

Peace

December 24, 2023

Welcome to the Beamsville Church of Christ online ministry. This week's message is titled "Peace" and it's part of our Advent series. The scripture reading is Isaiah 9, 6-7. Thank you to Ed, Glynnis, Temi, and Don for being part of the video. If you're watching this on the day it's released, our Christmas Eve candlelight service is tonight at 7pm Eastern and everybody is welcome to join us. Happy birthday this week to Tabitha, Johanne, Happy, and Rebecca.

Welcome, Announcements, Prayer

Good morning, everybody. Thank you for coming and being with us today. I was thinking when I was coming over this morning and I was walking over I thought, you know, I was thinking about church. You know, I am the church. We are all the church. And we've decided to come together as a church to encourage each other and to give honor and glory to God. A couple of birthdays this week, Dianne, and Debby. And we wish you well. Another year clicks by. A big thank you to Tina and Lynn for organizing the community care baskets. I've been saying baskets. You know when you use the word hamper, if they just think of this little thing, it's more like the back of a truck. There was so much stuff to sort through and Community Care definitely needed a boost this Christmas.

As far as budget goes, if you have any suggestions, please see Adam, Amy, or the elders in that regard. Candlelight service, we are going to have one this year on the 24th at 7pm. There will be opportunities to participate in leading singing, doing readings, and again see Adam in that regard.

As far as prayer requests, Peter's wife in Africa has her visa to come to Canada and so hopeful that she will arrive soon. Paul suffering a little bit from kidney stones and would appreciate our prayers. And facing some employment challenges and uncertainty right now. So, prayers for Paul and his family.

Ongoing concerns for Pam and Care and Jo, for Pam still in the hospital, hoping at some point to be able to move to Shaver to deal with her paralysis. But it seems like every week there's, kind of comes, looks positive and then it doesn't and so forth. But she remains in the Niagara Falls hospital. She really would appreciate visitors. She can't move very well. And she's spending a lot of time on her back staring at a ceiling. So, if you could go and see her, she would greatly appreciate it. If you don't know her, she is a very gregarious person. You go there and you can have this great conversation and then you might end up on her phone list and then she can have visits on the phone. She's absolutely amazing to have such a difficult medical situation but be so positive and so interested in everything that's going on. Like well, have you put the pies in the oven yet? Oh yeah, no, not yet. And then an hour later, did you take them out anyhow? But she's just interested in everybody's life and whatnot. And yeah, she's just amazing.

Care has been in Taiwan and had some chemotherapy there. Tim came home this week and I'm not sure where Care is whether she stayed in Taiwan or not. I think she's still there being treated. Again, ongoing concerns. Jo has rallied a little bit this week, had a couple of good days. Again, I think Jo would appreciate some visits, short visits. Would that be fair to say? So again, lots of needs.

So, we talk about the church meeting but the church leaves the building and so what do we do when we leave the building? Hopefully we're going to look after people and love people and be bright lights

in our community. Another one, as Mary currently is suffering some symptoms of a concussion. And Brian has sent word of thanksgiving for support and so forth. And also, Johnny and Jo and Dianne expressed thankfulness to the church for flowers and prayers and concern for them. Let's pray together.

Our Father in Heaven, we have so many things to be thankful for. For the blessings of your Son, for the blessings of your care for us through Him, that we come on this day to remember His life and His death and His resurrection and for the hope that can bring into our lives. The confidence that we know that you love us and care for us and that might give us the courage to be your people, to be able to be faced with doors to cross through with not sure what's on the other side but confidence to open the door because we know you're with us and that you will help us and that you will guide us. We pray for those in our church who have had difficulties for Pam and for Care and Jo. We pray, Father, that your spirit might be with them and that they might have peace during their difficulty and confidence that you love them and that you care for them, and you know the best for them. We pray Father for Paul, and we pray for his physical conditions; for the kidney stones that can be resolved and that the uncertainty about employment and that is in his life right now that that might have an end which will bring honor and glory to you. And for Peter as he awaits his wife we pray that that will be a beautiful reunion and that that will be able to happen here soon.

We pray Father for ourselves at this time of the year that we might be engaged in the spirit of the season of Christmas that embraces your son that we see this is a time of year to remember this precious and lovely gift of your son Jesus, and for the transformation that it's made to our world; to world governments, to the people that live here, that gives us a moral guide that we can live by. But also the hope of eternity and a model for how we should behave and what we should be caring about in our lives. We pray Father for eyes to see this and the heart to follow. We pray Father that you might bless us at this time as we honor you and raise up the message of Jesus to each other as we worship together. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Communion

It's so good to see everyone this morning. Excellent. Especially when I come and have something to say to you, I have a really narrow focus and this time not so much and I've prayed about it and I still don't have a strong connection but I often think that that kind of is what Christmas is about. We get these little snippets of things that touch our hearts, and we go, "Oh, that's really cool." I had two of them this week. They kind of line up together but they kind of don't. I'm just going to send them to you.

