

December 4, 2022
The Way to Peace
Isaiah 9:1-7

In Luke 19 we read that, one day, as Jesus came closer to Jerusalem and saw the city ahead, he began to weep. He said, *"How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace,"* (Luke 19:41-42).

It's ironic. After all, the very name of the city, "Jerusalem," means "City of Peace."

On the one hand, in Jesus' day, Jerusalem is at peace. The Romans, who are in control, keep a tight lid on things. Any unrest is quickly suppressed. The nearest military frontier is a long way away. There is safety. Security. And peace. Of sorts.

But under the surface, Jerusalem is a simmering stew of unpeace. Some Jews, like one of Jesus' disciples named Simon the Zealot, agitate for violent revolution. Some Jews, the Pharisees, want to pass laws to establish their religious and social values the law of the land. Other Jews, the Sadducees, the wealthy "establishment," want to make sure neither the Zealots nor the Pharisees rock the boat. Jerusalem is also a cultural melting pot of non-Jews: people we would now call Arabs, Syrians, Lebanese, Greeks, Iranians, Romans, Iraqis, Africans, Turks, and more. Jerusalem has deep social problems. When we read the gospels, we read of people living on the streets, people begging to survive, people's lives crippled by disease, people ostracized for their ethnicity, religion, and all sorts of reasons.

In this seething city, the Romans keep the "peace." At sword point. At spear point.

What was the "way to peace" in Jerusalem in AD 30? What do you think?

Imagine if Jesus were to come to our town, Lethbridge, in AD 2022. As Jesus comes closer to Lethbridge and sees the city ahead, would he begin to weep. *"How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace"?*

On the one hand, Lethbridge is at peace. We have a strong legal system and great police service who keep a lid on things. The nearest military frontier is a continent away. There is safety. Security. And peace. Of sorts.

But under the surface, Lethbridge is an interesting place, too. Politically, of course, some people, a bit like Simon the Zealot, are sure we need to throw all the politicians out. They even seem to think we need a violent revolution. Some people want to pass laws to make their religious and social values the law of the land. Other people want to make sure neither the extremists – at either end of the political spectrum – rock the boat. We're a cultural melting pot of ethnic groups. We have deep social problems. People are living on the streets begging to survive, people's lives crippled by disease and addiction, our medical system is buckling, and people are ostracized for their ethnicity, religion, and all sorts of other reasons.

What is the "way to peace" in Lethbridge in AD 2022? What do you think?

Peace doesn't come through revolution. People have tried that. Bloody revolution after bloody revolution testify that you can't force peace at gun point. Peace doesn't come through legislating an agenda. People have tried that. Passing laws to enforce compliance to a particular social vision leads to a police state of intolerance, rebellion, and violence.

Changing the government and the laws can, sometimes, change some things for the better. But it doesn't go to the heart of the problem.

A more fundamental change is necessary.

Centuries ago, people were looking for peace in a troubled world. The prophet Isaiah wrote, *"The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine ... A child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And He will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."* (Isaiah 9:1-6)

In Jerusalem, in the First Century, peace would only come when people's hearts, minds, and lives are changed ... by God. God doesn't send a Zealot. Or a conservative. Or a liberal. God comes Himself. He comes in person of Jesus. Mighty God. Everlasting Father. But also Wonderful Counselor. Prince of Peace.

Peace only comes when people turn to God in faith, welcome Him into their heart of hearts, leave their sinful ways, and join Jesus, living a different way, following a different path.

In Lethbridge, in the Twenty-First Century, peace will also only come when people's hearts, minds, and lives are changed. Peace will only come when people turn to God in faith, welcome Him into their heart of hearts, leave their selfish and sinful ways, and join Jesus, living a different way, following a different path.

Advent and Christmas are all about Jesus coming among us. They are about God himself coming among us. Our Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace has come among us. We find life, love, hope, joy, and peace through Jesus.

- The way to peace? *"The Kingdom of God has come near! Repent of your sins and believe this Good News!"* (Mark 1:15, Matthew 3:2, 4:17)
- The way to peace? *"Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)
- The way to peace? *"This is the first and greatest commandment: 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.' A second is equally important: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'"* (Matthew 22:38-40)
- The way to peace? *"I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. Your love for one another will prove to*

the world that you are my disciples.” (John 13:34-35)

So what does that look like in practice?

