

The Path of Peace

Jesus offers us peace even in the most un-peaceful circumstances.

.....Read Malachi 3:1-4.....

“See, I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me. Then suddenly the Lord you are seeking will come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant, whom you desire, will come,” says the LORD Almighty. ²But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. ³He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness, ⁴and the offerings of Judah and Jerusalem will be acceptable to the LORD, as in days gone by, as in former years.”

.....Read The Canticle of Zechariah - Luke 1:57, 67-79 (New Living Translation- responsive).....

“When it was time for Elizabeth’s baby to be born, she gave birth to a son. *Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited and redeemed his people.* He has sent us a mighty Savior, from the royal line of his servant David, just as he promised through his holy prophets long ago. *We have been rescued from our enemies, so that we can serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness for as long as we live.* And you, my little son, will be called the prophet of the Most High, for you will prepare the way for the Lord, *You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins.* Because of God’s tender mercy, the morning light from heaven is about to break upon us, *To give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, and to guide us to the path of peace.*”

Have you noticed how elusive ‘*peace*’ seems to be right now? Don’t we all pray that God’s ‘*light from heaven*’ will bring relief from the ‘*darkness*’ we feel?

This past week, we were grieved to hear of another horrific school tragedy. The Pittsburgh City Schools on Friday imposed ‘*lockdown precautions*’ after receiving copycat threats. In my community, our high school also received similar threats and I understand the same thing happened during the week in many other communities across the region.

Why do so many of us, and so sadly, also our youth, seem to be ready to explode? One reason could be that our mental health has suffered tremendously as a result of the disruption the COVID virus has brought to our lives.

Our patience seems to be wearing thinner as a new wave of COVID has apparently arrived. It seems to me that we are becoming more short-tempered; more anxious and depressed. I am hearing a lot of angry, blaming voices. It is easy to be tempted to join in.

‘*Peace*’ with each other is sorely needed right now. As we read our Bibles, we realize that we aren’t the only generation struggling with unrest and division. Seeking and praying for ‘*Peace*’ is something people have been doing throughout all the ages. We are living in challenging times right now, but we should remember that God promises to help all generations as they experience their unique difficulties.

When the prophet Malachi wrote to the people of Jerusalem in our reading today, he told them how to take the first steps toward *Peace*. He told them that the *Path to Peace* begins with repairing their relationship with God.

Malachi told the people in Jerusalem that God was going to send ***His Messenger*** to do some serious ‘*deep cleaning*,’ by scrubbing away anything unholy in their lives. In that time, people used a ‘*laundering soap*’ called ‘*borit*’ to take stains out of their clothing. It was a kind of lye; a super harsh bleach that penetrated the fibers of the cloth to remove the stain.

Malachi also said that God’s ***Messenger*** would perfect His people just like the process used in refining silver or gold.

In order to make the precious metals ‘*pure*,’ the ore is heated, and stirred, and as the impurities rise to the top, they are skimmed off. As the metal refiner repeats the process, he waits to see his own reflection in the liquid metal in the vat. When that happens, he knows that the silver or gold is pure and ready.

Just like back then, God still promises to show us His Path to Peace. When we allow God to ‘*refine*’ and ‘*scrub*’ us, he is able to do amazing work in our lives. By skimming off our impurities, layer by layer, God can bring new attitudes to our hearts and minds.

This process isn’t at all easy. It is painful to admit we need God’s help, and it is painful to go through God’s cleaning process. But it’s so important to let God get rid of our sinful attitudes, so that by God’s grace, our lives *will* look more and more like God’s own reflection.

For thousands of years God has been scrubbing the hearts, minds and souls of those who will let Him. There is a reason why we’ve been praying those verses in Psalm 139 as part of our Prayer of Confession: ‘***Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends You and lead me along the path of everlasting life.***’ I wonder, can you tell if God is at work, purifying something in you right now?

The name ‘***Malachi***’ means ‘*my messenger*’ in Hebrew. Malachi was God’s ‘*mouthpiece*,’ through whom God told the religious leaders how upset He was that they were disrespecting Him by ignoring sin in themselves and allowing it among their people.

Their apathetic attitudes had ruptured their relationship between God and their nation and Malachi told them that God was running out of patience with them.

