

The Fourth Sunday of Advent

December 20, 2015

Prayer of the Day: Stir up your power, O Lord, and come. Take away the burden of our sins and make us ready for the celebration of your birth, that we may receive you in joy and serve you always; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day: Alleluia! The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel. Alleluia! (Matthew 1:23)

Sermon Text: Micah 5:2-5a

If you had one word to best describe how you feel right now—would that word be “Peace?” We have reached the week of Christmas and Christmas is littered with tidings of “Peace.” So, are you feeling “peace” right now? If you are unlucky enough to have school this week, I am sure you still have final projects and tests and quizzes and reports due— and all you really want are for those assignments not to be there so that you can just enjoy Christmas break. This week you have many opportunities to worship which means you pay extra attention to the calendar and clock, making sure you arrive at the right place at the right time on the right day. You may still be out fetching last-minute Christmas gifts or still grocery shopping or have yet to mail out Christmas cards. Maybe you have family to visit or family coming to visit you. That means you have to make sure you and the kids are healthy and ready to arrive with the right presents and the right food at the right house at the right time. So, are you feeling “peace” right now?

These last days before Christmas can be kind of stressful, can they not? You probably already have a daily schedule, but now you have all these extra events added on top of whatever other worries and deadlines and appointments you currently face. So, is the best word to describe how you feel right now: “Peace?”

Maybe not— and not just because of all the extra appointments you have to remember this week. You know this added stress does not occur only one week out of the entire year. Christmas break does end and eventually school starts up again— along with

Micah 5:2-5a

- 2 “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
though you are small among the clans of
Judah,
out of you will come for me
one who will be ruler over Israel,
whose origins are from of old,
from ancient times.”
- 3 Therefore Israel will be abandoned
until the time when she who is in labor gives
birth
and the rest of his brothers return
to join the Israelites.
- 4 He will stand and shepherd his flock
in the strength of the LORD,
in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.
And they will live securely, for then his
greatness
will reach to the ends of the earth.
- 5 And he will be their peace.

all of its due-dates and assignments and projects. Family leaves and the house is empty—leaving you wishing the house was full again. The world again rises from its sleepy silence and begins churning out tensions and arguments and drama. Sometimes it seems like peace in life just lasts for a flickering moment before it vanishes again.

Today your God promises you peace. He says that. The peace he is giving you for Christmas is not something that will make you feel like you have peace. It will not merely look like peace. God gives you something more solid, more certain, more permanent than something that quickly vanishes. He promises to send you someone who will be your peace.

That is what Micah gets to share. God had sent him out to the nation of Judah and tells him to proclaim: “[Jesus] *will be our peace!*”

To the people living in that land that sounded like complete nonsense. Life had anything but peace! Judah was on the very brink of disaster and it looked like nothing was going to prevent that. They could look over their city walls and see a mighty, powerful army marching ever closer to them. That army that will swarm over their walls, swallow their fields, flood their city streets, and take it over. How can Micah speak of peace?

Because the peace coming will last much longer than the nation of Judah itself. You see, for years Judah had turned its back on God. You heard how they did that over these past few weeks. They worship little golden cows and thank these cows for helping them. They pray to stars for guidance. They throw their living children into blazing fires in order to appease some made-up god. Their actions are a far-cry from God’s very important commandment: “*You shall have no other gods*” ([Exodus 20:3](#)). That command does not stand without a threat. God clearly says: “*The soul who sins is the soul who will die*” ([Ezekiel 18:20](#)).

Judah could look over their walls and see God’s threat carried out in a very visible way. That army comes because they had turned away from their God. Yet, God’s threat goes deeper than physical defeat. Hearts which have no room for him will be cut off from him forever. In hell there is no peace whatsoever. Instead, there nothing but weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Peace was nowhere to be found then—and it still remains a struggle to find peace today. No, not that we face the threat of foreign invaders. Instead, how many of us can keep God’s first commandment perfectly? “*You shall have no other gods?*” We probably do not bow down to little objects of stone and gold. Yet, do we consider some parts of science to be more accurate than God’s Word? Do we lean on ourselves for guidance because we feel that God is not reliable enough? Do we search for meaning in our money or in our accomplishments? If Judah faced physical and spiritual destruction because they found trust in other places than God, then what would we expect to find apart from God?