The miracle of new life through Jesus.

In the beginning, when God created the universe, and created it good, there is a wonderful image of God walking in the garden, having an open, free, perfect relationship with His people. This is what we were created for. That was – and still is – God’s vision for humanity. We have life, lived in a full and free relationship with Him.

Adam and Eve’s sin ruined all that. That perfect, open, friendship and fellowship was deeply marred by their disobedience. We were separated from God.

To cut a very long story short, God, through Jesus, reestablishes that open, free, perfect relationship with us. Through Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, God destroys the power of sin and death. Our “separated-from-God” life is over. We are “reborn”/“born again” to the “united-with-God” life for which we were created.

Jesus forgives us. The past is over. Done. Finished.

Jesus gives us the love, hope, joy, and peace of a new start. A new beginning. A new life. With a restored, renewed, free fellowship with God, once again. Just as it was meant to be.

That’s incredible. Amazing. No politician or political party can offer us that. No counselor or doctor can offer us such a radical rebirth. Only God can heal us. And give us new life. That is good news. The best news.

Some of us may have a dramatic testimony of how we experienced this transformation. To quote the old hymn, we really were lost and now we’re found; we were blind but now we see. God’s amazing grace really saved a wretch like me.

Some of us never really were wretches, totally lost, or blind as bats. But we still knew we needed Jesus. We still knew we needed God’s grace and love. We still welcome Him as our Saviour and Lord who gives us life, day by day. And that makes all the difference.

The miracle of new community through Jesus.

Those of us who have experienced this new birth, new life, and new start through Jesus create a new kind of community. What unites us is **belief** in the reality of God’s amazing grace and love, shown through Jesus. What unites us is **the experience** of God’s grace and love. We know (I hope) God’s love, His forgiveness, His renewal, His joy, and His peace.

If we have experienced those incredible realities, then other differences we have – political differences, economic differences, ethnic differences, social differences – hopefully fade into the background. How can anything compare with new life, new hope, new love in Jesus?

I think back to the first church I started attending, Trinity Baptist Church, Vancouver. We had the Bentall family, owners of Dominion Construction, one of the wealthiest – and politically conservative – families in the city. And we had the local NDP MLA – definitely NOT politically conservative – in the same congregation. You know what? One of the Bentalls and one of the NDP MLA's family members co-lead the youth group. They got along brilliantly. How is that possible? Because what unites us – our experience of new life in Jesus, our faith in Jesus, our commitment to Jesus – is simply infinitely more important than our politics.

I appreciate that, in our church, too, we have people who are from all sorts of ethnic backgrounds, social backgrounds, economic backgrounds, and political backgrounds, and none of that matters – I hope. We can differ on all sorts of things, from our personalities to our politics. What unites us – our experience of new life in Jesus, our faith in Jesus, our commitment to Jesus – is simply infinitely more important than any of our differences.

As we mentioned when we talked about the churches in Revelation 2-3, when we are that kind of church – a church where Jesus is front and centre, we are a safe sanctuary, where people don't experience the judgment, rejection, division, and anger they receive in the world at large – then we are a foretaste of the Kingdom of God. We are who God created us to be.

The miracle of new hope, love, and compassion in the name of Jesus

Personally, I hope, we have experienced new life, new love, new hope, new joy, and new peace Jesus can give us.

I hope we are a community, centered on Jesus, a safe place of sanctuary where people hear about and experience the love of Jesus, where they find new life in and through Jesus.

And, I hope, we appreciate that we have good news – great news – for our world.

Jesus looks on our city. He may well weep, *"How I wish today that you of all people would understand the way to peace ..."*

This is the way to peace: we experience God's love. God's forgiveness. God's new hope, peace, joy, and love. New life. A full life. That's the good news of Advent and Christmas. Who do you know who needs Jesus? Who can you introduce to Jesus?

This is the way to peace: we need the welcome, love, support, care, and grace of Christian community. When we are that place of sanctuary, good news, grace, love, and new life, we are the good news of Advent and Christmas. When we live as the people of Jesus, we are the way to peace in our city. Who do you know who needs a safe sanctuary, a welcoming community, a place of peace? Who can you welcome to His church?