**Sunday, December 4, 2016, the Second Sunday of Advent**

**Announcements**

**Lighting the Candles (Peace)**

We light these candles as a sign of the coming light of Christ.

**In Christ there is life and light for all people.**

Now lift up your heads and rejoice: your redeemer is drawing near.

Prepare the way of the Holy One! All flesh will see the salvation of God.

**Glory to God in the highest, and peace to God’s people on earth!**

**Opening Prayer**

Holy Trinity, work among us today your

Peace, your fellowship, your cooperation.

Work among us your healing, your love and your joy.

Work in us hope that as we are renewed in worship today,

Partaking of your presence in the bread and juice,

We are strengthened for the new day that dawns with your birth.

In Jesus Christ we pray,

Amen.

**Confessional Prayer**

**God of Truth and Justice, you do not judge humanity by its appearance. But we do.
We are a superficial people, seeing only what we want to see, hearing what we want to hear.
We have little patience for events that puzzle us, little practice with the search for deep answers.
Yet you call us to be people who do what is right, no matter how long the journey.
Have mercy on us when we defend our half-baked opinions with all our strength
instead of seeking the wisdom that comes from you.
Have mercy on us when reduce our neighbors to our idea of who they are,
without seeking to know them first.
Give us the humility that leads to peace. (silence) Amen.**

**Isaiah 11:1-10 (West side – italics, East side – boldface text)**

*A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
          and a branch shall grow out of his roots.***The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him,
          the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
          the spirit of counsel and might,
          the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.***His delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.*

*He shall not judge by what his eyes see,
          or decide by what his ears hear;
but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,
          and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;***he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,
          and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.***Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist,
          and faithfulness the belt around his loins.*

**The wolf shall live with the lamb,
          the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
     the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
          and a little child shall lead them.**

*The cow and the bear shall graze,
          their young shall lie down together;
          and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.***The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
          and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.***They will not hurt or destroy
          on all my holy mountain;
     for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
          as the waters cover the sea.*

**On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.**

**Time out for Teaching: How to Wait for Jesus**

Christmas Eve is an agonizing time for children. In our house, we weren’t allowed to open any presents at all until Christmas morning, although my brother and I tried to persuade our parents, “But other kids get to open at least one present the night before!” So, our mom and dad would suggest that maybe we should leave out the cookies and milk for Santa and go to bed early, because Santa won’t come until we go to bed. Of course, that meant we were up at the crack of dawn!

Advent is not about going to sleep so Christmas will come sooner however. It is about being awake and alert, using this time wisely to prepare our hearts for Jesus’ birth. Unfortunately sometimes we only use this time to distract ourselves with all the busyness of the season, another way to “sleep” until the special day.

Maybe instead, meditate on the meaning of these Advent candles. Last week, we lit the candle of Hope. Today, the candle of Peace. Next two weeks it will be Joy and then Love. Hope, peace, Joy and Love are all gifts from God that this world needs much more of? Perhaps it is incumbent on us that we share those gifts during this time of waiting.

The holy Hindu man who championed the rights of the poor in India, Mahatma Gandhi, is credited with this phrase: “Be the change you want to see in the world.”

What he means is this: you want peace in the world, be peaceful. So, stay awake and alert during Advent, and you will see small and big ways to be those gifts of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love. And when you see them elsewhere, point them out.

**Matthew 3:1-12**

1In those days John the Baptist appeared in the wilderness of Judea, proclaiming, 2“Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” 3This is the one of whom the prophet Isaiah spoke when he said,
     “The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:
     ‘Prepare the way of the Lord,
          make his paths straight.’”
4Now John wore clothing of camel’s hair with a leather belt around his waist, and his food was locusts and wild honey. 5Then the people of Jerusalem and all Judea were going out to him, and all the region along the Jordan, 6and they were baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins.

7But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?8Bear fruit worthy of repentance. 9Do not presume to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our ancestor’; for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham. 10Even now the ax is lying at the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

11“I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. 12His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.”

**Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19**

1   Give the king your justice, O God,
          and your righteousness to a king’s son.
2   May he judge your people with righteousness,
          and your poor with justice.
3   May the mountains yield prosperity for the people,
          and the hills, in righteousness.
4   May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
          give deliverance to the needy,
          and crush the oppressor.
5   May he live while the sun endures,
          and as long as the moon, throughout all generations.
6   May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass,
          like showers that water the earth.
7   In his days may righteousness flourish
     and peace abound, until the moon is no more.

18   Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel,
          who alone does wondrous things.
19   Blessed be his glorious name forever;
          may his glory fill the whole earth. Amen and Amen.

**Sermon: “Island of Misfits”**

 Every year millions of people sit down to watch “Rudolph.” I never did see it growing up. I think it was in direct competition with the “Charlie Brown Christmas” and in our house, Charlie Brown rules. One of the more interesting parts of “Rudolph” is when he and his friends land on the Island of Misfit Toys. And Rudolph and his friends discover a new kinship with these poor toys who nobody seems to want. A train with square wheels. A lonesome doll. They all have a special song they sing together, “We are Misfits, Misfits, Misfits…!” It’s kind of sad, but at least they are together in their loneliness.

