

First Presbyterian Church of Plymouth, Michigan

Advent Series, 2020

Hello, My Name Is... Prince of Peace

Sunday, December 20, 2020

Rev. Mark Hovermale

Rev. Mark Hovermale—Welcome and Announcements

Good morning! Welcome to worship today on Sunday December 20th. Thank you so much for joining us. Thank you, too, to Susan Underhill, the Uller family, Ashley, Emily, the brass ensemble and 5th Season for all coming together to make this service a reality. Now it is almost Christmas, so let me be, maybe, one of the first to wish you a very Merry Christmas.

We've got some exciting things coming up in the church. Now this has been a year unlike any we've ever experienced, but there is going to be something normal—Christmas Eve service. Now we're going to have it online, available all day on Christmas Eve for you. Okay, after 8:00 in the morning, you can experience, anytime at your convenience, the Christmas Eve service online. But this is exciting! At 5:00 on Christmas Eve, we're having a parking lot Christmas Eve service. You say, I've never been to one before! Neither have we, but it's going to be amazing. We're so excited for this! But listen, it's just like every other parking lot service. You have got to register your car ahead of time. So how do you pre-register? Well, you can do that by going to fpcp.net and you can register there, or you can register by calling the office and getting Julie Thompson's line which is X115. We are so excited! This service is going to be a shorter service but we're looking forward to having you come and be part of it.

We also have a December 27th service—online only. It's our family service, again online, December 27th.

The third service that I want to talk about is Sunday, January 3rd. Epiphany Sunday is star Sunday, as we've come to know it here at the church. We're offering an online communion service available all day, as well as a live parking lot service at 10:00 a.m. If you can come to the live service at 10:00 a.m., you can receive a star which has a word on it for 2021. And, no, one of the words will not be “pandemic!” Please pre-register your vehicle for that service. Again, you know the drill. Either go online, to fpcp.net, or talk to Julie Thompson or her phone at extension 115.

At this time, we will have the Uller family go ahead and light the advent candles.

Uller Family: Pete, Carol and children, Cody and Inara—Lighting of Advent Candles

Friends, this morning we light the first candle remembering that Jesus Christ is our hope. The second candle reminds us that Jesus Christ is our joy. The third candle reminds us that Jesus Christ is our source of love, and the fourth candle reminds us that Jesus is also our peace.

The Prophet Isaiah writes, “For us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.”

Let us pray. Lord Jesus Christ, you bring peace into this world and peace into our hearts. Today, help us to live as peacemakers so that we may reflect the light of your presence. God of hope, God of joy, God of love, God of peace, into our darkness come. Amen.

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor—Opening Prayer

Let us pray. Eternal God, through long generations you prepared a way for the coming of your Son and by your Spirit you still bring light to illuminate our paths. As we prepare to celebrate his birth, make our hearts leap for joy at the sound of your Word and move us by your Spirit to bless your wonderful works. Renew us in faith and hope, that we may welcome Christ to rule our thoughts and claim our love. As Lord of Lords, King of Kings and Prince of Peace, may Christ alone receive all of our glory and honor, now and forever. Amen.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Scripture Lesson

Friends, our scripture lesson today is from the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. It is a reading of Isaiah, Chapter 9, verses 1 through 7.

But there will be no gloom for those who were in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light;
those who lived in a land of deep darkness—on them light has shined.
You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy;
they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest,
as people exult when dividing plunder.
For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders,
the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian.
For all the boots of the tramping warriors and all the garments rolled in blood
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.

For a child has been born for us, a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace
for the throne of David and his kingdom.
He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness
from this time onward and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Amen.

[The Fifth Season sings, “Mary Did You Know”]

Rev. Mark Hovermale—Discussion of Theme of Advent Sermon Series

Well, we are coming to the end of our “Hello My Name Is...” series. It has been about a month that we've been in the series, and we're just a few days away from Christmas. Can you believe it? It's a Christmas, though, unlike any other we have experienced! We have been working our way through the descriptions of Jesus found in Isaiah Chapter 9. You remember, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, and today we're talking about Him being described as the Prince of Peace.

