

Mooretown Presbyterian Churches
December 4, 2022
Second Sunday of Advent: Peace



God calls us to worship

Advent reading and candle lighting (*Insert*)

Song: **A candle is burning, a candle of peace,
a candle to signal that conflict must cease.
For Jesus is coming to show us the way,
a message of peace humbly laid in the hay.**

We respond in praise, confession, and supplication

Prayer of Praise:

Father of wisdom and understanding,
of peace and promise,
you are the giver of life.
You have welcomed us as your children,
and called us to live out your image with hospitality toward each other.
Jesus Christ, you offer us living water
to wash away our sin and sorrow,
and call us back to paths of justice and righteousness.
Holy Spirit, you baptize us for service and life in community,
refreshing us each day with your presence and purpose.
Glory and honour and praise be yours,
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit –
one God now and forever –
Amen.

Prayer of Confession (Unison):

**God peace and promise,
we confess that we have taken your commitment to us for granted.
We assume what we do is acceptable to you,
yet we judge others more harshly.
You call us to repentance,
but we resist seeing anything needing change in our hearts or habits.
Forgive our self-satisfied attitudes,
and challenge us with your vision of a peaceable kingdom
where all can be new.**

Assurance of pardon:

Hear and believe the Good News: God forgives what we have confessed and offers us new life in Christ. Receive the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and be at peace with God, with yourself and with one another.

Hymn: #784 “Thy kingdom come – on bended knee”

God speaks to us

Readings: Isaiah 11:1-10
Psalm 72:1-7, 18-19 (*read responsively*)
Romans 15:4-13
Matthew 3:1-12

Repentance

1. God made a promise that He would ensure a king of His choosing would reign over His people forever. This promise was a concession God made toward the Hebrew people. For generations, they had been governed by elders, priests, and judges as a confederation of families and tribes. However, they insisted that they be like other nations and have a king. So, in an act of conciliation, God acquiesced. The first king thus installed was Saul in the year 1051 BCE. Then, in 1011 BCE, God entered a covenant with a shepherd-musician named David, the youngest of Jesse's sons, in which God promised that someone from David's line would rule over Israel (and thus affirm that God was still with His people) forever:

I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. ... I will be a father to him, and he shall be a son to me. When he commits iniquity, I will punish him with a rod such as mortals use, with blows inflicted by human beings. But I will not take my steadfast love from him ... Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever.¹

Thus, God established his relation to humankind as of a father towards his children: a good father who, although at times must discipline, yet will never desert his children. And, because of this promise of God's perpetual presence, the dynasty of Davidic kings will be established forever.

Well, 400 years later, in 586 BCE, the city of Jerusalem was invaded, the temple destroyed, and God's people deported and scattered throughout the foreign, non-Yahweh worshipping empire of Babylon. This event is known as the Exile.

This catastrophic destruction of the kingdom of Judah not only displaced God's people, it marked the end of the dynasty of David's line.

Considering the promise God made to David, as recorded in 2nd Samuel, it's not hard to imagine that the termination of the Davidic line of kings created a massive crisis of faith. For generations the people had been holding to God's promise of positive influence through David's line.

Without a descendant of David on the throne, was God still with His people? Who would protect them now? Had God abandoned His children, His heritage?

¹ 2 Samuel 7:12-16

The enemy empires loomed large and imposing like the tallest of trees while David's line had been cut down like a forest of rotting stumps.

2. For the next 600 years the people of the covenant would have to exercise their faith like never, perhaps, before. The temple was destroyed. The holy city ruined. David's line was cut-off from the throne.

The season of Advent reminds us that the life of faith is a life of watchful waiting for the promise while everything that goes on around us denies the possibility. It's of celebrating the God of life in a context of loss and death. It's of hoping in spite of discouragement. It's of seeking peace in the midst of chaos.

3. Although it seemed like the promise had failed; like the dream had ended, just as seedlings grow out of decomposing nurse logs, said the Lord through Isaiah, so shall a shoot come out from the stump of Jesse.

From out of Jesse's buried roots, a branch would grow.

It would take 600 years. But, one day, true to the promise, Mary would give birth to a baby boy named Jesus. Which name means "The Lord saves." Mary's espoused husband Joseph was a direct descendant of King David (and, through him to Abraham and so on back to Adam and God's self.)

With the birth of David's heir, the shoot from the stump of Jesse has come up, the dynasty was re-established, and the kingdom of heaven come near.

We ought to notice, that this is good news first for Israel. For the descendants of Abraham; for those of the circumcision. They are the ones who are naturally part of this royal family tree. They are those for whom Jesus first came "to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs."² We who are Gentiles have no natural claim to citizenship within this kingdom.

Except, by God's grace and mercy, not only has the shoot come up from the stump of Jesse, but the tree has been growing for 2,000 years! Its branches have spread around the globe!

² Romans 15:8

Sin-fed drought and pestilence continues to plague the tree and will do so until Christ returns, nevertheless, Jesus is the tree by whom the kingdom of heaven has come near. And, by God's grace – if we accept it in faith – the Master Gardener welcomes even us Gentiles and grafts us into the royal and holy branch.

Thus, we Gentiles can rejoice together with His children, Israel.

Thus, in Christ the Gentiles shall hope.

