



ADVENT 2

December 4, 2022

St. Timothy Lutheran Church, Portland, OR

THE LESSONS: Isaiah 11:1-10; Psalm 72:1-7,18-19; Romans 15:4-13; Matthew 3:1-12

THE SERMON: “The Great Detour... to God’s Peace...”

Grace and Peace to you in the NAME of GOD: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Introduction: Building a Road to Peace

Advent invites us to live in two directions at once: looking back to Jesus’ humble arrival in a manger, and looking forward to His return in glory—when wrongs are made right and peace becomes not a candle we light, but the very air we breathe.

This morning we lit the Candle of Peace. But biblical *shalom* is far more than the absence of conflict. Biblical shalom is wholeness, harmony, restoration—your soul exhaling because things are finally how they should be.

Yet many of us long for this peace without experiencing it. We carry the key but never unlock the door. We know God’s grace is free, but don’t always live as if we’re free. Dietrich Bonhoeffer warned about this “cheap grace”—like winning a sweepstakes and pinning the check to your fridge instead of cashing it.

To “cash in” on God’s transforming grace, we respond—not by earning, but by opening. We repent. We turn back. We allow God to shape our lives so His grace flows through us to others. That’s where the road to peace begins.

Matthew 3:1–12 – Making Straight the Road

Our Advent journey toward peace begins in the wilderness with John the Baptist. He’s not offering cozy carols; he’s shouting: “Repent, for

the kingdom of heaven has come near!” The Prince of Peace is on His way.

John’s message is vivid: “Make straight the road for the Lord.”

Picture your life as a highway. If Jesus is coming down that road, what does it look like?

Are there potholes carved by resentment?

Guardrails bent by old habits?

Billboards of anxiety blocking your view of God?

John says, “It’s time to clear the debris.”

He even challenges the Pharisees and Sadducees, who thought their heritage made them spiritually safe. “Bear fruit worthy of repentance,” he tells them. Don’t just claim change—live it.

Repentance isn’t shame. It’s the U-turn we make when we realize our current direction isn’t leading to peace. Peace grows wherever repentance clears the ground—not because we’re perfect, but because we surrender.

Isaiah 11:1–10 – Peace From the Stump

In contrast, while John’s voice is urgent, Isaiah’s is gentle hope. Isaiah speaks to a people whose world has been cut down—whose nation feels like a lifeless stump. Into that despair, Isaiah declares: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse.” Not a mighty oak—just a fragile green shoot from what seemed dead. Isaiah is saying: God is not finished. What are the stumps in your life—places that feel cut down or beyond repair? A relationship? A dream? A season of burnout or grief?

Isaiah tells us that God starts right there. From the stump of Jesse comes the Messiah, filled with the Spirit of wisdom and might. And His reign brings *shalom*—the wolf lying down with the lamb. Peace that transforms, not just comforts. This is God’s Advent agenda: new life where we thought none was possible.

Psalm 72:1–7, 18–19 – The Peaceful King

If Isaiah gives us the picture of peace, Psalm 72 shows us the King who brings it. He is not a ruler hungry for power but one who defends the weak, rescues the oppressed, and brings abundance for all.

God doesn't just promote peace; God embodies peace.

And Advent gives us the plot twist: this majestic King comes as a baby. Not on a warhorse, but in a manger—because He comes not to overpower us, but to win our hearts. His peace begins in us, but it's meant to move outward—into our families, our churches, and our communities. When this King reigns in us, His peace becomes visible around us.

Romans 15:4–13 – A People Shaped by Peace

Paul brings this Advent vision down to where we live. He reminds us that Scripture isn't just information—it is formation. It fills us with hope, and that hope shapes us into a certain kind of people: people who bear the character of Christ in a world starving for grace.

Paul imagines a church where unity isn't a slogan but a lifestyle. A community where encouragement is the default, where differences don't divide because Christ stands at the center holding everything together. He prays: “May the God of steadfastness and encouragement grant you to live in harmony with one another... so that with one voice you may glorify God.”

That's not sentimental language—it's a challenge. Harmony is not easy. It means choosing forgiveness when holding a grudge feels justified. It means listening before speaking, especially when opinions clash. It means seeing the person across the aisle—politically, socially, emotionally—as someone Christ has welcomed with open arms. And if Christ welcomed them, how can we do anything less?

Paul is calling the church to be a community where peace is not merely a private feeling but a public witness. Where peace is practiced in the way we talk to one another, talk about one another, and show up for one another. Where patience is not a rare virtue but a daily discipline. Where we welcome others not because it's convenient, but because Christ welcomed us when we were anything but convenient.

This kind of peace is costly. It requires humility. It requires self-denial. It requires the courage to be reconciled. But this is exactly the kind of peace that becomes a testimony—a light shining in a fragmented world.

Advent peace does not sit still. It moves—from your heart into your relationships, from your relationships into this community, and from this community into a world aching for hope.

It starts as a gift, but it becomes a calling.

To *abound* in hope is to overflow—so much so that the people around you can't help but notice. That's the kind of peace God wants to cultivate in us: a peace so visible, so resilient, so generous that it draws others to the Prince of Peace Himself.

This is the people God is shaping us to be. This is the challenge of Advent. And this is the witness the world needs now.

The Call and Our Challenge

So here's the Advent word for today: Prepare. Not the shopping list. Not the decorations. Prepare *your heart*.

John the Baptist invites us into spiritual construction work.

Repentance is God clearing out pride, fear, bitterness, and distraction—everything that crowds out His presence.

And remember Isaiah's promise: the stump, the place that seems dead or worn out, is exactly where God loves to plant new life. The Prince of Peace is coming. He seeks a heart that is ready, open, expectant.

So the question is simple: Will you allow God to clear the debris, tend the stump, straighten the road, and plant the seeds of peace that only God can grow? Because, when we grow in Christ, the Peace of Christ doesn't just visit us, the Holy Spirit will fill us with a peace and a joy that passes human understanding. Christ will lighten the burden of our sorrows, so we can rejoice and let our light appear into a dark and hopeless world. And, with hope and expectation, we wait for Jesus to appear and to set us free. (ELW 244, Rejoice, Rejoice, Believers)