

## The Fourth Sunday of Advent



### Text: Micah 5:2-5a

<sup>2</sup> But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from everlasting. <sup>3</sup> Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has given birth; then the rest of his brothers shall return to the people of Israel. <sup>4</sup> And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. <sup>5</sup> And he shall be their peace.

### Theme: Christ Is our Peace

When I first came to Benediction, one of my shut-in members was named Ruby. I visited her for 7 years until our Lord called her in 2003. By the time that I came to Benediction she was living with her daughter and her family in Waukesha. She had a great sense of humor, and we had a lot of laughs. I still keep one of her Christmas cards in my file, because I get a chuckle out of it every time that I see it. But what I remember most about Ruby was when we were done with Communion, and I would say the Benediction, she would respond with “Peace, that wonderful peace that He gives.

When you think about it, peace is one of the greatest treasures that we can have on this earth. We worry and fret about so many things, but it is a blessing when our hearts are filled with peace. Peace is a gift that Jesus gives to us. He says, *“Peace, I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid.”* After He rose from the dead, Jesus first words to the disciples were, *“Peace be with you.”*

I. Peace is often difficult to find in this world.

**It’s hard to find on the outside.** For over 10 years our nation has been at war since the terrorist attacks on 9-11-01. We have had a lot of concern for the safety of our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the last year those troop levels have gone down, but now we have had a series of horrendous acts of violence at home: the shooting at the theater, another at the Sikh temple in Oak Creek, and the horrific shooting of so many first graders in Connecticut. This world is full of violence. Sadly, it seems to be getting closer and closer to home.

There are all kind of other concerns: A lot of people are worried about their jobs. Some people are afraid of losing them. Others dread going to work every day for a variety of reasons. There are millions in our country who are looking for work and can’t seem to be able to find it. There are worries about our health, about family members, and all kinds of things that we struggle with. In the last few months, I have often been working with families who are having troubling paying rent and utilities, clothing their kids for the winter or buying anything for their kids for Christmas. Sometimes we grieve for years over loved ones whom we dearly miss. There are other family members who have gone on the wrong path and hurt so many people, including themselves.

Peace is hard to find, even in this Advent Season. The commercialism of our day has robbed us of

the goodness of so many of our Christian traditions. Advent was once a quiet time of year. There is a quiet joy and peace to many of our Advent hymns. We sing, “Hark the Glad Sound, the Savior Comes.” In his Advent hymn, “O Lord How Shall I meet you, Paul Gerhardt writes,

**4. I lay in fetters, groaning,  
 Thou com'st to set me free;  
 I stood my shame bemoaning,  
 Thou com'st to honor me;  
 A glory Thou dost give me,  
 A treasure safe on high,  
 That will not fail or leave me  
 As earthly riches fly.**

What does the world do with the peacefulness of this season? It makes it into one of the most hectic times of the year! It revolves around shopping, buying gifts, and baking. It has become a season full of stress, so much that people no longer have the post Christmas blues. They are happy that it's all over and toss out the tree on December 26.

The era in which Micah wrote his book was a time when peace was hard to find. The northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed. The southern kingdom of Judah, which is where Bethlehem was, was in danger of being destroyed. It was also a time of war and economic upheaval for the people of that day, even more so than today. It was a period in which the course of world history was being shaped in a very brutal way. There was little peace to be found in this world.

**The place where peace is most lacking is in our hearts.** We worry and fret about many things. We worry about our family, our health, our financial situation, and even our sins. People tell us to calm down, but we think that it's easy for them to say. How can we be calm when there is a distinct possibility that our entire lives could soon unravel. Some times we will try to tell ourselves that everything will be okay, but the prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel all mock those who say, *“Peace, peace, when there is no peace.”* A false peace of heart is worse than no peace of heart.

II. Christ is our peace.

**He brings is to our hearts.** Our text prophesied the Savior who would come from Bethlehem. He origins would be from everlasting. He would be born in this tiny, insignificant town in a clan that was just as insignificant. But he would bring the true peace that we need. Whenever Jesus speaks about the peace that He would bring, it is not necessarily a change in the outward circumstances, but He brings peace of heart. In John 14 He says that He does not bring the kind of peace that the world does. He says, *“Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”* In Philippians 4 Paul writes of the peace that passes all understanding. The hymn “Chief of Sinners though I Be” says, “Peace that flows from sin forgiven.” This special gift of Jesus stills our hearts even when it might look at though everything around us is falling apart. We commit our griefs, our worries, our fears, our losses, and especially our sins to Him, and He rescues us from them all. He pronounces the forgiveness of sins, and He promises that He will never leave us or forsake us. He is always by our side in any time of trouble. He also invites us to call upon Him in the day of trouble in prayer, and He will deliver us.

That peace is expressed well when we come to the Lord's table. He gives us His body and blood which were given and shed for the forgiveness of our sins. As I dismiss each table, I do so with the words, "Depart in peace." When we know that Christ gave His body and shed His blood to take away my sins, nothing can separate me from His incredible love. Our fearful hearts find peace and rest in Christ.

**At Christ's second coming all things will be restored to their original peace.** In the Garden of Eden all things were at peace with each other. It was the fall into sin which destroyed that peace. That is shown graphically when one of Adam and Eve's sons killed the other one. Ever since the fall, this world has been longing for peace. The chapter just before our text speaks of when swords will be turned to plowshares and all people on earth will live in peace with each other. Although we want to work for peace in this world, we also know that it is always fleeting. But on the day when Christ returns, the swords will turn into plowshares. All of our Lord's people will live in eternal peace with each other. Revelation 7 gives us a picture of heaven in which people of every nation, tribe, people, and language are in perfect harmony as they praise our Lord who saved them from the great tribulation. As Christians we don't try to predict the end of the world as so many people have tried to do lately, but we know that when Jesus returns, all those who know Him will be at perfect peace again.

Ruby was right. The greatest gift that we can have in this world is peace, and Christ, the Savior, who was prophesied in this text, is the one who alone can give it. He is our peace. May God fill each one of your hearts with that gift of peace this Advent season and always, and may we all like Ruby treasure what a great gift it is.

Amen.

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