

The 4 traditional advent themes represented by each candle are hope, peace, love, and joy. This season of Advent we will be focusing on peace.

What is Advent? Advent is an invitation to, in the words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, ““Look up, you whose gaze is fixed on this earth, who are spellbound by the little events and changes on the face of the earth. Look up to these words, you who have turned away from heaven disappointed. Look up, you whose eyes are heavy with tears and who are heavy and who are crying over the fact that the earth has gracelessly torn us away. Look up, you who, burdened with guilt, cannot lift your eyes. Look up, your redemption is drawing near. something different from what you see daily will happen. Just be aware, be watchful, wait just another short moment. Wait and something quite new will break over you: God will come.” Peace will come.

No gospel author talks about peace as much as Luke so naturally we will be using Luke-Acts as the primary text throughout Advent this year. I also want to encourage you to use our meditation moments this week even if you don't normally use them because each day walks you through a couple scriptures within Luke-Acts that mentions peace and by the end of the week, you'll have examined every appearance of peace within Luke-Acts. This will be a comprehensive journey that I hope you'll join us on!

If I were to sum up Luke-Acts into a sentence it'd be this: The incarnation was God's initiation of our transformation.

This is actually a parallel to what happened in the old testament Exodus 31. Moses was a physical mediator between God and humanity, the 10 commandments were given to help people understand right relationship with God, and that relationship was meant to ultimately change and guide human behavior. God is doing this again through the person of Jesus except this time he is majorly upping the stakes: God is choosing to be wildly vulnerable. We don't hear “The vulnerable God” often, but God's vulnerability paired with humanities faithful response is the path to peace in Luke-Acts.

Part 1: What is peace according to Luke?

Peace is a continual, transformational relationship with Jesus.

A) There is no such thing as peace outside of Jesus Christ. Notice how Luke introduces and frames peace. First mention: “By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, ⁷⁹to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Luke 1:79 The next occurrence of the word peace comes in Luke 2:14. “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

- Peace is the result of God's favor extended to us through the incarnation.
- Zechariah's prophesy- Peace is coming!
- The angels song- Peace has come!
- Our advent prayer- Peace will come again.

- Isn't it rather beautiful that God's great redemption plan necessarily involves you?
 - Peace involves both God's initiation and invitation as well as our response.

Peace is a process.

- A) Peace is experienced by people who enter in and experience the presence of God. That's a two-way street. While God's presence is always extended to you, it requires that you respond to that availability with intentionality.

Scripture: "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me." Revelation 3:20

You have to listen for God. You have to wait for God. You have to respond and open the door for God. Relationships require effort and vulnerability on both ends.

- B) Also, transformation doesn't happen to us over night. It's a gradual process, right? Example: The Biggest Loser. Transformation takes time. It's a lifelong commitment.

Scripture: "Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will." Romans 12:2

Transformation is a daily process. Every morning, we have to intentionally set our eyes on Jesus and then live accordingly. The good news here is that peace isn't what comes to us once we're perfected and do all the right things and make everybody happy all the time. Peace is the very process itself of being transformed daily into the likeness of Christ.

Peace is salvation.

- A) If Luke-Acts were an equation it'd be this:

God -> Jesus -> faith -> salvation -> peace -> church

1. God initiates a vulnerable relationship with us through the incarnation- through Jesus
2. Our response to Jesus is faith
3. Our faith is what saves us (Luke 7:50, Luke 8:48)
4. The salvific nature of faith is what propels us into a life of peace
5. Peace is the building block of the church (Acts 9:31)

Part 2: What peace is not

Peace is not the perfect government. Luke is clear, peace cannot be found within a human empire.

Scripture: "You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ—he is Lord of all." Acts 10:36

Ya know it's not often you hear Luke spoken about as a revolutionary, but he was. Here's why. Luke proclaiming Jesus Christ as Lord of all was actually an act of resistance towards his government. During this time period, Caesar Augustus was referred to as lord and savior. Augustus was a wildly successful leader who transformed Rome from a republic into an empire and he restored a general sense of calm and prosperity to the people. The people probably really did feel saved by Augustus in a sense. So Luke knew who was Lord and Savior according to the people and he is posing a challenge, which likely put him in danger, by denouncing Augustus' lordship and proclaiming Jesus'. He's saying Jesus is Lord and he/she whom governs is not. Today that would sound like: Jesus is Lord and our president is not.

