

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 10, 2023

Old Testament Reading; Isaiah 40: 1-11

Responsive Reading; Psalm 85: 1-2, 8-13

Epistle Reading; 2 Peter 3: 8-15

Gospel Reading; Mark 1: 1-8

Sermon Title; **Looking Forward**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; You ain't nothing yet.

We are now in the second week of Advent. The theme of the first week was Hope. This must start every advent season. Throughout the history of the world, generations have lived in a dark place and hope was necessary for them to survive. In the evil times before the great flood, the years of exile from Israel to Babylon, to the Roman occupation in the time of Christ and even to the present days of civil unrest and wars in Palestine and Ukraine.

We must start out by looking forward based on that Hope that God will prevail, and we will experience a peace, a peace that passes all understanding. PEACE is key and that is why Peace is our advent word for this Sunday.

Just as the Hebrews looked forward to a Messiah that would conquer all their adversaries and return Israel to the power status that it had under King David, we look for a peace that eliminates war and violence. The Hebrews misread God and so do we.

Peace is a deeper thing than a truce or a cease fire. Peace must be a deep-seated belief that things will be OK and for that matter are already OK.

Peace must come from God, and our strong belief that we have a wonderful God, and that God has got this, even when things may not look all that good. We have to believe.

Let me paint you a verbal picture of a peace that passes all understanding.

Picture a World War 2 battlefield with ragged trees and bombed out buildings. The sky is colored from the smoke in streams of a faded red layer, just below a sort of blue sky and on top of that a layer of greyish white. In the middle of that battlefield is a foxhole with a soldier holding a frightened dog.

That dog is finding peace in the middle of a battlefield. Then pan out and you will see that what you thought was the sky is actually the robe of Jesus Christ with His arms cradling the entire war zone. For all of those who can perceive the presence of Jesus there is an unexplainable peace. A peace in knowing that Jesus has got this and live or die they are securely wrapped in the arms of their Lord and Savior.

I know that I may seem presumptuous in using this illustration seeing how I have never personally been in this situation, but I was ordained by the AECC. The American Evangelical Christian Church was started in 1944 with many of its early ministers having come to their faith understanding in scenes very much like what I have described.

How can you find peace with bombs going off around you and bullets zinging over your head? Personally, I cannot understand it, but isn't that exactly what God promised? A peace that passes all understanding!

We so often get in a hurry and ask why God hasn't come to save the day yet. 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter has a novel approach to this question. Peter says that God is not trying to keep us waiting. God is giving us time to get our act together and get life right. If you buy into the idea of a Hell with eternal torment then you should also be agreeable to the notion that a little extra time to

get right with God is a good thing for you as well as the multitudes that are still in a state of resistance.

During that time you can be looking forward to remarkable things that will happen when you and your fellow man are in harmony with God.

In our Psalm reading it says, “Surely His salvation is near to those who fear Him, that glory may dwell in our land. Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed. Truth shall spring out of the earth, and righteousness shall look down from Heaven. Yes, the Lord will give what is good; and our land will yield its increase.”

I love that line that says, “righteousness and peace have kissed.” These two have to go together. Peace without righteousness is hollow at best and “of the Devil” at worst. Righteousness without peace is a witch hunt that turns God’s good into man’s evil. Here I am using peace as a verb and not as a noun. Peace is something we must do.

Isaiah predicts the coming of John the Baptist and what John will do to prepare the way for Jesus. Our Gospel describes John in a way similar to that of how Rev. Don describes me. John wears camel hair and a leather belt and Don refers to me as, “a rascalion farm boy” and I wear a leather jacket and motorcycle boots. I would like to think that neither one of us is pretty but I hope we are both real. I know John the Baptist is.

Isaiah said that John would be a voice crying in the wilderness and would say, "Prepare the way of the Lord; Make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough places smooth."

People are still living in the wilderness of not having a Lord and Savior that they can turn to for the Peace that passes all understanding. People are still getting lost on twisting highways of life. People are still lacking the energy to climb the hills and to descend into the valleys and are still tripping on the bumps of the roads on which they are traveling. People still need someone to share the peace of Jesus Christ with them and guess what. John the Baptist is not available to be their guide. I guess that means the job falls on us.

If we are going to be able to make the rough ways smooth for them, we will need to be walking in the Peace of Jesus Christ. If we walk in the light we can lead others to the light.

That is what Christmas is all about. The light of the world coming to the world in the form of a little baby, born in a stable and laid in a manger some two thousand years ago.

This is the light that can erase all our fears and give us peace.

This peace we must not hold for ourselves, but we must rather make that peace a guiding light for all those that we meet.

If John the Baptist came to prepare the way for the first coming of Christ, just think what millions of God's modern day followers could do to ready the world for the second coming.

Peace is a verb. Know Peace. Be Peace. Share Peace. The world ain't seen nothing yet. Let's do it. Hallelujah and Amen