You know, Micah comes to a nation that will be destroyed with words of peace. He explains what this peace offers. He says, “**But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.**” For many living there, that also sounded absurd! This little town of Bethlehem is not even listed as a “Top-

1000 important city” in the book of Joshua! ([15:21-63](#)). Out of this little itty bitty insignificant town will come someone who will change the world forever? It would be like saying that a city politician from Marion is the answer to solving Detroit’s bankruptcy or that this Marion politician is just what the world needs in order to bring peace. The capital city of Jerusalem is where politicians are born and groomed for leadership. How can someone from such a little, quiet, backwoods town bring such overwhelming comfort? How could the work of a man from Bethlehem bring lasting peace?

Because this is no plain old ordinary man. Yes, he comes from royalty. His parents, Mary and Joseph, travel to Bethlehem because Joseph comes from King David’s family tree ([Luke 2:1-4](#)). This Ruler over Israel comes from royalty, but even in that way he is different. He is not just another king from a long line of kings; his family tree goes back further than David. In fact, it goes back before the beginning of the world. The One who is coming is not just a mere man; he is from ancient times; a ruler of old; he is the One with no beginning and no end, the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the One who is, and who was, and who will be!

This special Ruler is no one other than Jesus. God does not send him to fix life in Judah; Jesus comes to fix the real problem: the human heart. He comes to set your heart free from guilt, cleansed from evil thoughts so that you can stand before the perfect Judge of all without any fear. This Ruler gives his heavenly Father what is demanded of you: a life of perfect obedience.

Because Jesus has conquered death by rising again to life you now possess this life of perfect obedience. **Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites.** Jesus uses special words to describe how he brings you to God. He calls you Israelites, people who are connected to him by faith. That is, you share not blood, not nationality, but rather a common belief, a common trust that Jesus is your Savior from sin. You no longer have any reason to fear ending up in hell; Jesus has established peace between God and you.

Now **He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.** Your Ruler does not go up into heaven so that he can hide from you. He does not leave you alone in this world. He continues to walk with you, to guide you, to protect you. Quite simply, his rule over all things brings you peace.

How? First, he gives you his Word, the Bible. In the pages of Scripture he professes his love for you, his love which sustains you throughout life. He tells you that you are forgiven, that heaven is your home.

Then while you walk towards heaven, he still shepherds you here. In the midst of a chaotic world he still stands in charge. You do not go through life alone. You do not have to anchor an uncertain hope in the doctor’s knife or in your bank account or in a job application. You have a God who sees the future, how every single event works out and affects you. You have a God who works through those events to protect and provide for you. He uses those events to strengthen your faith, to grow a deeper trust in Him.

Does knowing this give you peace? We have reached the week of Christmas and Christmas is littered with tidings of “Peace.” Maybe for that one day you will have no

pressing demands. You might even not have personal fears or worries. Yet, as Christmas day passes on your routine will start up again. With it comes deadlines and appointments and drama. Do you still have peace then? Or does it quickly vanish?

Remember what you get this Christmas. Jesus has been born and he sees that the effects of sin bring little peace. Yet, he comes not to fix the symptoms, but the problem of sin itself. He comes to defeat the devil and to cleanse our sinful hearts with his perfect life. Because of his saving work, you have peace with God.

You get to live your life now knowing that you have true peace. Yes, sometimes you will face stress and worry and drama. It might feel like any trace of peace has vanished. When you feel that, go back to the manger, look to the cross, see the empty tomb. Jesus is born, dies, rises again so that he can stand and shepherd you now. He shepherds in ways he knows is best; he shepherds according to his infinite knowledge and love and care. You get to rest under his peace as you follow his guidance— and you follow by trusting in that care.

While you live under his reign now, God also points you forward to something even greater. You already live under his peaceful reign. Soon, you will live in the presence of his peaceful reign. There will come a time when his shepherding will not happen behind the masks of this world, but that mask will be lifted off and you will see your God actively with you. **And [you] will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth.**

DOES CHRISTMAS GIVE YOU PEACE? Well, what peace truly matters? What peace has God already established with you? Jesus, your Ruler reigns over all things; he unites you into his flock. Now, he shepherds you forever. In the midst of a world filled with uncertainty, filled with trouble, filled with fear, cling to the peace found in the manger. Your Ruler reigns! He unites! He shepherds. He gives you peace.