4. While we celebrate the fact that David's dynasty *has* been re-established with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth, and that through him the Kingdom of Heaven *has* come near, we also wait, as we have been for the past 2,000 years, for Christ to return and consummate – or, bring to perfection – the kingdom.

During this long season of waiting, there are many times when we fall asleep and lose sight of the promise. When we – whether consciously or subconsciously – begin to assume that the Messiah is not returning and it's up to us to make the best of things. We then begin to elevate our own needs and while we are still be grafted onto that holy and royal family tree, our fruit no longer bears witness to the kingdom in which we live.

And so, John the Baptist urged whoever would listen to “*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.”

Interestingly, when Jesus began *his* public preaching life, his first sermon was also:

“*Repent*, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 4:17)

“The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; *repent*, and believe in the good news.” (Mark 1:15)

Repentance need not be a negative word associated with guilt and onerous deeds of penitence. It is, rather, a word of grace. It is the holy habit by which citizens of the kingdom of heaven daily renew their allegiance to the Messiah and return to be welcomed into his steadfast love for the glory of God in a context that would deny the kingdom's presence.

Repentance is the holy habit whereby, believing that Jesus of Nazareth is the descendant of David, the Son of the Living God, and the Messiah through whom the kingdom of heaven has come near, you allow Him to rule over all aspects of your life – emotions, thoughts, and behaviours – by turning away from that which is not of God and holistically embracing that which is.

Isaiah described the King as one who possessed the wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and piety of God's own self. He would have the discernment necessary to judge with perfect righteousness and justice, not needing to rely on the presenting evidence but being able to understand the heart of the matter. The result of this king's rule will be a harmonious kingdom. A peaceful kingdom. The wolf will lie down with the lamb and a little child will lead them. Gentiles and Jews will live in harmony with one another in accordance with Christ Jesus. There will still be poverty, wickedness, conflict, and disputes, but the King will respond with righteous judgements and conflicts will be settled without anger.

If the fruit of our thought processes and of our actions is instead heightened anxiety, or anger, jealousy, or violence, one must wonder if we are allowing the Prince of Peace to rule our hearts and minds.

If the fruit of our thoughts and actions creates stress in the home, it is time to wonder if we have been faithfully pledging allegiance to the one who has, by grace, grafted us into his royal family tree.

If the fruit of our thoughts and actions does not glorify God, then it is time to repent.

Repentance involves *yearning* for the influence of the kingdom of heaven in the privacy of our own hearts and minds. It involves *learning* the ways and the wisdom of the messianic descendant of David: Jesus. It involves using that learning to *discern* what is of God and what is not. And it involves *surrender*.

Repentance involves surrendering our ego and our desires – even our desire for retaliation or our desire that those who have wronged us suffer – to the King and embracing His loving kindness.

We respond by affirming our faith, offering our tithes, and prayer:

Hymn: #126 "On Jordan's bank"

The Apostle's Creed (*insert*)

Offering:

(*Offering plates are presented at the Communion Table while congregation sings:*)

**Praise God from whom all blessings flow;
praise him all creatures here below;
praise him above, ye heavenly host;
praise Father, Son and Holy Ghost**

Prayer of dedication

Prayers of thanksgiving, intercession, and the Lord's Prayer:

God of the peaceable kingdom Isaiah envisioned,
where predator and prey are reconciled,
and children play in safety,
we give you thanks for every step taken towards reconciliation among rivals.
and every program provided to give children a reliable future.
Thank you for policies implemented on behalf of the climate
and every vulnerable creature,
to give us all hope for an enduring future in the world you love,
for peace will not come if the earth keeps tilting out of balance.

God of John the Baptist's rallying cry,
You raised up John in the wilderness as a voice calling us to conversion.
We thank you for signs of renewal and change in the church,
and in communities grappling with historic injustice and current outcry.
Guide advocates who work for change with both courage and compassion.
As we await the coming of Christ,
awaken the church to new ways to undertake ministry and mission,
and give us the energy and resources to reach out in ways we have yet to imagine.

God of steadfast encouragement,
St Paul called the followers of Christ to live in harmony,
and welcome those perceived as strangers to you and to them.
Thank you for welcoming us when we were strangers
to a new community, a new church or a life changed by unexpected circumstance.
We pray for people who dread this Christmas season
because life has changed for them,
or circumstances leave them feeling lonely and discouraged.
Draw close to those who suffer in body, mind or spirit,
and guide us to reach out to someone who needs comfort or encouragement.

God of justice and equity,
The psalms, the prophets and the gospels proclaim your care for the poor,
and your expectation that your people will look to the needs of the vulnerable.

We thank you that Canada has resources to share,
and pray that our leaders will attend to longstanding injustice and urgent need
without excuse or delay.

We pray for places torn apart by war,
and for communities devastated by storm, flood, fire or drought.
Challenge any who would hoard scarce resources or profit from the needs of
others.

Open our hearts to share what we can, even in these difficult times.

God of peace with justice,
Hear our prayers, O God, and strengthen us to serve you in faith and obedience.
We offer our prayers through our Lord Jesus Christ who taught us to pray
together:

The Lord's Prayer

God sends us with God's blessing:

Hymn: #115 "Hail to the Lord's Anointed"

Benediction

Congregational Amen