

Advent 2018 – Peace

Psalm 4:8 I will lie down and sleep in peace. Lord, you alone keep me safe.

Today, the 2nd Sunday of Advent, we focus on peace. Sometimes our concept of peace is limited to harmonious welfare and freedom from hostile aggression. This is certainly one aspect of peace, and one which we must focus on as a society and as a member of the global community.

This worldly perspective affects all of us; whether we are safe and secure within our home and national borders. Are we free from attacks, aggression, and harm? Is the world itself safe from damage that we could do? This is one important aspect of peace. It can be thought of as social peace or behavioral peace. Do we have peace within our home, society, and interrelated societies? World peace ... is it possible?

There are scientists who are studying peace. One such team is the Sustainable Peace Project, headed by Peter T. Coleman. He has assembled a multidisciplinary team of researchers to analyze societies that have successfully sustained peace.

One of the members is anthropologist David Fry, who in 2012 published the study *Life Without War*. In it he compared three inter-societal peace systems of the Upper Xingu River basin tribes of Brazil, the Iroquois Confederacy of upper New York, and the European Union. With this study, he provides initial evidence of

the fundamental societal conditions that sustain peace. He builds his case on anthropological evidence that indicates that war is a relatively new human phenomenon, emerging over the last 10,000 years as humans began migrating, settling, and claiming territory. This refutes the idea that humans have always been innately warlike beings. Fry's research proposes that societies are likely to evolve in peaceful directions if they have a clear idea of its direction, and that when societies proclaim to be peaceful, they are more likely to act and organize themselves in a consistent manner.

Coleman's team writes that, "Peace is highly complex but fundamentally simple. Although a large array of factors can influence peacefulness in communities, at its core it is quite simply a function of how members of different groups (national, political, ethnic, and so on) mutually treat one another. In other words, the higher the ratio and strength of acts of reciprocal kindness, respect, inclusion, and so on, to acts of hate, contempt, exclusion, etc., the higher the probability of sustaining peace."

In other words, it is following the wisdom of the Bible. In Romans 12:18 we are instructed: *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* Then in Psalm 34:12-14: *Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.*

The Coleman teams says that old school assumptions drive much of our thoughts on peace, including the tendency of policy makers and scientists: we focus more on preventing what humans fear

rather than on creating opportunities to maximize what we hope for and what motivates us. The conclusion of Coleman's project is that "scientific evidence suggests that living in peace is both possible and replicable."

Living in peace is possible, so say these scientists; we can learn the behaviors and they can be implemented. So, there is hope for peace.

Even a declaration released by UN Secretary General António Guterres, reflects a slow but growing movement in the international community over the past 25 years directed at modifying global emphasis toward actions, protocols, and behaviors that sustain peace and away from the traditional approaches of crisis management and lessening the severity of war.

Things are changing in the world consciousness; we are beginning to point our compass in a new direction, toward a new pole star. An ancient and ingrained destination hails us, and we are at last hearing that call – the call of peace.

Yet, peace is not only the destination; it is the path. There is certainly a behavioral peace, and there is also a psychological peace, a precursor to behavioral peace. Before we can exhibit sustained peaceful behavior, we must first create sustained peaceful thoughts. Our demeanor and attitude must be peaceful.

I propose that there is even a deeper level of peace. Peace is the destination, peace is the path, and peace is also the motivator for

stepping onto the path; peace must be who we are, our intention, before we can have peaceful thought and then peaceful behaviors.

Proverbs 12:20 tells us that “Deceit is in the hearts of those who plot evil, but those who promote peace have joy.” Every Sunday we sing our “Peace Song”. In it we sing the words, “Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.” Before we can see peace in the world, we must see peace within; we must be peace.

Philippians 4:6-7 teaches this: *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* There is a peace beyond the mind, beyond the intellect; a peace that is only known experientially that sustains us, guards us, and envelopes us when we are attuned to Christ.

The energy of Divine Peace is even beyond the energies of Joy and Love. Peace is the antecedent to Joy and the predecessor of Love. When we are resting in God’s peace, we are free of fear and inner conflict. Nothing of the world can harm us or impact us. Regardless of what is going on, what people are saying or doing, we can engage the world yet not be influenced by it.

When we are experiencing God’s Peace, we love our neighbor without thought. We love our enemy without effort because we are beyond any harm or disparagement they might attempt to inflict. As the Dali Lama says: “Do not let the behavior of others destroy your inner peace.”

This is the peace of Christ; the peace that raises us above the hurts and inducements of this world. We know that we are exactly where we should be; all is as it should be despite what others say and their judgments of how bad things are. Peace allows us to trust and know that all is well.

I will both lie down and sleep in peace; for you alone, O Lord, make me lie down in safety. We can both lie down in peace and sleep in peace. We can trust that we are safe in all circumstances; safe to release our old habits and thought patterns. Peace in the world is possible, in God's time. People are moving that direction, but we simply haven't transformed enough yet.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu once said, "We must be ready to learn from one another, not claiming that we alone possess all truth and that somehow we have a corner on God." When we embrace peace, we can release the ego and be willing to learn from others, accepting them as equals with their own unique and wonderful skills, talents, and qualities. In peace, we can hold to thoughts and visions that support a global consciousness of oneness. From an attitude of peace there is no enemy, no 'other', so we recognize, honor, and respect the many ethnicities, cultures, and pathways to God. In peace, we embrace the diversity of our humanity. Proverbs 16:7 says, "When the ways of people please the Lord, he causes even their enemies to be at peace with them."

I pray that we will experience the peace of Christ as we willingly create peace within our souls, hearts, minds, and bodies. Christ came so that we might have life and have it abundantly.

Romans 8:6 teaches: *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.* My prayer is that we choose life and peace, and choose to have it abundantly.

Let us pray....