 We can all relate to that terrible feeling of not fitting in. Some of us eventually rebel against it, growing very proud that we DON’T fit in. But deep down, I believe, we all have a need to fit in somewhere, so that we can find some peace. For feeling as if we fit in nowhere gives us no peace.

 That is why church is so important. Romans reminds us not to be conformed to the world but to allow ourselves to be transformed by our knowledge of Jesus Christ. We are brought up to believe that we are in the world, but not of the world. So being church gives us a place to belong, as we seek to live out our lives as misfits out there beyond these church walls. For we believe in a God whose name is Love, a Lord of Lords we call the Prince of Peace, a king who laid down his life for his kingdom. A faith like does not fit but is trying to win with love!

 John the Baptist shows up in our Gospel reading today, definitely looking like a misfit, stirring the pot, calling for repentance, calling the Pharisees and Sadducees a “brood of vipers!” You and I know the story of his remarkable birth, paralleling the remarkable birth of his cousin, Jesus. He disappears from the Scriptures for several years, but returns now, all grown up. There is archeological speculation that perhaps John was living in isolated religious group, a group similar to those who had the Dead Sea Scrolls, where he lived a nearly monastic life, separate from society. But now, wherever he has been, he barges back into society, a misfit with a message. His message is about peace, but not the kind of peace that comes from trying to conform to the world. His message is about the kind of peace only God gives when we have done what we must to be square with God. Repent, he says. Prepare the way for the Lord.

 The kind of peace is not very peaceful to those who refuse to humble themselves before God. But for those who do, they can find a deep peace that only God gives. A peace of knowing that God has forgiven them, that God loves us so. This kind of peace isn’t an uncomfortable one, nor one that forces us to sit and wait in anxious silence. God’s peace is a peace of repentance, a settled stated of freedom to be who God made us to be.

That kind of a peace, frees us to be the people, misfits even, that God created us to be. It means that you may be a weird person. You may feel frustrated because you have bad knees or mental lapses. You may be very sad and grieving and out of sync with the holiday season. You may feel like a misfit. And God grants you forgiveness, offers His love and promises peace. You are free to be those things and more. It’s okay to be who you are, and who God plans for you to become. That peace that comes from God is not just for ourselves but to be shared. Even if we’re misfits we can still give others the gift of peace, for it is Jesus Christ himself, alive through our words and works.

Jesus was born into this world, not to give us good ideas so we can say, “Well isn’t that nice?” and “What a beautiful thought.” He was born a baby in a manger, to show that God is in this world with us, even in smallness, vulnerability and weakness. So that in our own smallness and weakness we are able to find acceptance with God, and let others see that same Good News. It is to make real God’s plans to bring peace and hope to all the world. We can be vessels of peace, misfits with a message, who point the way to Jesus. The peace God gives is not of this world, but it is the peace the world needs. So let God fill you and use you for his peace. Amen.

**Service of Holy Communion**

**Invitation**

Jesus offers an invitation we all need to hear:
“Let the little children come to me…”
Let the humble, the meek, the ignored come.
Let the noisy, the misbehaving, the boisterous come.
Let the ones who ask the hard questions come.
Let the ones who trust in ways we cannot understand come.
Let all come to the table,
“…and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs.”
It is to us, my friends, that the kingdom of God belongs.
All are welcome at this table.

**Prayer of Thanksgiving**

The Lord be with you.
**And also with you.**
Lift up your hearts.
**We lift them up to the Lord.**
Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
**It is right to give our thanks and praise.**

We thank you and praise you, God of mercy,
for you offer us refuge in times of trouble.
Your Spirit swoops low over turmoil and chaos,
and creation emerges from the shadow of her wings.
O Most High, you call forth a people
to bear your promise,
and despite our wandering, your maintain your covenant.

Your Word descends from heaven for our salvation,
to confound the powers of sin that trample upon us,
and to lead us forth into the fullness of your faithful love.
You Holy One endured suffering
and descended into the very pit of death,
so that death itself may be defeated.

Therefore we exalt you above all things, O God,
and we join all the saints who sing to your glory:

**Holy, holy, holy…**

Holy are you, O Lord,
and blessed is Jesus Christ, the Risen One,
on whom our hearts are forever fixed.

Through this meal, we join in the great melody of your praise.
Pour out your Holy Spirit upon this bread and this cup,
so that this meal might awaken our hearts once more
and help us shine with the rising light of your kingdom.

Join us with Jesus Christ and all your faithful ones,
so we might confess you in all that we do
and sing praise to you in all circumstances.
We praise you for your loving-kindness that is greater than the heavens,
and your faithfulness that reaches beyond all our understanding.
We lift up those who are broken this day and this season:

Rev. Harold Armstrong’s family in their loss

Wilford Gallegos

Reagan Kenyon

Be exalted, O Most High God,
in the glorious name of Jesus Christ,
in whom we pray, saying:

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**Distribution of the Elements**

**Prayer after Communion**

You are the bread of life, staff of all Creation.

Mighty God, you are the peace that surpasses all understanding.

You have fed us time and time again, and feed us again today with these gifts of bread and juice.

Remind us that it is through you and in you we all live.

Strengthen us for your service. In Christ our Savior.

Amen.