

Daily Devotional Guide

Monday – Read Luke 3:1-3. John the Baptist came to prepare the world for Christ. The season of Advent (“to come”) is about preparation. Our culture is always in a rush to get to Christmas. Have you noticed? Christmas music is already playing everywhere you go. But those of us who truly anticipate the birth of Christ know that we must prepare ourselves. John the Baptist reminds us that we must repent and make room for Christ before we can receive him. There can be no peace without repentance. Are you preparing yourself for Christmas?

Tuesday – Read Luke 3:4. John, taking his cue from the prophet Isaiah, gives us direction as to how to find the peace of Christmas. He says, “Prepare the way of the Lord.” In order to receive the peace of Christ we must prepare ourselves. For some of us this means removing clutter from our lives so that we can give our full attention to Christ. Simplicity is one of the keys to peace. Advent is a great opportunity to remove the unimportant “stuff” of our lives and reorient ourselves around what is most important. Make a list today of those unimportant thoughts and areas of your life that will no longer rob you of your precious time.

Wednesday – Read Luke 3:4. John tells us to “make his paths straight.” We want Christ to find a wide open path into our lives. We do not want his path to us to be crooked or broken. Therefore, some of us may need to “repair” our paths. Some of our paths are crooked with resentment and bitterness. Other paths are broken by sin. Our paths must be made straight before Christ can come in and give us peace. What kind of repairs do you need to make?

Thursday – Read Luke 3:5-6. Notice how many times the word “shall” appears in these two verses. 4 times we see the word “shall.” This is a powerful word that communicates certainty. These things *will* happen when we prepare and repair ourselves. For many of us our problem is not a lack of preparation or repairing; it is a lack of belief. Do you believe Christ will give you peace? If not, what is holding you back from believing?

Friday – Read Luke 3:6. This is a beautiful verse that expresses that Christ comes to bring us salvation. The word salvation literally means “wholeness.” This is why we experience peace when we receive Christ. We are made whole by his love. Whoever finds wholeness finds peace. If you don’t have peace in your life it is because there is something broken in your life that needs healing. Ask God to give you the wisdom to discover what is broken in your life and the courage to fix it.



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The Peace of Christmas

Sunday, December 5, 2010

Sermon by: Dr. Charley Reeb, Senior Pastor

Scripture Lesson: Luke 3: 1-6

Today, we focus on the Christmas gift of peace. And our focus begins with a text about John the Baptist. Why John the Baptist? Well, John the Baptist came to prepare our hearts for Christ. I don’t know if you have noticed, but our culture is in a rush to get to Christmas. The music is already playing and the decorations are already up, and they have been for a few weeks! But those of us who desire Christ know better. We know we must prepare ourselves for Christ, and this is what our text is all about.

(A Reading of Luke 3:1-6)

There is a gift everyone wants under the tree this year. It is the most requested gift of all Christmas gifts. Just naming the gift makes us want it – The gift of PEACE. Just saying the words melts our hearts, doesn’t it?

We live in time of great unrest, anxiety, fear, turmoil, and we want peace. So we come to this time of year and we sing about peace, light the candle of peace, lift up the Prince of Peace, and read about the angels singing of peace. Then we remember that Jesus said, “My peace I give unto you.” We understand that peace is the fruit of the Christian life. Yet, peace is something very few people find, especially during the holiday season.

The big question is, “Will we ever find peace?” The answer: it is really up to us. Even though Jesus wants to give us peace, few people receive it because they don’t know how to get it. We have all seen the bumper sticker, “No Jesus, No Peace? Know Jesus and Know Peace.” This

bumper sticker speaks the truth. Knowing Jesus will give you peace. But the sticker leaves out one important truth. What the bumper sticker doesn’t tell you is, “Know Jesus, Know Peace, *if you do what Jesus wants you to do.*”

What is it Jesus wants us to do? Well this morning I’m going to tell you.

This morning I’m going to tell you the biblical keys to finding peace in your life. These are the keys those who have peace use. These are the keys those who don’t have peace, don’t use. If you use these biblical keys I am about to give you, you will find peace in your life.

Prepare Ourselves for Christ

“Prepare the Way of the Lord.” Luke 3:4

If we want peace in our lives, we have to prepare for it; we have to make room for it.

There is a popular show now called “Hoarders.” It documents those who have a serious problem with throwing away anything. Their houses are health hazards with junk piled high to the ceiling. They live their lives climbing over boxes and old newspapers. In most cases, they need psychological help with their problem of hoarding.

I could have produced a show like this a long time ago. I recall visiting a lady in another church I served who desired a pastoral visit. When she opened her door I was overwhelmed by the amount of stuff she had piled in her house. She asked me to come in and I didn’t know how!

There was no clear path into the house! So, we climbed over boxes to get to a small area we could stand, and she asked me to have a seat...on a box. We began to talk, and after a couple of minutes the box I was seated on collapsed and I fell on the floor. And she had the audacity to say, "I thought that box might not hold you!"

