

**Path of Peace**  
**A sermon by Rev. Dr. Gregory Young**  
**Presented on Sunday, November 28, 2010**

**Sermon Prayer:**

Gracious God, we bow in awe and wonder before your holy presence and the symbols of our faith praying that you will shape our life together as a congregation as we gather here today that you will deepen our faith walk with you and with one another. That you will deepen our commitment to the principles and the values of your kingdom and that you will strengthen us to be witnesses to your love in a world that so desperately needs to receive that love. And so we thank you Lord for your word. We pray that as you bring it to us it might take root and grow within our lives that we might live as your children in Christ's name.

Amen.

**Sermon:**

Well, we've had our feasts for Thanksgiving Day. We've seen all kinds of parades and performers on the route. We've watched countless football games, some of us happy for the results at the end of those games and some of us not so happy. Some of us have taken time to go into the attic or down to the basement and dust off the boxes that have last year's Christmas decorations and started testing the lights and preparing our homes to be decorated for this festive time of the year. Russ even tells me they had some extra time on Thanksgiving Day and got their Christmas tree up. (Got to be careful what you tell the preacher just before service, Russ.) And I guess he's telling me that that's probably about 24 days earlier than most years.

The sales have started – well, they probably started a couple of weeks ago – everybody enticing you to come into their store to buy their latest thing because your life won't be complete if you don't buy from them this year. Some of us have started piling up the credit on the plastic with the hope that we'll be able to pay that off in a month or two or three or four or five. Some have fought the traffic

around this time of year, especially the Thanksgiving holidays when everybody seems to be out on the road driving somewhere to some family function just to be together and enjoy one another's company.

The Christmas holidays have started in our world all around us. Everybody wants to think about Christmas. I even tuned in my favorite radio station to hear they have already switched over to 24/7 Christmas music. I'm sick of it already. Sorry, it's not Christmas I'm sick of, what I'm tired of is we never get to do Advent, seems like we only do that here in this place. Advent is about a time of preparation, not buying gifts but preparing our souls to once again hear the story – the greatest story of God's love. And we know that story so why do we have to keep repeating this, Preacher? Why can't we just get to Christmas, get it over with? But the story comes every year and the call for us to prepare our hearts and our minds, to prepare our lives, our souls to once again receive the precious gift of God's love.

The prophet's call comes once more and this year we journey to Bethlehem with the words of the prophet Isaiah. And we have this wondrous reading before us today about peace. I was talking just the other day with a friend and we were talking about the war in Iraq, the war in Afghanistan, and now once again the building conflict in Korea. And why do we have to send our young people off to fight in those wars – to die in those wars? And so we hear Isaiah's words. In the vision of God's Kingdom where peace will reign, not just any peace; not the USA's version of peace, not Iraq's version of peace or Afghanistan's version of peace, not some country's version of peace, not even my own personal version of peace but God's vision of peace for God's creation. Where instead of us making weapons to destroy one another to defend our property, rather we might find ourselves working the fields side by side. And instead of weapons of war finding weapons rather that will help us all to till the soil; to provide for the want of those who are in our community and have nothing to see one another as brother and sister.

The reading from Matthew is a wondrous reading today because it reminds us of a time when God's judgment ruled upon the Earth and brought the flood. How fitting that we would be reminded of Noah and his family and the animals of the ark on a day when we celebrate baptism and that's one of the things we recall - the thanksgiving over the water, how God saved Noah and those in the ark from the death of the flood waters. Noah was busy building using tools to construct an ark that would bring salvation, not just for him - for family, for all of those animals, for the human race and for the creation. He was working with his family to build an ark rather than engaging in the festivities that were going on around.

It's easy for us to get caught up in the spirit of what our society says Christmas is all about. It's easy for us to hear those advertisements and to say, "I've got to go to the mall to buy one more gift." It's easy for us to say we've got to have parties; we've got to be at celebrations. The prophet's call comes that with the words that Christmas begins with a vision of God's creation and God's kingdom. It begins with having our minds eye, having our soul's eye, even having our eyes - our physical eyes - focused solely upon God's vision of peace and living that vision here and now.

One of the things I learned very early on when I was in junior high school at the time was that what happens outside of the church isn't necessarily Christian. Although it takes forms that lead us to think that Christmas celebrations are Christian. And the way I learned that was I visited my very close and dear friend's home one day, the week before Christmas and he had a Christmas tree up in his home, all decorated and the funny thing was my friend was Jewish. And his parents were holocaust survivors. And so I looked at Les and I said, "What are you doing with a Christmas tree in here? I expected to see a Hanukah light or something." He said, "We celebrate Christmas like everybody else." Said, "I get presents under the tree Christmas morning. I get up and I open my presents just like you do." It dawned on me - hmmm - there's a disconnect here.

The things that we do at home on Christmas day exchanging gifts – you don't have to be a Christian to do that. And it's a wonderful thing to do because I think exchanging gifts just say to those we give gifts to I love you. You're important to me and I want to give you something that symbolizes that love. For us who try to follow the way of Jesus, for us who come to this place to worship and praise our God before we do anything else in the week, that gift giving begins with God's action. And so Advent is about preparing ourselves, allowing God's word to prepare us; to turn over the soil of our souls so that we might be ready to receive the gift of God's love that is offered to us at Christmas and that we remember at Christmas that we might be ready to receive the gift of a savior. And that's what Advent is about. Catching the vision that God has for us and for all creation and hearing how that vision begins to flesh itself out through the cry of the prophets and through those who receive that word as it unfolds for us this Advent.

And so if you're looking for Christmas carols this year, there's a nice tension that we create. We're singing one Christmas carol today and it's because we have three boys that are going to be baptized and I just thought we've got to sing *My Dear Little Boy* before baptism today. But most of our hymns are going to be hymns that will prepare us to truly celebrate the most precious gift that we can ever receive and that is the gift of God's love as it comes to us in his son, our savior, Jesus the Christ. So let us give thanks today for this vision of peace. Let us become people of peace and let us live that peace that God so desires us to do. That indeed it might just begin with you and you and with me, with us, with the church, with God's people throughout the world that that vision one day might truly come and we might all – all of us – live in God's peace.

Thanks be to God, Amen.