

Sermon Notes: December 6, 2020*“The Christmas Gift of Peace”*

(John 14:25-27, Luke 2)

I heard about a lady that found a genie lamp. She rubbed the lamp and out popped a genie. The lady said, “Can I have my three wishes?” The genie looked at her and said, “I’m sorry but I’m only a one-wish genie. What do you want?” The lady said, “Do you see that map over there? I want you to end all fighting in the Middle East and I want peace in the world.” The genie shook her head and said, “Ma’am, those countries have been fighting for thousands of years. That’s a little out of my pay-grade. I’m not that good. What else do you want?” The lady said, “Well, I want a good man - one who loves children, likes to cook, enjoys house cleaning, and hates sports.” The genie shook her head, sighed, and said, “Where did you say that map was?”

We all want peace, don’t we? We want peace in our hearts, in our lives, in our country, and in our world. Sometimes it is hard to find and it feels elusive. When I was in high school, there was a lot of turmoil in our family at home. My mother had died; my father was sick all through my teenage years, and we were always fussing and arguing in the house about money. (You know money can be tight when there is sickness, death, and hospitalizations in the family.) My father was not able to work, so my brother and I went to work. We gave the money we made to our father to help with bills and things around the house. Every time we turned around, something was wrong - the washing machine broke down, the car needed a carburetor, the truck needed a new battery, etc. There was a lot of fussing and arguing and not much peace to be found. I worked at a general store called Wood’s 5 and 10 after school and on weekends. My boss at work came to us employees one day and asked if anybody would be willing to work at night to help put up stock. I want you to know that I volunteered to put up stock for free because I wanted to get away from home. I saw it as my escape to find a few hours of peace - and I’d rather go work than be at home in all that turmoil. We all want peace in our lives, don’t we?

The peace that Christ came to give us is internal and relational. It is a gift that God gives us because of who Jesus is. Did you notice in the gospel lesson it says, “In the city of David... is born a Savior - the Son of God - the Messiah”? A Savior. Now they understood a Savior to be “a Deliverer,” somebody who delivered you from disease, danger, and human predicaments. Jesus was called the “Universal Deliverer” - the one who would save you from death, sin, evil, and corruption. ***He came to bring us peace, reconciliation with God, with ourselves, and with one another. Peace is a by-product of God’s grace at work in our lives. “Peace” in the Hebrew-sense and in our understanding is more about our relationship with God and with one another.*** Jesus came to bring us reconciliation with God, ourselves, and others. He was going to live, die, and be resurrected for the sins of the world. He was going to overcome our sins and our death and pay the price for us. He came to bring peace for our troubled, sinful souls.

Some of you remember the late Natalie Cole. She died about five or six years ago. Natalie Cole had a song called, “My Grown-Up Christmas List.” In that song, she says these words, “That lives will not be torn apart, that war will never start, that time will heal the heart, that right will always win, and love will never end. This is my life-long dream, my grown-up Christmas list.” She was talking about peace in our hearts and peace in the world. We all want it, don’t we?

Thomas Merton, the late American Trappist monk, theologian and writer said these words, “Man does not have peace with others because he’s not at peace with himself - and he’s not at peace with himself because he’s not at peace with God.” Peace comes in our relationship with God - having a relationship with Him. Jesus came to reconcile us; therefore, that peace is a by-product of God’s grace at work in our lives and it grows in us. In Galatians 5:22-23 it says, “The fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, and patience.” In Romans 5:21, the Apostle Paul said, “Since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through Christ.” So the peace that we want comes from our relationship with Jesus Christ. He is our Savior. He is our Deliverer.

When I was a young child my uncle did and said something very wrong to myself and another of my cousins. I had a hard time forgiving him. He died when I was about 19 years old and I remember standing at his graveside and praying, "Lord, please, help me to let go of this unforgiveness and bitterness because I am not at peace with you and I need to make peace about it." It wasn't until I turned it back over to God and God helped me to let go of the hurt and anger that I felt toward my uncle that I felt peace in my soul. God wants us to know peace with Him and peace with one another. Jesus Christ is the one who came to reconcile us with God and others.