We laugh at hoarders. We are sometimes disturbed at hoarders. Perhaps we find them weird. Well, we may not hoard material things, but many of us hoard something just as bad - negative thoughts and habits. Many of us live our lives weighted down by many bad thoughts and bad habits that we refuse to throw away.

This is why many of us don't have peace. Our lives are cluttered with negativity. We want Christ to come and bring peace to our lives, and Christ is saying to many of us, "I couldn't find a place to dwell in your heart and mind if I tried!" The question we must ask ourselves is, "Is my heart and mind a welcomed place for Christ?"

This is why John the Baptist says, "Prepare the Way of the Lord." What do we think that means? It means make a clear path, clear out the junk that is taking free rent in our brain and heart. We must take a trip to a spiritual dumpster and throw the clutter away because it is taking away precious energy and time and stealing our peace.

How do we do this? Listen close because the advice I am about to give you executives will pay thousands of dollars to get from gurus. I'm giving them to you for free. Ready? Write down every thought and task that is in your mind. Write down all of them. Then divide this list into two groups: important/unimportant. Do what is important and throw out what is not. That is free!

Here is some more advice that is priceless. Ask yourself, "What is incomplete in my life?" The biggest contributor to a lack of peace for people is incompleteness - the estranged relationships that have not been healed, the dreaded task that has been put off and put off. Many people will not sleep well tonight because of the incomplete things in their life.

I recall a man coming to see me who was a bundle of nerves. He complained that he could not sleep. He had been to a bunch of doctors and specialists and nothing worked. After a series of

questions, we uncovered his problem. A few years back he said something to an old business colleague he regretted. There was a big blow out and the relationship was severed. My advice to him was simple. I told him to call the guy, take him to lunch and apologize. That's what he did! He later told me that he never slept better than he did the night of his apology.

Repair Ourselves for Christ

"Make His Paths Straight" Luke 3:4

Some of us not only need to clear the path for peace: we must repair it.

A couple of years ago Brandy and I went on vacation to Hawaii. We went out exploring in our rental car. We came upon a big detour sign that said, "Road Broken, Cannot Cross." We got out of the car and noticed a sink hole had developed and sucked about a 100 yard section of road right into the ground. We were glad there was a sign!

This is what Christ finds on the way to many of our hearts - A BIG SIGN THAT SAYS "BROKEN - CANNOT CROSS." You want to know this biggest road block to the peace of Christ? Bitterness, resentment, and the unwillingness to forgive. Many of us are dying for peace, and we don't know why we don't have it. For many of us the reason that we haven't found peace is that we haven't forgiven someone or we haven't forgiven ourselves. Resentment blocks the movement of Christ in our lives. Christ wants to empower us to forgive but many of us refuse the power and suffer a lack of peace.

If you don't have peace in your life and have tried everything, it may mean something is broken in your life that needs to be fixed. What is broken in your life?

I want you to remember something that will save your life from much pain, heartache, and unrest. When someone hurts you, insults you, or betrays you, remember this: **YOU HAVE THE ADVANTAGE. YOU HAVE THE CHOICE TO FORGIVE THE PERSON AND MOVE ON. THE PERSON WHO HURT YOU DOES NOT HAVE THAT CHOICE.**

When someone hurts you, pray, "Lord, I will forgive and move on. I choose not to strike back. I will not live with a lack of peace like them. I pray for them and hope they find peace, but I will

not be like them. I desire peace more than a few minutes of satisfaction."

Believe It Shall Be Done!

"Every valley SHALL be filled, and every mountain and hill SHALL be made low, and the crooked SHALL be made straight, and the rough ways smooth; and all flesh SHALL see the salvation of God." Luke 3:5-6

The word SHALL is powerful. It communicates certainty. When we prepare and repair these things *will* happen.

For some of you, finding peace is not a matter of preparing or repairing; it is a matter of believing. Doubt rules your thoughts and life, and doubt can be a thief to all that God wants to give you.

Ever tried to hear someone in a loud environment? Perhaps you were on your cell phone in a loud restaurant and you could not hear the person on the other line? This is how doubt works. It is noise that drowns out the truth of God for you. This why James says in the first chapter, "Ask God in faith, never doubting, for anyone who doubts is like a wave of sea, driven and tossed by wind."

We must Have FAITH that God will bring us peace! Hebrews says, "Without faith it is impossible to please God. Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew, "Ask it will be given you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be open unto you." Later, Jesus tells us that if we have faith the size of a tiny mustard seed we can move mountains!

I know a lot of bad theology has been developed from these verses, but this does not negate the biblical truth that belief and faith sets God in motion in our lives. Why? God will not force his will, love and peace on us. But when we have faith, we give God permission to work! **FAITH IS THE KEY THAT WILL SET YOU FREE!**

I want to show you a famous depiction of Christ. This is Jesus standing at the door of our hearts and knocking. Over the years many artists have depicted this picture. And there is always one common element in every depiction. Take a close look. There is no handle or lock on the outside. It can only open from the inside. This Christmas

Christ is knocking on the door of your heart and wants to give you peace. Will you make room for him and by faith let him in? All you have to lose is unrest, confusion, and chaos. And what you have to gain is peace! Amen.