I'm a follower of Facebook which means I'm old. I get that. One of the things that I really like about Facebook that I don't like about Instagram or any of the other social media is that you can get a little bit more meat because it's just a longer ... People have more opportunity to express themselves. One of the sites that I follow is a farm, kind of, of all things. You just wouldn't really think that I live in a town, I'm not a farmer. I married a farmer but I'm not a farming kind of person. I wouldn't describe myself as a farm girl. This farm has really captured my attention. I kind of came across it by accident and started following it. They're actually a sheep farm. They have lots of different sheep. They post all the time on Facebook, lots of pictures. At least one of the farmers is kind of a poet at heart and he really thinks about (he or she. I think it's he) but thinks about really deep things. What's kind of weird about this farm was it was begun by *bona fide* hippies. These hippies way back in the 60s and 70s bought a chunk of land. If you're familiar with where Prince Edward County is, it's on the north shore of Lake Ontario on

the other side of Toronto. It's the island that's right beside Prince Edward County and they have a chunk of land on there that they have been farming since then. They work the land; they have organic practices which involve sheep and the things that sheep do which keeps their land growing. They posted this week.

It was Kyle's birthday. That's the name of the fellow. It says, "He's our head shepherd." It was never meant to be this way. We nearly quit and sold everything in 2017-2018 as the farm's owners looked to retire. Topsy sends out feelers to see if any farms want to take on our sheep for their breeding programs. To keep Topsy's particular genetics alive, but there was no success. Kyle could simply not bear to see the flock sold off to the auction house. Animals, in their prime, likely sold to slaughter. I will be the shepherd, says Kyle. A sacred, ancient bond between human and animal. The shepherd's weight is heavy. Concern for the flock takes not a day off. For Kyle, this feeling is orders of magnitude higher than the other Topsy farmers and owners. When an animal is sick or injured, Kyle feels it. It is a physical thing. A shepherd thinks about his flock always. Do they have sufficient water? What day will they run out of food and attempt a break out? Is there predator activity nearby? Where does the flock go next? Who is available to help? The sheep don't take time off needing care. For Kyle, there is a deep understanding and appreciation for animal sentience and welfare. The standard of care for our flock is high. Kyle works hard to give the flock and every individual the best quality of life. Otherwise, it's not worth it. The relationship between shepherd and flock is extraordinary. The sheep know who is responsible for their protection. And that really hit me so much of how Jesus is our shepherd. Certainly not the intent of the post. But it's like, oh my goodness, to think about Jesus as being our shepherd and always watching, caring the way that he never takes his eyes off of when we're falling or hurting or that we have needs or all of those things. And it really is a trust bond. The sheep, his sheep know him, know that they will take care of him.

Second thought. I was thinking about O Holy Night. Don't ask me why, but I just kind of got it in my head. And I was thinking about it and one of the lines in it. And so, here's the thing about O Holy Night. Everybody's thinking about, "Fall on your knees." My voice is so bad now I used to be able to sing this, but you know, "Fall" and how beautiful it is. "Fall on your knees. Oh, hear the angels voice." Everybody's sort of thinking about that. And I've sung it like a million times. I skipped over something that I'd never ever noticed before. Long lay the world in sin and error pining till he appeared and the soul felt its worth. And the soul felt its worth. So, kind of when I combine these messy ideas of the shepherd and the soul feeling its worth, it's like I am worth to Jesus. I have worth to him. In fact, I'm so worth it that he thinks about me all the time. He doesn't forget that I need things. He doesn't forget that I have troubles. He doesn't forget any of that stuff. He knows that stuff. Not only am I worth that to him, like a sheep to a shepherd, I am worth this incredible sacrifice. And if I open my heart, I feel my worth.

When I struggle and I remember, God loves me. I am dear to him. He's not going to forget about me. Even if my prayers aren't answered. Even if it takes a long time. And that makes my soul feel my worth because it's reflected off of him. And it's like, okay, that's a mind-blowing line in a song. That was the beginning of the soul feeling its worth. This has changed the world like Mr. Ed said. This changed the world for the soul to feel its worth. And that brings me such peace. I don't need to be anxious. I don't need to be anxious about anything because I'm worth. I'm worth this gift that God gave me through his son. Just takes my breath away. Let's pray together for this incredible idea that we're worth it. And a reminder as we take our communion that this is really what it's all about.

