

God's Peace, God's Shalom

(Sermon by Cheryl Williams for December 7th, 2025, Advent 2 – Peace –Isaiah 11:1-10, Romans 15:4-13)

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Welcome to the second week of Advent, the time we prepare ourselves for Christmas and all that event means for us as Christians. Traditionally the second week of Advent has a focus on peace.

It is ironic isn't it, that we are called to ponder the idea of peace when the world around us is frantic. We find ourselves busy with our preparations – cooking, parties, shopping, wrapping presents, catching up with people. The traffic on the road is busier and crazier than normal. In the midst of this, we are called to peace.

Peace. Stillness. Calm. Quiet. No conflict. Silence.

What is peace? Darryl Kerrigan in the Aussie movie 'The Castle' stands on the front verandah on holidays in Bonnie Doon and says 'Ahh, the serenity'. Is that what peace is?

John Lennon sang, "You may say I'm a dreamer, but I'm not the only one. I hope someday you'll join us. And the world will live as one."

Jimi Hendrix sang, "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace."

Vincent van Gogh, said, "There is peace even in the storm."

Mother Teresa said, "If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other".

Albert Einstein said, "Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding."

Richard Rohr says, "There is no way to peace. Peace is the way."

Each week in church we say three words for peace – peace, shalom and salaam.

Our readings today also paint a picture of peace. Isaiah paints a beautiful picture of peace, but it is more than just a bit of stillness and quiet. In Isaiah's vision we see predators living in harmony with their prey. What seems impossible becomes possible.

The kind of peace Isaiah envisages is more like shalom. Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace. Shalom is not just about peace, it is about wellbeing, equality, sufficiency and justice. Such peace will require us to be sharing, caring for others, forgiving and being reconciled, standing up for those who are exploited, discriminated against, marginalised. This kind of peace doesn't necessarily mean the absence of conflict, indeed when one stands up to the bullies of the world, there is sure to be conflict. This shalom is not achieved by force or domination. This peace is more than fragile ceasefires.

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Paul in his letter to Romans tells the church there, that Christians are called to live in harmony with one another, by welcoming each other. How do we go about this, offering hospitality to all, so that no one is excluded?

In a world where there seems to be ever increasing world conflicts and violence, we need to reclaim this vision of peace. Where those who are traditional enemies are able to forgive and be reconciled, are able to put down their weapons or even more, turn them into ploughshares and pruning forks, into farming implements. Where no one learns war anymore.

At this time of the year, we think about Jesus as the Prince of Peace. Jesus is the one who brings into our world and lives this kind of shalom. Jesus does not bring peace by fear or force (unlike how some of our current leaders seem to think peace can be brought into our world), rather he brings peace by healing, by loving, by practicing justice and inclusion, by breaking down walls and divisions that divide us.

We are called to live that kind of peace – to play our part in making things right and as Jesus shows us it will take courage, compassion and care, not the avoidance of conflict. Living this kind of peace in Isaiah's world and Jesus' world was an active thing. Peace to both Isaiah and Jesus was God's disruption of a violent order.¹

Like so much of the gospel, we have domesticised the idea of peace and shalom. We think of peace as a calm sentiment instead of justice restored.

Peace is not just an inner calm, quietness, the absence of visible conflict or just private serenity, it is defiance in the face of injustice, it is liberation from coercion. Peace is a political statement, it is the quiet, subversive and obedient following of the way of Christ. Peace comes through forgiveness, justice and restoration. This is what we are saying when we talk about God's shalom.²

True peace enters conflict, disarms fear, dismantles domination and dares to believe that shalom will break through.³

I came across a modern rewording of Isaiah 11 and would like to share it with you:

*"People who were once enemies will live side by side.
Those divided by race, nation, politics, or religion will sit down together in peace.
A refugee child will lead them.
Those with power will no longer oppress those without.
The wealthy and the poor will share freely.
People from rival countries will build homes together.
Children will play in places once marked by violence and fear.
No one will harm, and no one will destroy—
because the world will be filled with the knowledge of God,
as deep and wide as the ocean."*⁴

¹ Stanley Hauerwas

² Much of this is taken from 'Recovering the Heart of Advent' by Peace Catalyst International.

³ ibid

⁴ Taken from 'Advent Shine the Light Resources'

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As we lit our peace candle today, we were testifying to our belief that Christ's reign has begun even in the midst of trouble and conflict. Let us live out that belief and may you all know God's shalom this Advent. Amen.