

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 5, 2021

Old Testament Reading; Malachi 3: 1-4

Responsive Reading; Psalm 85: 8-13

New Testament Reading; Luke 1: 68-79

Gospel Reading; Luke 3: 1-6

Sermon Title:

Peace Is Making the Rough Ways Smooth

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary; Peace is like a good shock absorber. It does not take the bumps out of the road but it takes the pain out of those bumps.

We are now in the second week of Advent. The theme of the first week was Hope. This has to 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 the pandemic of COVID.

We have to start out with a hope based in a God that will come through for us. Next, we need to achieve a state of peace where we can function in our newly enriched state of hope. This is where we find ourselves today.

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

Peace has to 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.

Throughout the scriptures prophets of old predicted that a new day was coming. Malachi said, "Behold I send My messenger, and he will prepare the way before me." "He will purify the sons of Levi...that they may offer to the Lord an offering in righteousness, as in days of old, as in former years."

Ezekiel says it like this, "God said, 'I will make a covenant of peace with them and rid the land of wild beasts so that they may live in the desert and sleep in the forests in safety. I will bless them in the places surrounding my hill. I will send down showers in season; there will be showers of blessing.

The trees of the field will yield their fruit and the ground will yield its crops; the people will be secure in their land. They will know that I am the Lord."

God is good ALL the time, and God has got this!

Notice, there will still be “deserts” and “forests” but they will be safe havens for us because God will be there with us.

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 the line that says that, “righteousness and peace have kissed.” These two have to go together. Peace without righteousness is hollow at best and “of the devil” at worst and 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 that we have to do.

Our first reading in Luke reinforces my concept that peace is something that we have to do. Luke says, “And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest; For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways. To give knowledge of salvation to His people.”

The gospel lesson is usually taken as a prediction of the work of John the Baptist and I believe that it is true but I believe it is something more.

When it quotes Isaiah saying, “The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight. Every valley shall be filled and every mountain and hill brought low; The crooked places shall be made straight and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God.” It is saying what John said as he explained what he was doing. I fully agree with this but I firmly believe that the work of John the Baptist is not yet completed.

People are still living in a 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 the twisting roads of life. People are still lacking the energy to climb the hills and descend into the valleys and are still tripping on the bumps and pot holes 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 need to be walking in the peace of Jesus Christ. The 23rd Psalm speaks of the Shadow of Death but with the peace of Christ in our lives we can walk in the light and we can lead others to the light.

That is what Christmas is all about. The light of the world coming into 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 of our fears and give us peace. This is a peace that we can not hold unto ourselves but must make it visible to the world in all of our words and actions.

Jesus has given us the peace by making our rough ways smooth, the least we can do is to share the peace, and next week the joy that we have in Him.

Know the peace of Jesus that passes all understanding and share it with everyone that sees you and you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest.

Know Peace. Be Peace. Share Peace. Hallelujah and Amen!