If all the political unraveling has stolen your peace recently, check to whom you have given lordship to.

Peace is not making nice with injustice.

Scripture: "And the jailer reported the message to Paul, saying, "The magistrates sent word to let you go; therefore come out now and go in peace." Acts 16:36

This is nice, right? Paul is being released from prison! Well, not exactly. Peace is being used falsely here and Paul won't have it. Paul, amongst others, had experienced unjust oppression via this unlawful imprisonment. The Roman magistrates who abused Paul's humanity and freedom tried to passively dismiss Paul's experience by letting him quietly go through a third party to which Paul responds, "No. They need to come speak to me to my face and own up to their sin." This is not Paul trying to make nice with the Roman magistrates. In fact, he is being deliberately argumentative and confrontational. He was holding them accountable to what was just no matter how uncomfortable or dangerous. This passage is a warning: beware those who use the word "peace" to cover up cowardice. There is a difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking. Peacekeeping does whatever it can to maintain peace, even if it's just the illusion of peace in the midst of injustice. This is not a holy position. In the words of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, "If you are neutral (silent) in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor." Peacemaking desires right relationship between God and all people which requires waging war and speaking up against all oppression. Paul wasn't having it, and neither should you.

Peace is not the absence of what annoys you.

Scripture: "When Paul had been summoned, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying "Your Excellency, because of you we have long enjoyed peace, and reforms have been made for this people because of your foresight." Acts 24:2

So this is actually the High Priest speaking to a Roman Governor in an attempt to get Paul arrested and potentially even killed. We know peace is being used falsely again here because

the High Priest is claiming that the governor was the source of the people's peace. He further claims that Paul is agitating that prized peace. He's essentially saying, "get this guy out of here. He's making us uncomfortable!" But listen yall, peace is not the absence of that which annoys you- it's the presence of Jesus. Notice how when peace is misused in a story, violence and the abuse of God and/or God's people often follows.

A few weeks ago, I sat down with Pastor Jeff and a few other members of our teaching team here at Summit Church and we started to brainstorm about what our Advent theme should be this year. We thought about the absolute craziness that seems to be swirling around our world due to sickness and political strife and one song popped into my head. It's called Peace Be Still. The lyrics include these lines: I don't wanna be afraid every time I face the waves. I don't want to fear the storm just because I hear the roar. Peace be still, you are here so it is well even when my eyes can't see I will trust the voice that speaks peace over me.

I want you to close your eyes and use your imagination with me here for a moment. God shows up at your front door and knocks. You answer but it's like you were expecting it, you're not afraid because you know with your whole being who is standing before you. God invites on a walk and you don't even give it a second thought. And who knew, but God leads you to this beautiful pasture right by your house and there is a calming stream running alongside it. You choose to pause and sit for a bit to take all the sights and smells in. Chaos is still running rampant in your house, things still need to be bought and wrapped, covid rates are still on the rise, you still need to return your mothers call knowing she has nothing but constructive criticism for you, and yet... you are at peace. You look over and lock eyes with God and you are overcome with comfort. God asks if you want to walk a little farther and you agree. Sure enough, you stumble upon a table set for two- just you and the Lord. Before you sit, God anoints your head with oil. God calls you holy, beloved, chosen, child of mine and thanks you for accepting the invitation. Your cup is just overflowing with gratitude. You share a meal together and all you see when you look into God's eyes is this tender loving mercy. When the meal is over, you stand up to return to your house and God shares with you a few final words, "My beloved, your faithful response to my invitation has saved you. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow you all the days of your life and you will come to dwell with me for eternity. Go in peace."

This is the invitation of Advent. Something quite new is breaking over you. Jesus will come. Answer the knock on your door. Say yes to relationship with Jesus and continued transformation. And then... God in peace. Amen.