

**Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood – Dec 6, 2015**

**Advent 2**

**Living in Peace**

**Luke 1:68-79 & Malachi 3:1-4 (Sermon Text = Malachi 3:1)  
563, 548, 530, 556**

**See, I am sending my messenger  
to prepare the way before me,  
and the Lord whom you seek  
will suddenly come to his temple.  
The messenger of the covenant in whom you delight  
– indeed, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts.  
(Malachi 3:1)**



I love this rendering of the dove of peace.  
I have not figured out how many languages are in the image –  
dozens, at least.  
They are languages that are often used to express anger,  
to divide and separate,  
to bully and dominate,  
to foment hatred and violence.

But this Sunday, this symbol, these words –  
they are God's invitation, grounded in God's promise,  
to see things differently and to act differently  
in all the earth.

The dove and the olive branch point back to the time of Noah.  
God's anger got the best of him.  
He sent a flood to punish the unfaithful.  
Only a select few were saved on the ark.  
When he saw the impact of what he had done,  
God regretted it and repented.  
God experienced regret and repentance.  
God changed his mind.  
And that change led to a promise  
that never again would the world be destroyed.

*I will never again curse the ground because of humankind,  
... nor will I again destroy every living creature as I have done.*  
(Genesis 8:21)

From that day forward, God worked for SHALOM, for a peace in all the earth  
that is beyond what humans on their own can imagine.  
He sent messenger after messenger to remind people of that covenant –  
of its promise and its obligations.  
Only when humans are in right relationship with God  
does that peace arise in its full energy and scope.  
But that is God's driving desire –  
to have this right relationship with his human creatures  
and guide them into caring for the whole of his creation  
as it evolves into God's Commonwealth.

The One who finally carried the message fully  
was Jesus of Nazareth,  
the One in whom God became flesh and dwelt among us,  
to reveal to us the true nature of his love and peace.  
That presence threatened the accepted wisdom of the day.  
That presence threatened the established powers of the day.  
In a final, desperate attempt to hang on to their privilege,  
those who were dominating and dictating  
tried to get rid of this God by execution.  
And failed miserably.

The promise of life eternal, of life universal,  
was fulfilled in the resurrection and ascension of Jesus,  
God's Christ or Messiah  
in whom the Lord of hosts came for our delight.

God's work for SHALOM is strange.  
The promise to Noah and his progeny happened,  
in the estimation of archeologist Robert Ballard,  
7000 years ago.

Any brief scanning of news media in any part of this earth  
would find discouraging evidence  
that God's peace remains a distant longing.  
Seeing it as a desperate delusion seems most reasonable.

But this God of the Gospel that we gather to worship,  
at whose table we will be nourished in his SHALOM,  
is a patient and persistent God.  
All of this is unfolding in God's time and in God's way,  
soul by soul led into the flourishing  
that comes through the grace of Jesus Christ.

In the midst of seeming impossibility,  
this patient and persistent God  
creates possibilities of peace,  
sowing the seeds of his SHALOM  
in the tone and tenor of conversations  
that express peaceful aspirations, face daunting barriers,  
and keep talking until breakthroughs are made  
to the delight of all involved.

This is Jonathan Powell.  
His father was murdered by the IRA.  
For 17 years, he represented the British government in secret conversations  
with the top leaders in that organization  
to reach the Good Friday Agreements of 1998.



He is convinced that these kinds of conversations  
can resolve all armed conflicts.  
His views are not universally respected or accepted.  
But he is resilient in his faith and persists in his actions.

What he is doing is sowing seeds of SHALOM,  
one conversation after another,  
one small step after another,  
some back and some forward.

Walter Brueggeman gave an interview to an online blog  
called *Waging Wisdom: Uncommon Sense for a World in Conflict*.  
I love that name, in our indifferent culture, for matters of faith.  
Here are a couple of bits of that interview  
that speak directly to what it means to live in Biblical peace:

*Shalom is a very dynamic notion. It's always under way, always in process.  
So we never finalize it. We take incremental steps along the way  
to try to create safer space for the flourishing of more people.*

*Shalom calls us to do something radically different.  
And I'm really glad that you're staying at these hard issues.  
It's hard, slow work isn't it?  
And it's so urgent.*

This is the kind of work we are nourished for at this table –  
creating safer space for the flourishing of more people.  
That's what we hope, to pick up on last week's word,  
to offer to the refugee families that we will welcome  
over the next year and more.  
That's what we sing of as we gather at this table –  
the specific acts of peace that arise  
from the nourishment that we take at Lord's Supper.

So, come.  
Taste and see that the Lord is good.  
As God's nourishment infuses every cell of your being,  
fueling the patient energy that peace requires,  
rejoice in the great things God has done for his creation.