

Cornel Barnett
Redwoods Presbyterian Church
Larkspur, California
December 7, 2014

Luke 1:78-79; Luke 2:13-14; Matthew 5:9; Matthew 10:34-39
Advent of Peace

Last week I spoke about waking in the hospital after my surgery, now 18 days ago, and while attached to an IV I reflected on my Advent sermons and chose to speak about the emphases on the bulletin covers for Advent: Hope, Peace and Joy. Love is the theme of the fourth Sunday and Stephanie will preach on that Sunday.

As I thought about peace at midnight, I decided to focus on personal peace since I more than often see peace in the context of global peace. My own situation in that hospital bed encouraged me to think of peace at close range.

My thoughts went to the child born on the day we celebrate as Christmas. Jesus is the embodiment of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love given by God's grace. Our appropriation of these aspects of faith profoundly affects our personal lives.

In Advent, I read the birth stories of Jesus with the word of the week in mind. The word "peace" this week is portrayed in the birth of a new king of Israel, a symbolic king, who would bring God's peace and justice to the earth as Israel's kings of old were expected to do.

Jesus would "guide our feet in the way of peace" and bring peace to those whom he favors, in other words, to those who embrace his peace by faith. This is the Jesus of the first coming. The Jesus of the second coming to which we aspire encourages us to be peacemakers and to be challengers of injustice which causes turmoil as a prelude to peace. That is an interpretation of the last text read by Nancy.

From midnight on in the hospital, things got worse before they got better. The patient in the room to my right began loud moaning. I said a prayer for him. Shortly, thereafter the patient in the room to my left began a constant series of shouting in what the nurses described as "confused." I prayed for her. This moaning and shouting joined by three other "confused" persons on the floor (an unusual number according to the nurses) kept us awake and the nurses running. I prayed for the nurses.

My reflection on Jesus' birth and the peace he brings into our lives helped me to place his peace at the center of my hospital room and it needed to reach the patients and nurses. It is amazing what peace and comfort prayer brings at times like this, and I knew you were praying so I felt better.

At home, I continued my spiritual rhythm for healing. As mentioned in last week's sermon, I attribute my health to the spirit and science of healing. Spirit is a positive, hopeful attitude. It is the prayers of you all and my own prayers. Science is the excellent medical team, meds and the regimen.

Further reflection: Personal peace is undone and expressed in a myriad of ways. Consider the area of loss. Kenneth Mitchell and Herbert Anderson in their book, *All Our Losses, All Our Grievs: Resources for Pastoral Care*, outline six major types of loss, which upset personal peace. They are material loss, relationship loss, intrapsychic loss, functional loss, role loss and systemic loss.

Material loss is loss of a physical object or of familiar surroundings to which one has an important attachment. One of the recent Oscar shorts showed a movie about older adults leaving their New York and New Jersey homes for a retirement village in Florida. There was profound sadness in many residents. One woman fought her way back to New York City just to die there. Joining a church and receiving the church's love and support provides peace and nurture in times like this.

Relationship loss is the ending of opportunities to be in the emotional or physical presence, or both, of a particular other human being. Here we turn to members of our own community who have experienced loss of loved ones. As hard as it is to experience such a loss again church as community is a balm.

Intrapsychic loss is the experience of losing an emotionally important image of oneself. I am not the young man I used to be but God in Christ helps me accept who I am right now. I cannot surf those big waves but I am looking forward to riding them or smaller waves in different ways. Still, peace comes when I accept the loss and cherish the memory. My life is full in Christ and there is a lot in me yet to replace the losses.

Functional loss is the loss of a specific social role or one's accustomed place in a social network. There's tremendous meaning in what one does. When that is taken away or changed one can feel deprived and depressed. I remember as a journalist when computers replaced typesetting. I met a skilled linotypist sadly sitting at a computer a year later and he said his world was ripped from under him. Many in this sanctuary have experienced the losses of major things as modernity has unfolded. God's peace comes when we make adjustments and share with each other about these losses.

Role loss is the loss of a specific social role or one's accustomed place in a social network. One hears stories of people crumbling after retirement, especially executives of large corporations. Their command and authority persona has gone and they don't know how to get along with the average Joe.

For Christians, one is never diminished in the eyes of God. The poor and rich, weak and strong, are accepted and valued and there lies our peace.

Finally, systemic loss is the loss that a system sustains when one part of the system leaves or functions very differently within the system, as when a young adult departs from the family of origin. While we empathize with members going through such losses we also affirm the peace and sustenance that a church family brings. We are an extended family. We feel God's presence in our mourning and we praise God for our lives and for positive aspects of the change.

There are variables inherent in the loss itself. There is avoidable and unavoidable loss, temporary and permanent loss, actual and imagined loss, anticipated and unanticipated loss, and leaving and being left. Then there is the relationship between the loss and grieving the loss.

Personal peace and the peace that God gives has many facets and nuances and yet we hold on to the biblical promise that the peace that God gives in Christ is indeed peace that passes all understanding.

We call on the perfect peace of Jesus through prayer, bible study, meditation, pastoral care, therapy, friendships, experiences of nature, reading, yoga, relaxation techniques, deep breathing, humor and appropriation of the wonderful elements of worship each Sunday.

One of the great significances of Jesus in the world is that he brought the people of his day into renewed contact with God through him. Jesus connects us to God. Our lives are a constant consciousness of God. There is our peace: God above me, God below me, God behind me, God in front of me and God within me; God in my head, God in my body, God in my words and God in my actions; God when I'm sleeping and God when I'm awake.

We give peace to ourselves when we meditate on the peace born in the night in Bethlehem, as we appropriate the peace of Jesus's life and as we share that peace with those around us. Peace be with you. Amen.