Jesus, Lord God, God precious Jesus, it is amazing that we have this incredible worth to you. God that as we begin to celebrate Jesus' birth, God that we know that the end of the story is not that a child is born. The end of the story is the love, the joy, the peace that you plan on bringing to us and sharing with us and God opening up a way that we can grasp hold of the true worth that you have for us. It's mind boggling. We don't know. I don't even know why you do that God. I don't get it. I don't get why you love us so much and yet I'm so utterly grateful. God and as we take the bread and the wine that reminds us of your sacrifice for us, God for you as a father watching his son die, Jesus for you as the one giving up their life for your sheep. God, we ask you to fill our hearts with a sense of our worth, a sense of peace, God and carry us forward into the days and weeks ahead as the soul feels its worth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Reading

Isaiah 9:6-7

Isaiah 9, verses 6 to 7. For to us, a child is born. To us, a son is given. And the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called, wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, Prince of Peace. And of the greatness of his government and peace, there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing it and upholding it with justice and righteousness. From that time on and forever, the zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this. Amen.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Sermon

Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being with us. Henry Van Dyke wrote these words. *"With eager heart and will on fire, I strove to win my great desire. Peace shall be mine, I said. But life grew bitter in the barren strife. My soul was weary and my pride was wounded deep. To heaven I cried. God grant me peace or I must die. The silent stars glittered, but no reply. Broken, at last I bowed my head, forgetting all myself and said, whatever comes, his will be done. And in that moment, peace was won."*

Do you remember the beautiful words from the hymn, peace, perfect peace? Let me read to you the lyrics. *Peace, perfect peace. In this dark world of sin, the blood of Jesus whispers, peace within. Peace, perfect peace by thronging duties pressed. To do the will of Jesus, this is rest. Peace, perfect peace with sorrow surging round on Jesus' bosom, not but calm if found. Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown. Jesus we know and he is on the throne. Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and ours. Jesus has vanquished death in all its powers. It is enough. Earth's struggles soon shall cease. And Jesus call us to heaven in perfect peace.*

As we approach the Christmas season, we will be noticing the themes of Advent. And the word Advent means basically the coming of the Messiah. Last Sunday, we concentrated on hope. And today, we will consider peace and peacemakers, the bringers of peace. Many times, life brings sorrow, worry, and peril. But God helps us to persevere. And sometimes, it's difficult to grasp God's promise of, I will never leave you. I will never forsake you. Christmas time can be wonderful. And sometimes, it can be very difficult. We sing Happy Christmas hymns, yet there are many who are in despair and sorrowful. Some

of us will remember the powerful hymn, Master, the tempest is raging. And you can picture this even with the words. Here are the words to the hymn.

Master, the tempest is raging. The billows are tossing high. The sky is overshadowed with blackness. No shelter, no help is nigh. Carest thou not that we perish? How canst thou lie asleep when each moment so madly is threatening a grave in the angry deep? The winds and the waves shall obey thy will. Peace be still. Whether the wrath of the storm-tossed sea, or demons, or men, or whatever it be, no waters can swallow the ship where lies, the master of ocean, and earth, and skies. Remember that hymn? They all shall sweetly obey thy will. Peace be still. Peace be still. Now scripture is quick to remind us that there will be wars, rumors of wars, as we've noticed overseas. We sometimes forget how truly blessed we are living in Canada. We do enjoy peace, precious peace.

In the Old Testament, specifically in the book of Judges, it says during Gideon's lifetime, the land of Israel enjoyed peace, which was so important. Because as you read through the Old Testament, it seemed like Israel was in war after war after war. But then peace would come. And in the Old Testament and the New Testament, as the ages pass, the Lord is with us always. The Lord gives strength to his people. The Lord blesses his people with peace. And I'd like to suggest that's not just old in New Testament. That is for us today. The Lord gives strength to his people. The Lord blesses his people with peace. We must open up our heart to experience what God is putting into our heart, peace. We can push it away. We can talk all about it. But it's the realization that we are his children. And he brings to us through the Holy Spirit peace. We just must accept it.

So, in Mark chapter 9, it says Jesus said to his people, be at peace with each other. Demonstrate peace. Be a peacemaker. Go out into the world and just share it. Share the peace, sometimes by a kind word, sometimes by a smile, sometimes by a hug. It's peace that God gives to us so we can give to others and each other.

So, in Luke 19, it says when Jesus came near a place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of people began joyfully to praise God in loud voices. They said, blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord, peace in heaven, and glory in the highest. Even then, they're recognizing Christ, the Lord, God, the Holy Spirit, those who have gone before us, they are still with us. Many of us recall vividly the love we had for people who have passed in our life. But that peace comes when we know they are with the Lord, and we will be with them again. A new heaven and a new earth will exist, and we will be part of that. How's that for a Christmas gift? It's a promise God gives us. And so, listen to these words. In Ephesians, many of the New Testament books are churches and Paul and other people trying to help people specifically deal with terrible situations and yet to observe peace. So, listen to what he says in Ephesians. "For Christ himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility," listen, "by abolishing in his flesh the old law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new person out of the two, thus making--" say it with me-- "peace."

