

## “The Path of Peace”

*Luke 1:67-79*

Pastor Charlie Berthoud | Sermon for Sunday, December 5, 2021

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Let's pretend we're doing a room renovation on an old house. We want to put a fresh coat of paint on the walls, which are dirty and full of scratches, scrapes, and nail holes.

If we want the paint to last, we have to prepare the surface. So we clean it and sand it and if necessary, apply primer.

Preparation is essential to make the paint endure.

Are you prepared for Christmas? Are you getting prepared for the coming of Jesus into the world? Are you preparing for God's light to shine in your heart, your home, your life?

John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus. He does the necessary cleaning and priming, so that people are more able to receive the good news of the gospel, and to move forward on the journey of faith, the path of peace.

In Luke 3, we read about John the Baptist:

He went into all the region around the Jordan, proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins, as it is written in the book of the words of the prophet Isaiah,  
“The voice of one crying out in the wilderness:  
‘Prepare the way of the Lord,  
make his paths straight.  
Every valley shall be filled,  
and every mountain and hill shall be made low,  
and the crooked shall be made straight,

and the rough ways made smooth;  
and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.”

When asked what repentance looks like, he angrily told people turn from greed and selfishness, saying if you have two coats give one to someone who doesn't have one, and he told people in power to not exploit other people. (See Luke 3.7-18)

John's message is strong and loud and even abrasive. He tells people to repent, to turn around, to change direction, wanting people to become generous, kind, and awake.

He wants to clean us up before Jesus comes, to get rid of the junk so there is room for the good news.

I'm no John the Baptist, and I'm not going to scream and yell, but I do want to urge you to be awake and intentional as we journey amidst the noise toward Christmas. I invite you to prayerfully think about how you are preparing yourself for God's light and God's love and God's ever-renewing call to purposeful living.

The preparation for Jesus goes back even before John the Baptist. In our primary reading for today from Luke chapter 1, we hear from Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Our reading is the song of praise he sings about what God is doing through his son and beyond.

Note how the song begins with a social or even political perspective, and then it concludes with a more personal or spiritual perspective.

I'm reading from the Common English Bible. Zechariah said:

“Bless the Lord God of Israel  
because he has come to help and has delivered his people.  
He has raised up a mighty savior for us in his servant David's house,  
just as he said through the mouths of his holy prophets long ago.  
He has brought salvation from our enemies  
and from the power of all those who hate us.  
He has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,

and remembered his holy covenant,  
the solemn pledge he made to our ancestor Abraham.  
He has granted that we would be rescued  
from the power of our enemies  
so that we could serve him without fear,  
in holiness and righteousness in God's eyes,  
for as long as we live.  
You, child, will be called a prophet of the Most High,  
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his way.  
You will tell his people how to be saved  
through the forgiveness of their sins.  
Because of our God's deep compassion,  
the dawn from heaven will break upon us,  
to give light to those who are sitting in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,  
to guide us on the path of peace.”

Today we lit the candle of peace. At Christmas we celebrate the birth of the prince of peace, and we hear the song of the angels about peace on earth and goodwill to all.

Peace runs through the Bible. Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace; Eirene is the Greek word. Biblical peace isn't simply the absence of conflict. It's a sense of wholeness and wellbeing deep in our souls and in our systems. We yearn for this peace.

Every time we gather for worship, we pass the peace, after hearing the good news of the gospel, that we are forgiven and loved by God. The intention of passing the peace isn't simply saying hello or talking about the weather or the Badgers, but more importantly it's about looking each other in the eye, to bless and encourage one another in the peace that Jesus came to offer. It's the peace of knowing we are forgiven and love and can live with new purpose.

Welcoming this peace and finding the path of peace are challenging. We had another school shooting this week. Lord in your mercy hear our prayers for peace. And with Covid and all of our political and social

stress, peace is elusive.

We recently had two weeks of classes inspired by the book *Peace Talks: The Good News of Jesus in a Donkey Elephant War*, by David Drum. It's an engaging reflection on how we can find common ground in these divisive times. We have copies in the church library.

The book is aimed at Christians and a primary focus is on our identity, that our primary identity needs to be not as Republicans or Democrats or Americans, but as Christians.

“When we know who we are in Christ, we discover a peace, a meaning, a significance that can weather any storm. Peace talks, and it talks powerfully.”

--David Drum, in *Peace Talks: The Good News of Jesus in a Donkey Elephant War*

So we can work for peace in politics by praying to take on our primary identity, not as Democrats or Republicans, but as Christians. And we can pray for peace.

Our Advent devotional has a prayer for peace that I'd like to share:

“God,” I whispered. “What if peace isn't possible? Then what?”  
God was quiet for a minute. Then God wrapped me up in God's arms and told me a story. God said, “In the beginning, I knit you together. I wove strands of peace into your heart so that you might know and grow love; and your heart was beautiful, wild, and free. That was a long time ago, but peace is part of who you are. It just gets stuck under fear, doubt, and hurt—like a bird with stones on its wings.”

“I don't understand,” I fussed. “If peace is part of who we are, then why are we humans so bad at it?”

God held me a little tighter and said, “Little bird, remember how loved you are, and start small. Remove the stones of anger, hurt,

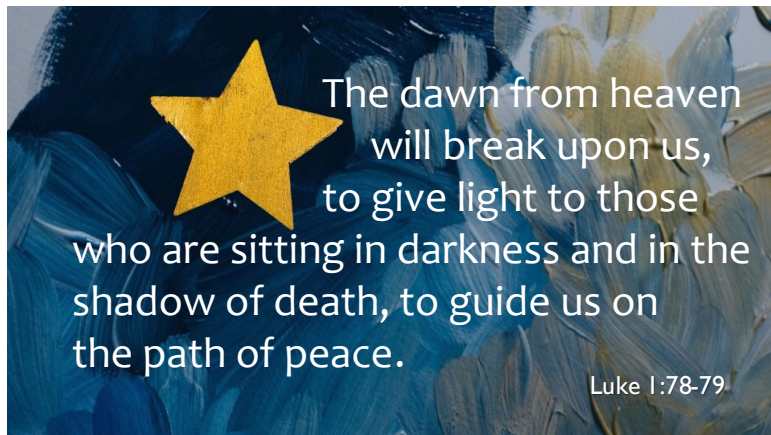
and fear one at a time and peace will surely grow.” Then God lifted up my arms and set me out to fly, and I realized that, grounded in God’s love, I was beautiful and wild and free, and peace was a part of me. So I flew home, and stayed up all night writing love letters and tearing down walls so that the peace in me could fly to the peace in you.

Let me know when you get it.

-- “Let There Be Color: An Advent Devotional”, prayer by Sarah Are of Sanctified Art

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Zechariah painted a picture of the path of peace. John the Baptist came to prepare people for the prince of peace, to help people claim a new identity, to continue the journey to peace, to wholeness, to wellbeing.



We celebrate the good news that heavenly light is breaking upon us, giving light for us in darkness and the shadow of death, guiding us in the path of peace.

So together we sing the songs, pray the prayers, share the meal, light the candles, and claim our new identity as followers of Jesus, the prince of peace. Amen.