

**A SEASON OF PEACE**  
**Isaiah 11.1-10, Luke 2.8-14**

I'm glad you are here today. It is Christmas Eve 2006.  
I want to tell a story about Christmas Eve 1914.

German and British troops were blasting each other with machine guns and mortar fire from muddy, rat-infested trenches each side had carved into miles of French farmland.

Between the rows of trenches there was no-man's land.

It was an area of craters and shattered trees that was so narrow that whenever there was lull in the action, each side could hear the clink and clatter of pots and pans as the soldiers on the other side began to cook something to eat.

British soldiers fumbled with frozen fingers to opened their King's Xmas Greeting while their German counterparts did the same with Kaiser's Xmas letter.

Finally the sleet and snow stopped, the shivering continued, and a new sound filled the air and floated across no-man's land.

A British Tommie heard the words, "*Stille Nacht, heilige nacht*" and recognized the tune to "Silent Night, Holy Night." He chimed in the words, "Silent Night, Holy Night."

A second Tommie, then a second German, then a third from one side, the other and then another, and another added their voices until the words of the two languages mystically blended in song between barbwire of the shell pocketed no-man's land.

Silence followed the singing of "Silent Night". The Germans broke out in "O Tannenbaum" to break the tension. The Brits countered with "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen."

The Battle of the Ballads continued until a British soldier with binoculars reported that the German had hoisted a ragged evergreen with lighted candles on its branches.

As the day appeared, dirt marred signs of Merry Christmas appeared. It appeared that the soldiers got the same message in the other's language. It appeared they got the message.

Soldiers one by one laid down their rifles and crawled out of the trenches beneath the barbed wire to stand in no-man's land.

At first there was a few and then there was many. They shared pictures of mothers, wives, and daughters. They exchanged gifts of candy and cigarettes.

Someone found a soccer ball and a few yards of crater-free ground became a soccer field.

But it was all short-lived. By mid-morning horrified officers got their men back into the trenches. Troops had to be reminded that they were there, “to fight, not to fraternized.”

I'm told 15,000 died the next day and in Christmas of the following years they made it a point to battle each other.

But for Christmas 1914, and for a few hours anyway, neither Kaiser nor the King ruled the hearts of men, they were under the reign of the Prince of Peace.

Isn't that a wonderful picture of Peace, a vision of Peace?  
Oh how we need a vision of Peace today, don't you think?

And that is the first thing today, **FOR THE SEASON OF PEACE; WE NEED A VISION OF PEACE.**

In this **SEASON OF PEACE** we're given a vision.  
Well actually we're going to borrow a vision from the 7<sup>th</sup> CBC found in Isaiah 11.

Isaiah began his ministry around 740 BC or about seven centuries before the birth of Christ.

His mission...to warn the people of Judah what would happen if they didn't change their ways. Judah was financially prosperous but spiritually and morally bankrupt. The judicial system was corrupt. The wealthy were taking advantage of the poor. Judah's King Ahaz, pretended to be a believer but was actually a power-hungry ruler who turned his back on God.

God even told Isaiah the people wouldn't listen to him in spite of what he said.  
It was discouraging. It's like warning your kids about something and they ignore you.

Isn't it pretty discouraging for us as we read the newspaper or watch TV?  
The clouds of 9-11 still hover over us, and the chaos and consequences of war and weather continue, not just for us, but for all the peoples of the world.

Isn't it tough to ever think there will be a peace? It's tough to think positive?

Maybe we need to think like Don Quixote.  
Don Quixote in Man of LaMancha was told he was crazy because his positive attitude toward life. He said, “Crazy, am I crazy because I see the world as it could become, or is the world crazy because it only sees it as it is?”

Let me say it again, “Am I crazy because I see the world as it could become or is the world crazy because they only see it as it is?”

Isaiah wasn't crazy, he was given a vision of what the world WOULD become...  
he was given a vision of peace; God's vision of peace for the nations, and for nature.

Our second point, **IN THIS SEASON OF PEACE, WE NEED GOD'S VISION OF PEACE**  
I'll bet we could each describe our own vision of peace, what we think peace in our world would look like. But for peace to be peace, it has to be God's Peace.

God gave Isaiah a vision of peace.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Edward Hicks, inspired by word painting painted the "Peaceable Kingdom". It pictures the end times, the last days of earth, and the closing of human history, as we know it.

Here is the picture and some of the words, unbelievable words,

Verse 6-*The wolf will live with the lamb; the leopard will lie down with the goat,*

*The calf, the lion, and the yearling together; and a little child shall lead them,*

Verse 7-*The cow will feed with the bear; their young will lie down together.*

Verse 8-*The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,*

*and the young child shall put his hand into the viper's nest.*

Verse 9-*They will neither harm nor destroy on all of my holy mountain,*

*For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

Verse 10-*In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples;*

*the nations will rally to him, and his place of rest (headquarters) will be glorious."*

Wow, all these animals sharing the same pasture, crazing and resting together?

All nations and all nature together in peace and harmony under the banner of Christ?

And Christ's rule will be a reign of righteousness, justice, and goodness.

What God will do for nations and nature, he will do for you and I.

Lt. Hiroo Onada was the last soldier to surrender in WWII. He and a few friends were commanded to carry on the mission even if Japan surrendered. All efforts to capture him failed.