Through Malachi, God told His people that He was going to send two messengers who would show them the way to restore peace between them and Himself. The first messenger would be His ‘***messenger who will prepare the way***’ for the coming of the second messenger, who would be the ‘***messenger of the covenant.***’

If you look at the Book of Malachi in the Bible, you notice that it is the last book in the Old Testament. After Malachi, God didn’t speak again to Israel for over 400 years until God did send His promised Messengers in what we call the New Testament.

The mysterious identity of Malachi’s two messengers is revealed to us in the Gospel of Luke. When the priest Zechariah took his newborn son into his arms, he praised God for using his son to bring peace to Israel.

He said, ***‘You, my little son, ... will prepare the way for the Lord, ... You will tell his people how to find salvation through forgiveness of their sins... and guide us to the path of peace.’***

In Biblical times, a king would send a messenger before Him to prepare for his arrival. One of the things that the King’s ‘messenger’ was supposed to do was clear the roads to make sure that nothing would block the king’s travel.

Malachi and Luke show us that the ‘roadways’ that need to be cleared for the coming king are our own hearts. The rocks and debris that clog the Path of Peace are actually *within* us. The wonderful thing is that when we ask, God himself, ***‘because of His tender mercy for us,*** will remove all of the boulders that prevent us from receiving His peace in the deepest places of our souls.

That was the first messenger’s job. His name, as we read in Luke, was John. We call him John the Baptist, because he warned people that their hearts needed a ‘redding-up’ before God’s King arrived. He *baptized* those who repented of their sins.

The second Messenger from God was the little child whose birth we celebrate this Christmas season. In God’s timing, humanity did receive God’s salvation. He grew from a baby to become the only One who can transform us into people holy enough to be part of God’s Kingdom.

Jesus does this by forgiving our sin, and then sending the Holy Spirit to live in us, to refine our hearts and souls. Through the persistent work of the Holy Spirit, convicting us to repent of our sin, God strains out all of our wrongheadedness and stubbornness until He can see His image in us. As we are promised in *1st John 1:9* ***‘If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’***

The peace we all seek has come to us. Cleansed from sin by Jesus, we know that we do have peace with God, because we are no longer separated from Him by our sins. Peace with God brings peace with others, and peace with God brings what can sometimes be the hardest thing, ... peace with ourselves.

If you search the internet, you will find many websites that claim to have the inside scoop on how to find *the* Pathway to Peace. But the Bible tells us that real peace is only found through God’s Messenger, Jesus.

It is important to realize that accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord is the first step. Continuing to live by Jesus’ peace is a process. Even though we belong to Jesus, we will continue to have struggles in our life. We can be confident that faith in Jesus has made us ‘right’ with God, so that God will not judge us for our sin. We can be certain that as our Lord and Savior, Jesus has made us God’s children and citizens of God’s Kingdom. But we experience God’s peace more and more only if we allow God to continually refine our attitudes.

Not only has Jesus brought us God’s new covenant of grace and peace, but he himself *is* the covenant. Jesus is God. Jesus is God ‘incarnate,’ both man and God together in human flesh. Because Jesus alone was both divine and sinlessly-human, only he was able to offer himself as our remedy for sin.

Only Jesus is able to bring pure silver and gold out of our lives, patiently stirring and sifting the unholy out of us. Only he is able to make our ‘*stains*’ fade away through the washing of his saving mercy.

Both John the Baptist and Jesus cause us to reflect and ask ourselves a very personal question: ‘*Do I want to have God’s peace rule my life?*’ If so, it is yours for the asking.

The season of Advent causes us to remember the promises God has already fulfilled. It also makes us look forward to what God promises still yet to do.

God has promised that one day He will bring His Kingdom to the earth. On that Day, the earth will be restored to what God intended Eden to be. On that Day, Jesus will arrive first. He will come on the clouds, in the way that his disciples saw him leave. (*Acts 1: 9 - 11*) Those whose hearts belong to Jesus will be gathered up with him, and live with him in God’s Kingdom, forever. (*1 Thessalonians 4:16 - 17*)

There are so many theories these days about when and how Jesus will return to earth in his Second Coming, but we can trust, that in God’s good timing, Jesus *will* come back. Our job is to be ready. Our hearts need to be washed and made clean by our Savior, as we wait for God’s Kingdom to come.

As illogical as it sounds, it’s easy to lose Jesus in the celebrations of Christmas. ... Santa, parties, family gatherings, gift-buying; card-sending. Unfortunately, Jesus is often left out of his own day.

Make sure to thank God this Advent Season for sending us His Prince of Peace. (*Isaiah 9:6*) And then, receive the Peace that is God’s gift to you. Amen.