

December 1, 2019

Matthew 24:44

John 14:21

Awed and Odd: "Peace in the Midst of Conflict"

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For the next five weeks, our focus will be on being "Awed and Odd" as we prepare for and then come to celebrate the birth of Jesus.

Let's begin with the "awed" part for just a moment. Scripture at this time of year encourages us to 'keep awake". To keep awake is to open our eyes in awe at the works of the Holy in our midst, and to the promises of God to continually make all things new.

And yet, being awed is just half of the work this Advent, the other half is about "being odd". Odd in that we focus on peace, love, joy, hope, presence, and praise in the midst of conflict, hate, despair, hopelessness, loneliness, and suffering.

On this, the first Sunday of Advent, we are both awed and odd when it comes to peace in the midst of conflict. Awed by the simple fact that God can give us a sense and experience of the Holy even in the midst of conflict. We can have that feeling that everything is going to be okay, even when it not okay at that moment. We can have the deep down knowledge that God has got this even though it looks like a mess that will never be right.

The definition of peace is: freedom from disturbance, a state in which there is no war or a war has ended. Yet, the Bible does not have the same definition of peace. Rather, we are odd as

Christians because we can have peace amidst disturbances, conflicts, and even war.

I thought it might be interesting to check online on what some say are ways we can obtain peace. First, someone said, "It all starts with you" (notice I did not say you and God). Others suggest one can obtain peace by taking a walk in nature, slowing down, trying a relaxation technique, or not making a mountain out of a molehill.

Don't know about you, but my troubles, and those of others I know, and troubles in other parts of the universe cannot be made to quickly go away by a walk in the woods, or deep breathing ten times, or moving more slowly or saying it is not more than a molehill when it truly is a mountain.

I don't know about you, but I need more than all that if I am going to be able to handle, much less respond to the periodic tragedy, crisis, and ugliness that ends up on my lap, as well as what is thrust into all our laps from a world that has more than an occasional conflict.

The Bible really only makes one recommendation on how you and I and even our world can have peace. And that is, peace comes from having a relationship with God. Scripture reminds us in Romans 5:1 "that we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Yet, scripture also talks about not just peace with God, but the peace of God. The peace of God transcends all understanding is the harmony of body, mind, and spirit that supersedes earthly circumstances.

The peace of God can be described as a tranquil state of appreciation and faith when we submit to and trust the commandments, will, and plan of God. Peace does not come from the absence of danger, but from the reality of the presence of God.

What must we do to have the peace of God? First, we must have humility. Trusting that God has the best plan as opposed to our plan and that God's way of doing things is better than our way of doing things. We must not only have humility, we must also have courage in order to experience God's peace. Courage to trust that God knows best, and that God will be faithful to what God has promised. Courage is believing God makes all things work together for our good (Romans 8:28) and that God's purposes will be achieved (Psalm 33:11).

Peace comes from not only being in a right relationship with God, but also having right relationship with all others. The Bible refers to this as "righteousness"; that of having a right relationship with God, others, and even the earth.

Online advice about relationships suggests: do what you need to do for you. And yet, what makes us odd is that we are to see ourselves not as the one and only, but to live in such a way that we consider every move we make on how it will impact others.

The second suggestion about having a good relationship is to pick your battles. As odd people, we are told not to ever start a battle, and when we find one to seek to bring peace to that battle, and in so doing only carry the weapons of forgiveness and unconditional love as our arsenal.

We are called to be peacemakers. The Hebrew words for peace is shalom and it means: harmony, wholeness, prosperity, and

welfare. So, how do we do become peacemakers, sharing the peace we have received from God?

- First, we pray fervently that God will give us discernment and compassion. Be a peacemaker is possible, if we realize making peace does not depend on us, but on God, and that we come to it from a place of peace within ourselves given to us by God.
- Then, as peacemakers we are to listen lovingly. Giving validity to someone's experience can build bridges. Peacemakers want to understand.
- Peacemakers also put forth trust in every relationship and are seen and experienced as trustworthy. In other words, peacemakers have integrity.
- Peacemakers are not the same as peacekeepers. Peacemakers identify and address conflict, not sweep it under the rug.
- Peacemakers work toward resolution. In other words, do what you can. Do your best. Then trust God with the outcome. Continue to pray. And keep an open heart and mind.
- Lastly, rinse and repeat. Peace does not arrive and stay for all time. Rather, it comes and goes and thus it requires us to stay committed to be peacemakers for the long haul with all those around us.

Let me end with this, peace in the Bible is always based on justice and righteousness. Where justice prevails and righteousness rules, there you will also have peace. But without those two virtues, lasting peace is not possible.

Therefore, let us enjoy the peace we have with God and let us also be people who produce right relationships and justice in every sphere of our life.