Announcements over loudspeakers, leaflets dropped over the jungle, over 13,000 men, and almost ½ million dollars were used to locate him and get him to surrender. He lived off the land, killed 30 nationals, and never believed the war was over. There was no peace for Onada until he finally surrendered at the command of a superior officer in March of 1974. He was finally at peace and said, "No good had come out of the last 29 years."

God goes to a lot of trouble in His effort to save you and to offer you peace.

Onada was at peace because he finally surrendered to one superior to himself and for us true inner peace comes when we quit fighting, quit fighting with God, and surrender to Him.

Note that he didn't just give up...he gave up to one superior...so when we surrender, when we give up, we're not just giving up, we are giving to God. There is a difference.

A well-worn bumper sticker says,

N-O GOD, N-O PEACE... K-N-O-W GOD, K-N-O-W PEACE.

And so, the is the third thing is,

**FOR THE VISION OF PEACE, IN THE SEASON OF PEACE, WE NEED THE PRINCE OF PEACE**

we need to know God...Isaiah 11.1 says it this way,

***“A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse: from it’s roots a Branch will bear fruit.”***

Then Chapter 7.14 tells us that, ***“Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel...”***

and Emmanuel means-God with us.

God had a plan for the people of Judah and Israel. It wasn't a plan of immediate peace and prosperity. Instead God was showing them the glimpse of the future, his ultimate plan for the restoration of the nation of Israel and the reconciliation of all people.

Paul tells us, ***“But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace...(Ephesians 2.13-14a)***

John in 16.33 says it this way, ***“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart. I have overcome the world.”***

Isaiah reminds us that the face of the Prince of Peace will no longer be hidden, Isaiah 9.2, 6-7 says, ***“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light...For unto us a son is given, The government will be on his shoulders, and he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end.”***

Remember the words of Gabriel to the shepherds, ***“For unto is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign unto you; you will find the baby wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger.” Other angels joined him and the sang, “Glory to God in the Highest and on earth Peace to all on who God’s favor rests.”***

A baby...a baby to bring peace, a season of peace, a lifetime of peace, an eternity of peace  
peace to nature, peace to nations, peace to people.

Nancy Dahlberg tells us her family was headed home after spending Christmas with family. They stopped to eat at a restaurant and sat down to eat. They put Erik, their one year old, in a high chair. He starts to pound on the metal top of the high chair. He squealed with glee. His eyes sparkled with excitement, and his big toothless grin widened in sheer joy.

He wiggled and giggled as he looked across the booths. The object of amusement, a guy sitting by the wall. He was rumbled. His coat tattered and torn; his pants, patched and baggy; his shoes, soles were separated from the instep and his toes were sticking out. His beard was not shaved, his hair not combed...he was dirty, drunk, and a disturbance.

He kept waving at Erik and saying, “Hi there, baby, Hi there, big boy, Hi there.

And Eric kept saying, Hidare, hidare.

I see you buster...peek, peek...I see you baby...hi there, hi there big boy...Hidare, hidare

On and on it went through the order and through the meal,

“Hi there, hi there big boy...I see you, peek, peek, and Erik’s hi-dare.

Others were irritated, the family humiliated. It was finally time to go.  
She turned her back and held Erik tighter as they begin to walk past the old man.  
She didn't want him to breathe on them. Erik had other ideas.  
He leaned far over her arm, reached out with his arms to the old man, and grunted, "umm...umm."  
That is translated in the NIV, "pick me up, pick me up."

She spun around and their eyes met. The old man's mouth was finally silent, but his eyes begged,  
"Could I hold your baby?" Erik answered before she did.  
He lunged into the old man's arms and laid his head on his shoulder.  
He looked comfortable and content.

Tears came from the old man's closed eyes as his aged hands, hardened by hard labor,  
greasy and grimy, gently patted Erik's bottom and rubbed his back.

He rocked and cradled Eric until finally and painfully he pried Erik off of his neck,  
handed him back to her and said, "Thank you ma'me, you've given me my Christmas!"

She ran to the car and cried, "God forgive me, oh, God forgive me."

A baby...a baby to bring peace, a season of peace, a lifetime of peace...

For that mother, a moment that might just make life better for a lifetime.  
For the old man, a moment that might turn into a lifetime.

I do know we talk a lot about Jesus being born in your heart but we are talking  
not just for a moment, or even just a lifetime, but for eternity.

I'm not an angel ( I know most of you know that) but I'm here today to announce to you again,  
Jesus loves you and went to a lot of trouble to give you peace. He died on a cross for you so you  
might experience the peace that passes all understand, the perfect peace, the eternal peace of God.

Whatever you've done before, whatever is keeping you from that peace, surrender it to him,  
believe he is the Son of God, ask his forgiveness, and welcome him into your heart.

Let us pray. Lord, some of us come today restless and weary. Some of us know what is wrong,  
some of us don't. Either way, we know deep down we need you.  
So I come, I come to you pleading, "O God forgive me, forgive me."  
Jesus, I trust you are God's Son, that you have died on the cross for my sins, and have been  
resurrected. "Cast out my sin and enter in, be born in me today." May I hold your Jesus?

Lord, then there are some of us today who are seeking clarity in the midst of all the confusion  
and chaos in our world. Forgive me, I have let my mind wander, let my tongue speak out of turn,  
and let my hands grow idle. Restore me to right relationship with you and with others.  
I pray we all experience not just a SEASON OF HOPE, LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE,  
but A LIFE OF HOPE, LOVE, JOY, AND PEACE...  
we pray this in the name of the HEAVEN BORN PRINCE OF PEACE. Amen.

