that way. The peace of Christ is based on loving your enemies, not killing them.

Here we have another phrase - Son of God. Who, in the ancient world, was called the Son of God? Jesus and also the Roman Emperor. What this phrase means is if you want to know what God is like in the world, look to the one that we call the Son of God. And if you wanted to know what the Roman Empire thought was God in the world, they would say look to the one who creates peace through violence.

The early Christians said, “No, if you want to know what peace truly is, you want to know who the Son of God really is, if you really want to know what God is like in the world, don't look to the Emperor, look to Jesus. The true son of God who is not a God of power and might over and against others but a God who welcomes people into the realm of God, the realm of peace, yes, but a piece that is based on justice and love for all people.

You see here right in the beginning you have two different ways and I would call this a protest movement. You can call it whatever you would like. It is an alternative way of being in the world because the way of Rome is not just a first century way of life. It continues with us today. Bill offered prayers that we would stop going to war and spend that money helping one another here. And I would add helping one another throughout the world, helping our friends off in other countries. We could spend that money in so many other ways and make the world a more peaceful place.

Just to continue this line of thought, a little bit about this protest movement, we have John the Baptist who goes out into the wilderness to baptize people for the forgiveness of sins. Why is this significant? We often forget that John the Baptist's father was a priest in the temple. John the Baptist was part of a family of priests. His ancestors were priests in the temple. John the Baptist as he grew up his parents probably wanted him to be in that line of priests who go to the temple, who wears the correct religious garb and says all the right things and does the temple stuff. He could have had a very nice life, a very comfort life full of comfort and some wealth. Instead, John the Baptist sees that the temple system of his day become corrupt.

In a very Jewish way of life, he sees that, like the prophets before him, that the temple was not a place for all people but for those who could afford it. God's forgiveness at the temple was based on you purchasing an animal to sacrifice. So you could be forgiven if you had the money to do it. John the Baptist says this goes against our Jewish religion because in our religion, God's love and forgiveness is for all people. And so, Don, protests against the temple establishment and he takes this show on the road out in the wilderness and you'll notice that all people from Jerusalem and the countryside are invited to come. If you were rich, you were invited to come, if you were poor you were invited to come. There were no economic class distinctions. Everyone was welcome to come and participate in this way of life. It was about forgiveness that was about love and compassion here's one other thing that I want to point out, John was wearing hair which we think is weird because it is John here in the wilderness is not wearing priestly robe traditional priestly robe but camel hair. Why is this significant? Well because camels are unclean animals, John here wraps himself in ritual uncleanness. He says, "I don't care about the ancient laws that divide the world up into clean and unclean." In fact, John says, "I'm going to take all uncleanness upon myself in order to identify with everybody else who has been labeled unclean. In order to take that way of dividing the world up into good and bad, clean, gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual. I'm going to take all of those ways that we categorize one another that lead us to say who is included and who is excluded and we're not going to play by those rules anymore. Why? Because everybody is welcome here in this place in the realm of God.

This is a protest movement against the ways that the world generally tends to work but it is not merely a protest movement just to corporate. John is also fulfilling what the temple was supposed to be – a house of prayer and forgiveness and justice and love for all people. And so, as we continue this Advent season, may we continue to live into that way of life set forth by John the Baptist and lived into by Jesus. May we continue to say no to those parts of our world, those parts of our countries that harm and marginalize others. May we know that religion in its best form in its true form is not about dividing us against them, it's not about clean and unclean, it is about everyone being invited to the table of God. Amen