Now, if you're like me, the idea of the Lord as Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father—I can get my mind around those. But the idea of Prince of Peace—that is another story to me completely. When was the last time you said to someone, “You're a Prince of Peace.” You don't say those kinds of words; I don't say those words! How do we use and apply something to our lives that we don't usually use as far as language goes? That's the trick, isn't it, when it comes to God's Word? Especially this passage—it's one thing to hear it or to read it, and then it's another thing down the line to understand it, when the rubber meets the road. We can actually apply it. Hearing it is great, understanding it is better, but *applying* it to our lives is the most important thing. How do we do that, looking at the idea of Prince of Peace. We're going to tackle that in today's sermon.

Rev. Emily Riley Campbell—Rereads Isaiah 9:6

Listen again to these words from Isaiah Chapter 9, at verse 6.

For a child has been born for us,
a son given to us;
authority rests upon his shoulders;
and he is named
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Rev. Mark Hovermale—Sermon

Well, I'm so excited to be talking about Isaiah, Chapter 9, the Prince of Peace. Here are some “housekeeping things” about the passage. First, it consists of two elements. One is kind of a geography description and the second part is a poem or a song. And it really is a promise about a certain specific time period and particular place. This song talks about trouble and then about salvation and then it talks about why we can celebrate that salvation now.

The descriptions of Jesus, if I want to be honest, and maybe you feel this way too, they are true, don't get me wrong, but they seem a bit random don't they? I mean, when was the last time you described a baby or even a leader with these kind of phrases? Why do they put those random phrases in there? Well, they're not so random if we understand the context.

The scripture passage and these descriptions of Jesus connect to the Davidic line—the kings in the line of David. Listeners would have recognized those words as connecting to the line of David. Then there is even another connection: The words were royal names that parallel the great names of the Egyptian pharaohs. When they ascended to power they would use this kind of descriptive. That's interesting.

So, what does that mean? Well, here's why it is important. For the Prince of Peace, specifically, but for all the descriptions, people would have heard them and they would

have made a connection to the kings in the Davidic line and also to the connection with the pharaohs. This means this announcement of a baby is no such thing as just a small announcement about a random baby. This is a king, this is a prince. This is royalty!

Now the baby is going to be born in a manger, not exactly a palace, but these words, these descriptives, are very important, because the people in that day would have recognized, this is a king, this is the birth of royalty.

So now what does “Prince of Peace” mean? Let's just look, specifically, at “Prince of Peace.” I mean it's fairly obvious: Jesus is going to bring about all kinds of good things and, specifically, peace. But what is the one thing that the Prince of Peace description of peace is? What is the theme it's going after? Here's the theme—hope. Hope is the theme and let's be honest. Right now, today, hope is in short supply *and* in large demand! We need help. If you look at the news on the radio and the TV, everything is just bad news and it's overwhelming. We just desperately need hope.

The Prince of Peace is offering us hope today, but there's something else going on in this scripture passage. We try to separate politics and religion in our everyday lives. For instance, when you're at a Thanksgiving or Christmas gathering, the last thing you want to talk about is politics, right? We try to separate our faith from politics and what's going on in the government. But if we look at the context and the time, the description “Prince of Peace” isn't just referring to Jesus is going to be the Prince of Peace and bring about internal peace. By that I mean, you know, the world is collapsing around you, but you have this peace. It is that, but there's something more going on here. It is saying that Jesus is going to also bring about peace *externally* in the conflicts going on today.

As one theologian put it, since this passage speaks, above all, of the nature of the King's reign as one of perpetual peace, founded on justice and on righteousness, it concerns the messy world of politics. This means we can't separate the spiritual aspect of the words Prince of Peace and the government in the conflicts going on. What that means, God is using this situation and specifically this King born in a manger, to bring about justice and peace in the world, both internally and externally—all through the birth of a baby, the most vulnerable of humankind. It is clear from the passage that there is an external peace that Jesus is going to bring about as a Prince of Peace.

Jesus, still, also connects to the internal peace that we're going to feel from Jesus. He talks about it later when he is grown up, in his teachings, in his ministry. In John, chapter 14, verse 27, Jesus says, “This peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” Jesus uses this common Hebrew greeting in an unusual way and the words, speaking specifically, about salvation through Jesus, bring peace to his disciples.

So we have external peace and now we have internal peace. He even connects to the idea in John 16:33. He says, “I have told you these things so that, in me, (catch that, “*in me*”) you may have peace in this world. You have trouble, but take heart, I have overcome the world.

