

Christmas Eve 11:00 Luke 2:1-14 (15-20)

That feeling finally hit me last night at about midnight; I had been holding it off for days now. But then walls started to close in around me. I was trying to put the finishing touches on the last toy that needed to be put together. But it wasn't going together the way I thought it should be. I'm not sure why because the directions are always so crystal clear

As the project finished I had a temporary reprieve. Then the feeling hit me again this morning at about 10 am I was re-reading this sermon for the umpteenth time suddenly something didn't work. It had worked for the last four day but now it didn't seem to fit. And the walls started to close in on me again as I wondered how I would work it.

This time of year there always seems to be something to do. Christmas parties and open houses, cards to write, baking to be done, decorating, finding just the right Christmas tree, and of course, gifts to be bought.

There are probably a few of you out there wondering if the mall will still be open after the service or wondering if you order something tonight on EBay will Fed-Ex deliver it tomorrow.

This time of year, we worry about family dynamics. We wonder what Uncle Jimmy is going to say this year that sets everyone off. Or we wonder how it's going to work as we run from one family Christmas to the next. Are people going to be offended if we don't just spend enough time with each of them.

If you are like my mother-in-law there are a probably a few of you out there calculating what time you need to get up to pop the bird in the oven to make sure its out by noon so you can sit down at the dinner table by one.

At work, some of us are pressured as the year ends, to close the books, to write end of the year reports,.

Those working in retail and hospitality find themselves working extended hours.

And for some of us this is the most difficult time as we are wracked with deep sadness as we struggle to make it through the holidays without some of the loved ones who have gone on before us.

This time of year, many of us find ourselves off balance, off kilter, the walls closing in around us, tired-- run down-- struggling to find peace in our lives.

So we have arrived here at this moment. We've heard the story of God. The baby has been born, wrapped carefully in swaddling cloth and laid in the manger. The angel has appeared in the night sky to the shepherds and has announced that he has "good news."

"Good news of great joy for all people: **to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior...**" And then in the blink of an eye, in an instant the angel is joined by a heavenly chorus singing "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace, goodwill among people."

Peace, we may wonder--this child, this baby; this Christ has come to bring peace? Maybe we've heard this story so many times that the words of it zip by and they don't register. Maybe they just doesn't register because it seems that true peace seems like such a foreign concept to us.

Peace-Christ brings peace, when wars continue and our soldiers well as innocent civilians die every day in Iraq and Afghanistan,

Peace when there are still terrible atrocities that span the globe,

Peace when injustice reigns as millions suffer in Africa with HIV/AIDS.

Peace, when the Episcopal Church seems to be coming apart in places.

Is peace a pipe dream? It seems that it may be—as we realize how hard it is to just find even the smallest amounts of peace in own lives-- day in and day out. And yet the story we hear each and every Christmas is that God among us, Jesus Christ has come to bring peace- goodwill among all people.

The prophet Isaiah even describes the one that is to come as the “prince of peace.”

Zechariah tells of the Messiah as one who will “guide our feet in the way of peace.”

Is this a joke?

Is peace something that Christ can offer the world?

Is peace something Christ can even offer us individually?

Look around for a moment, breath in this moment of your life, the sanctuary is splendidly decorated, darkness is trying to creep in through the stained glass, only to be held back at bay from light that permeates this place, many of us are surrounded by love of our families, we have come to hear the ancient stories of baby being born , sing our favorite hymns and to soak up the presence of God in this place.

Are not some of you feeling a sense of a peace and tranquility right now? Has not the whirlwind of your life stopped at least for a moment?

I ask again, is peace something Christ can offer us?

Peace may be off in your horizon. It may come at the most unexpected moments in the midst of tumult and turbulence.

It may show up as you kneel before God in confession and lay down that something that is tormenting your soul. Peace comes to us in the assurance that we are forgiven in our asking and we are loved beyond measure.

Peace may come as you walk forward to the altar and your life becomes mingled with the life of Christ as you eat the bread and drink the wine.

Maybe it won't arrive here tonight at all maybe happens tomorrow as you sit down to dinner with your assembled family.

Peace may show up as through the hard work of reconciliation that occurs in those difficult conversations we need to have with those who are estranged from us.

Maybe it simply comes in a deep breath; take a moment of silence, a silent prayer whispered.

Most of you probably don't know this but I have both a dog and a cat at our house. When we first got the cat, our dog would not like it if the cat got center stage. If the cat came waltzing into the room the dog would immediately chase her away. So when the dog was around the cat was relegated to the periphery have to sneak around if the house. This went on for quite some time fortunately the dog has gotten old and mellowed out some.

Anyway, we have this great snapshot of the dog and cat right after we brought Alexis home from the hospital and laid her in her cradle for the first time. As Alexis slept both the dog and the cat crept over to the cradle to peer over the side to see just what this thing was that we had just brought home.

The snapshot is amazing not only because it really captures these incredible expressions of curiosity on the dog and cat's faces but also because for that moment peace and tranquility existed between the dog and cat because they were intently focused on this little child.

When we make the Christ child, Jesus the center of our lives, the focus of our attention, we will begin to find true peace, a peace that will be there if we look for it, if we work at it, if we expect it and seek it out.

Peace is a gift from God-- promised by the heavenly hosts and brought to us in a tiny package a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth, laid in the manger.

AMEN