

**The Second Sunday in Advent -
“Peace”
Isaiah 9 verses 6 - 7; Ephesians 2:12 - 18**

Every year there are surveys in the lead up to Christmas. You know, how are you feeling? What are you looking forward to, and of course, how are your stress levels?

Well this is how it stacks up.

- Two out of five of New Zealanders feel the added cost of Christmas adds financial stress during the holiday season.

And that's understandable - no one wants to miss out on a enjoying Christmas.

- Not only that but one in four feels that expectations from others and social pressure lead to more spending at Christmas time.

So as usual finance is a major stressor.

And a close second is of course... family.

A number of surveys have been done and here's some stats:

- 95% say they believe it is important to spend time with family over the holidays.
However, two in five respondents say it is almost always a stressful experience.
- More than a quarter (26%) of Brits are relieved about not having to see certain family members this Christmas due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- 39% of respondents believe they will be spending Christmas without somebody they normally would, and a further 16% are currently unsure if this will be the case.

I mentioned this last year but research goes to give a number to how long before have had enough of the wider family.

Any thoughts, anyone remember?

- It's average of three hours and 54 minutes before people start to feel sick of their families.

So, how do people finding some peace and quiet when family becomes too much?

- According to the survey, one in four Americans will find a quiet room in their relative's home to hide away.
- Meanwhile, 37% take things a step further and fabricate an excuse to leave altogether.
- Other top concerns or stressors among respondents when it comes to holiday visits were a lack of privacy (22%), family members getting on one's nerves (20%), family drama (20%), feeling like an annoyance to hosts (19%), and a loud or busy house (17%).

And of course behind all this is the spectre of Covid...

“Did any of those numbers stand out for you?”

We know that Jesus was declared to be the “Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and **peace** there will be no end.”

Peace is an inescapable aspect of the Christian faith.

The most common greeting in the New Testament letters - used by both Paul and Peter - is “grace and **peace** to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

That suggests that when churches gathered, this was the greeting given to all.

So it's inescapable to talk of God, to talk about Advent, without talking about peace.

Central to the gospel story is peace and that human beings are *not* at peace God.

We don't like to think of ourselves as being in a conflicted place with God.

We want to think of ourselves as ‘good’ people.
People who good citizens and polite neighbours.

¹ It's found 14 times in the New Testament.

That's the Western secular culture's default setting.

Of course every culture and society has its unpardonable sins.

But we, by and large, are those who think, "Well, I've paid my bills, love my kids, so my job, and haven't murdered or assaulted anyone, so I'm okay."

We know so many people like this.

One of the reasons is that the Western world, up until recently, was steeped in Christian ethics.

But when God says He looks at the heart, He means it.

You may be nice, family loving person but have a heart absolute set against God and God's purposes.

You may be kind but absolutely reject God's kindness shown to you in Christ.

So we hear in Ephesians:

"...now in Christ Jesus you who once were *far away* have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

...For *through him* we both have access to the Father by one Spirit"

And at its core is the good news of peace with God.

You see, we are a visited planet.

When God saw a world war with Him and at war with itself, He took a walk. He took a walk across the universe to this planet; He went on a peace-making mission.

The prophets foretell and the angel's announce a breakthrough in history - God is going to bring to an end all the brokenness, the alienation, the distance, the rebellion and sin that has placed people at odds with their Maker - for those who want it.

The child found in a manger will grow up to become the Suffering Servant, pierced and crushed for our transgressions, bearing our punishment that we might be at peace with God.

As Paul puts so succinctly, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

What so many, many people need this Advent and Christmas more than anything else, is to be at peace with God.

What happens is this Advent peace - this peace with God - also becomes the peace of God.

The peace that concerns so many is peace of mind and heart - a peace that ranges from an inward calm to quietness of spirit to serenity.

It is freedom from anxiety, from worry, from fear, from dread.

When peace is truly present, it overflows.

“...he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility...”

The groups referred to where the Jews and Gentiles and there was often genuine hostility between the two.

The Jews with the crazy laws and regulations; the Gentiles who lived such terrible idolatrous lives.

The Christ child would bring peace between two groups where there was great hostility - Jews and Gentiles.

In Himself he made us one.

So what does it look like, really?

What's the fruit of peace for you and me?

Peace is often a pathway to joy.

You may recognise scenes like this:





These are scenes from all around the world - partying in the streets as the end of World War II was declared.

Peace often precedes joy - how's your joy level today?

Then these words written by Horatio Spafford:

*When peace, like a river,
attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,*

It is well, it is well, with my soul.

And you know, Spafford encountered so many losses in his life.
His first son died at the age of two.
Shortly afterwards Spafford was financially ruined by the Great Fire of Chicago.
He then planned to move to England and sent his wife Anna and four daughters ahead while attended to some final business.
The ship was struck by another vessel and rapidly sunk.
He received a telegram from Anna which said, “Saved alone”; his four daughters had drowned.
Spafford immediately left Chicago to bring his wife home.
In the midst of his sorrow, while sailing near the place of his daughters’ death, he wrote the words to the hymn, “It Is Well With My Soul.”

He wrote the words for “It is Well with my Soul” as his ship passed near where his daughters had died.
(They had three more children including another son, who died at the age of four).

People say, well he must have had great faith, which I’m sure is true.
I would also say he had a great God so willing to give him great peace.

What about us?

Well, if there’s one word associated with this time of year, it is... stress.
So much to do or too much to do, in a small amount of time.
For us too it means carving out times where we just sit and be with God.
For Christians there is a challenging disconnect at times.
We know at times peace is so elusive.
Sometimes it’s a battle.

I feel at times at the moment.
These are not easy times to navigate.

So this morning, you know what you’re facing.

I’d love to be able to give six keys to finding peace but I don’t think it works that way.
Peace is not found in a technique.
It’s not in a formula.

Peace is not found in a Christian programme no matter how good it is.
It's not found in being as good as we can or as bad.
It's not found in wealth, a relationship, a career, a substance.
It's not found in religion.

The peace that Advent points to is a person: Jesus.

That's who we need to receive our peace from.

Are you at peace with God this morning?
Have you accepted Jesus Christ as King and Forgiver of your sins?
If you haven't, then you are still not at peace with God.

So what we're going to do is sit in stillness with Jesus.

Let's pray.
For whatever you are facing, there is the offer of peace.

For those who feel ashamed and guilty there is a forgiving peace.
For those whose hearts are mourning there is a comforting peace.
For the seeking direction, there is guiding peace.

All this is from the Price of Peace,
Amen.