And then Paul again writing to the church at Philippi, specifically chapter 4, verses 6 and 7. "Difficult to do, but important to do. Do not be anxious about--" help me. What? Really? Don't be anxious about anything? There's so many things to be anxious about. But Jesus comes along and said, I've never left you. I'm always with you. I will never forsake you. So not to worry, I am with you. Yes, I know the pain. Yes, I know the loneliness. Yes, I know where you're at. But I am with you. So, he talks about this. Don't be anxious about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving. Present your

requests to God in the peace of God, which is beyond understanding. We'll guard your hearts, your minds, your souls, and everything else in a powerful way. And then the Apostle Paul wanted, continually in his preaching and teaching and sharing, peaceful churches. We want the same, don't we? We want to be a church of peace. And I believe we are.

So, it says, finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is-- and think about these words-- whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about these things. Think about such things as these. And whatever you learned or received or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice. And here's why. And the God of peace will be with you all, not just all of us, but all the time with us, the peace of Christ in us. And again, in Colossians, Paul is constantly coming across various churches where there's a lot of anxiety in those churches, people going through difficult situations. But he says, let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body, you were called to peace. Throughout the New Testament, it's the common theme, that because of Christ and the peace we have in Christ, we can have that peace with each other. Oh, and at Christmas time, the rapid rush of the season. It's nice to every once in a while, just stop and remember the great gifts God gives us himself, particularly in Jesus, and experience peace.

First Thessalonians, live in peace with each other. And then in verse 23, may God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. And then in Thessalonians, he says, now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. Sometimes at the most anxious of times, wanting to explode, but at those times, feel the peace of God. Sometimes not knowing what's going to happen, but the peace of God is a promise that he gives us.

So, in Second Timothy, Paul is writing to a young man by the name of Timothy, my dear son in the Lord, grace, peace, and mercy from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. And we're not sure who wrote the book of Hebrews, but whoever did, whether it was a man or a woman, we don't know. We don't know the writer, but there is this significance, this constant talk of peace in Hebrews. He says this, endure hardship as discipline as God is treating you as sons and daughters. And then in verse 11, no discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained to accept that peace. The emphasis of peace in our lives is so important.

Well, that's probably enough. Before we close the Bible, God would say, ah, no, there's more I have to share with you on this. So, let's just keep going. So, he says, remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward, listen, all people. And then in James, but the wisdom that comes from heaven is, first of all, pure. Then what do you think comes next? Peace, loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy, good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. It's there everywhere. Just accept it, see it, feel it, experience it, and give it. It can be contagious.

So let me wrap up in this brief sermon. We seldom read the book of Revelation at this time of year. It's the Christmas season. But John shows us a great, great gift that we will experience. "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. And I saw the holy city. I saw the holy city coming down out of heaven from God, coming down. And then I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, now the dwelling of God is with us." And if God says he's going to do something, he's going to do it. And here's what he says. God is going to wipe every tear from our eyes.

And you know what? There will be no more death. That's it. No more funerals. No more death. No more death. "Or crying or pain for the old order of things has passed away. There certainly is a peace at Christmas, the greatest gift of all-- Jesus, our Lord, Savior, and friend." Merry Christmas.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

Closing

Don certainly touched down on a lot of really important passages of scripture today. And for that, we thank him. Peace. Hmm. It starts with this relationship with God, that we can have confidence in him and in circumstances. When I was married a few years ago, one of the things we wrote our own vows-- we didn't go with basically the vows that everybody uses. We wrote our own vows. And in my vows to Rhonda, I said, I will live harmoniously with you until I die. I determined at a young age, age of 21, that living in harmony and in peace with her was very important. So, from a practical standpoint, that's where it starts, with the people around us to live in harmony with them, because the gospel has more effect in harmony than it does in difficulty. So may we all be committed to being peace with God and with the circumstances and with each other. Let's pray.

Our Father in heaven, we do give you thanks for your son, Jesus and for these amazing fruits of the spirit that you bestow on us, especially as we remembered this morning, the fruit of the spirit of peace. We pray, Father, that we might all participate in creating circumstances in our life where peace and harmony can exist, because in that circumstance, we know your love will be manifested and it will be there to provide support for relationships and circumstances that will lead us all to your heavenly and earthly objective for us to be your people, your hands and your feet, your attitudes that will be manifested within ourselves and to people we share life with. To this end, we give you thanks and glory. In Jesus' name, amen.

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