I read somewhere that peace, true peace, is a gift from God and there is no alternative, if you want lasting peace. So the Prince of Peace description in Isaiah 9 talks about Jesus bringing about external peace to conflict and internal peace in our hearts.

What does this mean to us today? I'm going to leave you with one theme and two applications. Now you know the theme--the theme is hope. The words Prince of Peace

bring about the idea of hope, peace in our hearts and peace in our world. But what are the two applications? The first is, what we call external peace, true peace in this world is not going to be found from a political party. It is not going to be found from a government program. It is not even going to be found from a great leader. It is going to be found through a relationship with Jesus Christ.

That is where true external peace is going to come from. It is going to come from Christians, like you and me, listening and hearing the Word of God, then *understanding* the Word of God, and then finally applying the word of God to our lives. We must become the hands and feet of Jesus' peace in this world. How do we do that? We have to read the Bible, understand the Bible, and then apply it to our lives.

God's Word, and notice I said, "God's Word," not godly words. The Bible is God's Word, and it means that it is from God. It means that there are things in there we like and there are things in there we disagree with, but we have to take the whole thing and apply it to our lives.

"Let change begin," I've heard, "and let it begin with me." Now I've talked about external peace. That means there is conflict that we need to bring peace to. When I say the word "conflict," right now, I can guess that you are thinking of a specific conflict. Right? You have got something that is going wrong in your life or around you. When I say "conflict," you are thinking about that. Here is my question about it. In applying Prince of Peace and the sermon today to your life, how can you practically, in the next day or two, bring about some peace to the conflict, to the situation you're thinking about in your mind? How can you *practically*, in the next day or two, bring about peace in the conflict you're thinking about right now?

Now we're going to look at *internal* peace and when I say "internal peace," I mean the world is chaotic around you but you have this inner peace and it's a gift from Christ. But did you catch the last passage in John 16? When I read the passage in John, Jesus literally says, "you will get peace in Me."

"I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" (John 16:33)

Okay, that means that it is true! Jesus' true peace is found only through Christ, in a relationship with Jesus. That's where we get true internal peace. To just be honest with you this morning, as I look away from my notes for a second. You're going to say to me, "Well, Mark, I can get peace from lots of places". I do too! When the bank account is high, I have peace. When my team wins, which doesn't happen very often anymore, I have peace. When there's no conflict in my life, my kids aren't fighting for five minutes, I have peace. Can you relate? But when the stock market crashes, there goes my peace. When my team plays, there goes my peace. When my kids fight, again, there goes my peace.

See, there is "peace," but it is not lasting. If we want lasting peace, consistent peace, peace that lasts for eternity, it is found in Jesus, in relationship with Him. That is the internal peace you can get from the Prince of Peace. Peace—both external and internal—is found in the Prince of Peace. Jesus, born as a baby in the manger, who was indeed our Messiah. Amen, and thanks be to God.

[Brass Ensemble playing "Gloria In Excelsis Deo"]

Ashley S. Ashley, Associate Pastor—Prayers of the People

Let us pray. Gracious and loving God as you led your people in ages past, you direct our journey into the future. We cling to the hope of these words as we face an Advent filled with uncertainty and darkness. We long for the embrace of those we love, and we wonder when we might be able to gather safely again. As we wait for new days, we place our faith in you. We give thanks that you came to us in Jesus Christ, our light of the world, our hope, our salvation, and our eternal promise. We are thankful that we can bring all things to you and place them in your loving care. Look with compassion on all those who are sick or who sorrow. Cheer them by your Word and bring them a sign of your Grace. Bless us and those that we love, that in drawing closer to you, we might draw closer to one another, as well. Be with those who are working on a vaccine. Give them wisdom, diligence and perseverance. In the season of preparation for the Prince of Peace, we ask that you would send your peace to break down the walls of hostility that divide us, and put down anger, greed, and fear, so that together we can truly be the body of Christ. By your Spirit, open our eyes to your work and movement in our community and nurture our souls and all spiritual gifts. Fill us with gratitude overflowing that we may share in a life that praises you, saying the words that you taught us to pray together, Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

Rev. Mark Hovermale—Benediction and Blessing

May we bring about peace and may we receive peace from the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

May the blessing of God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be on you and yours this day and forever more. Amen.