There's a story Dr. Hugh Litchfield tells about his 4-year old son. They had gone shopping on the Saturday before Christmas to get his wife's present. Can you imagine going the day before Christmas to get a present? He said he went to Belk's in the mall and his son was with him. He told his son to stand still and stay close to him or he would get lost in all this crowd. Dr. Litchfield started talking to the clerk about the gift. He paid for the gift and had the clerk wrap the gift. All of a sudden, he looked down and his little son was gone. He started panicking. He ran to the candy department, the toy department, and everywhere he could think to find his son, but he can't find him in that crowd. When he's almost stressed to the limit, he hears a voice on the loudspeaker in the store say, "If you've lost a child, he's at customer service. Please come to the front desk." Dr. Litchfield takes off toward the desk and before he even gets there, the son sees him, runs toward him, jumps in his arms, and embraces his dad. I want you to think about something: The boy was lost and his father was looking for him. The man at the loud speaker was the one who reconciled that father and son. He brought them together. Jesus is the one who brings us - reconciles us - to God, the Father.

I want you to notice something else: Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God." We are called to be peacemakers. I don't know about you, but sometimes we have people in our family that we don't want to get-together with - maybe they've said something or did something that hurt us, our family, our

parent, etc. – and we’re upset with them. Sometimes we’re disenfranchised or alienated or estranged from someone at work, at school, at church, or in our family. We need to try to make it right. We can only do that with the help of Christ. The Apostle Paul in Romans 12:18 said, “As far as it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.” Remember Jesus said, “Love your enemies. Do good to those who hurt you. Pray for those who persecute you.”

Jesus came to give us peace – one of the greatest gifts He could give – His love, His peace, His joy, His hope. Peace with Him, with ourselves, and with each other.

Do any of you know George Frederick Handel, the great composer who wrote “Handel’s Messiah”? At a particular time in his life, Handel had been born in Germany – but went to live in London, England. He lived there for years and wrote operas and anthems. He composed “Handel’s Messiah.” But before he composed this beloved piece of music, he went through a terrible time in his life. He had a stroke or a nervous breakdown or something: many are not sure what happened. But, his health was deteriorating; his eyesight was failing. He was despairing and cut himself off from others. He had lost his creativity and wasn’t making money. He felt hopeless, miserable, helpless. One day a friend talked to Handel about Jesus Christ and how Jesus could give him peace and hope. Handel began to read the Bible and pray. He asked Jesus into his heart and life. As the weeks went by, Handel’s despair turned to hope, his fear turned into courage, and his emptiness was filled with creativity. One day he picked up his pen and paper and began to compose the words of what became one of his greatest pieces of music, “Handel’s Messiah.” You see, George Frederic Handel, found peace with God and with himself.

Do you ever notice that when a kid is small, many of them carry a security blanket? It may be a pillow, a stuffed toy, a pillow, or a blanket. They carry that security blanket wherever they go – to bed, on vacation, to the grandparents’ house, etc. Psychologists call these things “comfort objects” and children feel a sense of peace – safe and secure when they hold onto this object, no matter what’s going on in their lives.

Jesus, in our hearts and minds, gives us peace. Isaiah the prophet in Isaiah 26:3 said, “He will keep you in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusts in God.” Often we focus on our problems and the difficult people in our lives instead of focusing on Jesus. There isn’t anything you and God together can’t handle.

Do you want to have peace in your life? It begins with knowing Jesus in your heart. Jesus also calls us to be peacemakers - to share the peace - to be instruments of his peace. There may be someone to whom you feel estranged or alienated from. It may be this Christmas will be a time you can pray and ask God’s help, and make contact with that person and make peace, healing and reconciliation. May you know the One who is the giver of Peace and may you seek to be instruments of His peace this Christmas and throughout the year. Amen.