

**Peace and Quiet**  
Luke 1: 68-79  
December 9, 2018 (Advent 2)  
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The words of today's scripture are spoken by Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist. Spoken perhaps is not right, these words sing.

This is a beautiful hymn of blessing and a visionary prayer of hope.

Zechariah is thanking God for the gifts that will come to the world through the Christ-child.

He is recalling what Israel's prophets have long proclaimed.

God has raised up a mighty savior, who will rescue us from our enemies.

Who will serve God without fear and clear a way for God to enter the world anew.

He will teach his people. He will forgive sin. He will cause light to shine in the dark shadow of death.

And then this, he will guide our feet into the way of peace.

That is a lot of expectation to heap onto a newborn. And yet, this was no ordinary child.

The world is coming to understand what Mary has known, from the moment the angel announced the good news to her.

This child is holy. The very child of God. And his birth is a moment of cosmic significance. It will change everything.

And it's a good thing too. Because that world Zechariah had come to know through his many years, was unbearable.

Enemies get mentioned twice. He will save us from our enemies, he will rescue his from our enemies, so that we can serve him without fear.

Those enemies that the messiah is going to save us from? They are not abstract. They are patrolling the streets outside the temple, Roman legions occupy Jerusalem, God's Holy City.

And so when Zechariah says that Jesus will make a way for God in the world, he is imagining, as did most Jews at the time, that the Messiah will come and drive the Romans out of town, and liberate Jerusalem from the pagan empire.

And then that very last line. He will guide of feet into the way of peace.

But ok.

What does that have to do with us?

There are no Roman centurions out front. No foreign armies marching in our streets. Most of us are reasonably free.

And so to us this word —peace— takes on a simpler meaning. Peace means quiet. It means stillness. It means calm.

How many times did one of your parents say, I just need 2 minutes of peace and quiet! How many times have you said it?

I do not know about you, but I definitely grew up thinking of peace as being nice. As not rocking the boat. We use that word another way, “we make our peace” with the way things are.

For those of us who can afford to think this way, peace becomes a sort of quiet acceptance of the way the world is, a serene and tranquil state that makes for the perfect Christmas card.

Of course that is not the whole story. There is deep pain, and profound injustice not too deep beneath the surface of our world. White-supremacy, sexual-harassment, violence, environmental catastrophe, poverty, all of those things are real and present in our world today.

A lot of us have the benefit of experiencing those things only as stories that we can dip in and out of. But for many, so many, these are daily realities.

For many, for so many, Zechariah's world is not so hard to imagine. There is fear and foreboding, and the world is dominated by sinister forces beyond control. No Roman centurions, but other systems of oppression have arisen to take their place.

And it is in the presence of that fact. Both the ancient presence of Romans, and the current conditions of injustice, that we can begin understand what peace really is.

The way of peace is not the passive and quiet acceptance of the way things are. It is not silence.

Peace and quiet are two different things.

The civil rights movement in the 1960's had many opponents. Some are obvious, the vitriolic racists. The dogs and the fire hoses.

But Dr. King often struggled the most with the large group of white moderates who were more or less supportive of his message but felt that he was moving too fast, or pushing too hard.

This sentiment was perhaps most clearly expressed by the white clergymen of Birmingham who wrote to King asking him not to come. A letter they titled “an Appeal for Law and Order and Common Sense.” These clergymen urged King not to hold his planned demonstrations in Birmingham, they wrote: “We recognize the natural impatience of people who feel that their hopes are slow in being realized. But we are convinced that these demonstrations are unwise and untimely we are afraid they would cause friction and unrest.”

They thought they were appealing for peace. But really, they were appealing for quiet.

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. wrote back to these men in his now famous letter from a Birmingham Jail. In one line, he addresses the idea of peace.

“I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that our great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice.

True peace is not merely the absence of tension: it is the presence of justice.”

If you are anything like me, your can’t stand tension. You might even jump in to smooth things over when there is a disagreement in the family. You might ignore it when someone makes an unacceptable remark around you, because you don’t want to make a scene.

I get it. I feel that same temptation with every ounce of my being.

But what I also hear is a challenge. What is worse. My discomfort. Or the oppression of others?

Which will be easier, my surviving a tense afternoon with my uncle? Or my friend surviving growing up black in a racist world?

Peace is not about those of us who can find a way to feel calm and content in the world as it is.

Peace is about all of us together working with God to create the conditions where all people can flourish.

Some of us have to work a little harder than others to see the injustice of the world.

Zechariah was one of those people who didn't. It was outside his window everyday.

When he sang his beautiful hymn of hope. He is recalling what Israel's prophets have long proclaimed.



God has raised up a mighty savior, who will rescue us from our enemies.

Who will serve God without fear and clear a way for God to enter the world anew. And then this, he will guide our feet into the way of peace.

This season of Advent is a season of preparing ourselves for God's coming.

Preparing ourselves for Christ, the one who will come to do these things.

How will you prepare yourself to help usher in peace? True peace building takes courage. It takes conviction. It requires remembering that we will do it imperfectly, and make mistakes, and that is ok.

The best thing we can do to prepare ourselves to follow Christ, is to learn how to be uncomfortable. And how to speak up.

And for his part, Christ will clear a way for God in the world. Christ will guide of feet in the way of peace. That is what God promises.

Not quiet.

But peace.