

Gaines Congregational United Church of Christ

December 8, 2024

Old Testament Reading; Malachi 3: 1-4

Responsive Reading: Luke 1: 68-79

Epistle Reading; Philippians 1: 3-11

Gospel Reading: Luke 3: 1-6

Sermon: **Peace**

By Rev. Jim Gardner

Summary: Obtain Peace through love, knowledge, and discernment that you may be sincere and without fault until the day of Christ.

Our Advent word for today is PEACE, but what is peace? A couple weeks ago I quoted Pilot asking Jesus, "What is truth?" Truth to Pilot was totally different from truth to Jesus. To Pilot truth was governing, maintaining relative order and enforcing the law. To Jesus truth was a spiritual thing where God was in control and the laws were a result of love and not power. Pilot was an enforcer of the laws of Rome, but Jesus was a

proclaimer of the love-based law of God. Throughout the history of mankind, we humans have been interpreting God's word in a worldly framework.

We interpret peace roughly as no war, no domestic violence, no rioting in the streets, no quarrels and no loud boisterous debates. Philippians 4: 7 says, "And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

The verses from Malachi predict the coming of Jesus but have that worldly bent expecting Him to be accepted and to be a refiner's fire that will straighten out all the miscues of the spiritual leaders of the time then and the time to come. The indication here is that Malachi seems to predict that the peace coming will be the relative peace of power as it was in the good old days of King David being the dominant power in their immediate world. Either that or he was predicting the second coming of Christ rather than the coming of the crucified Christ. Any who, he did not seem to be predicting a peace driven by love and not power. Either way Malachi's prediction has not yet come to fruition.

Our second reading today is Luke's rendition of the speech of Zacharias at the naming of his son who becomes John the Baptist. Zacharias sees immediacy of fulfillment of Malachi's prediction and predicts that John's job would be to set the

stage for the coming not by eliminating the “darkness and the shadow of death but will give light to guide our feet”. This is further emphasized a couple pages later with Luke’s quote of Isaiah. “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 the Lord.”

Just a side note here, when a king was expected to visit everything possible was done to smooth out and dress up the route he would be taking to get there. In this case John was to prepare the people’s hearts for the God/King route.

Paul in his epistle to the Philippians has the timing benefit since when he came along Jesus had already lived and died and was raised from the tomb and then into Heaven. Paul had a better idea of the peace that Jesus was bringing. Paul was at peace in all of his circumstances. Paul was at peace with wealth and at peace with poverty. Paul was at peace while he waited in prison and wrote to the church in Philippi and said, “And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment, that you may approve the things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ, being filled with the fruits of righteousness which

are by Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God.” i.e. I pray you will get it right.

Buying into this “Peace that is beyond understanding” may not be the easiest thing to do but some get really close and the rest of us can get within a few steps of that. There was a young pastor in Africa that was martyred for his faith but before he died he wrote this.

I’m part of the fellowship of the unashamed. I’ve stepped over the line. The decision has been made. I’m a disciple of Jesus Christ. I won’t look back, let up, slow down, back away, or be still. My past is redeemed, my present makes sense, my future is secure.

I’m finished and done with low living, sight walking, small planning, smooth knees, colorless dreams, tamed visions, mundane talking, cheap living, and dwarfed goals.

I no longer need preeminence, prosperity, position, promotions, plaudits, or popularity. I don’t have to be right, first, tops, recognized, praised, regarded, or rewarded. I now live by faith, lean on His presence, walk by patience, lift by prayer, and labor by power.

My face is set, my gait is fast, my goal is heaven, my road is narrow, my way rough, my companions few, my guide reliable, my mission clear. I cannot be bought, deluded, or delayed.

I will not flinch in the face of sacrifice, hesitate in the presence of the adversary, negotiate at the table of the enemy, or meander in the maze of mediocrity.

I won't give up, shut up, let up, until I have stayed up, stored up, prayed up, and preached up for the cause of Christ.

I am a disciple of Jesus. I must go till He comes, give till I drop, preach till all know, and work till He stops me.

And when He comes for His own, He will have no problem recognizing me – my banner will be clear!

I think this young preacher is a glowing example of taking the PEACE to its furthest limit but if you, like me, are not sure you are ready to be a martyr for Christ just yet here is another story that might be a little easier to relate to.

A picture of peace

There once was a King who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The King looked at all the pictures, but there were only two he really liked and he had to choose between them.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror, for peaceful towering mountains were all around it.

Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the King looked, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest in perfect peace.

Which picture do you think won the prize? The King chose the second picture. Do you know why?

“Because,” explained the King, “peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work.

Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace.”

You may not be able to be a martyr for Christ but we can all be a little bird in a nest of peace, protected from the storms of life by “our” Jesus. Hallelujah and Amen!