

"Finding Rest Through the Advent/Christmas Season"

Psalms 85:8, 122:6-9; John 14:25-27; Colossians 3:12-16
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Advent Candle Lighting - Week two

Last Sunday we would have lit the first candle – the candle of hope. Today we light the first candle and then we will light the second candle, the candle of peace. We light it knowing full well that peace is elusive, and in some parts of the world, it is almost completely absent.

Yet in this season of Advent, we trust that God is never absent from us. God is always preparing something new. And even where there is war and discord, whether between countries, within families, or within our own hearts, God is present, gently leading us to new possibilities.

Sing Star Child verse two: Street Child, beat child, no place left to go, hurt child, used child, no one wants to know. This year, this year, let the day arrive when Christmas comes for everyone, everyone alive!

Prayer of Invocation

May peace begin with us, Savior and Redeemer. Jesus Christ, dwell in our midst as we gather together in your holy name to worship and adore. Let your indwelling presence be our guide as we seek to become a sanctuary here upon the earth. May it be truly said that this is the gate of heaven. Amen.

The Word

Psalm 85:8, 122:6-9; John 14:25-27; Colossians 3:12-16

The Ancient Hebrews sang: Let me hear what the LORD God says, because he speaks peace to his people and to his faithful ones. Don't let them return to foolish ways.

Pray that Jerusalem has peace: "Let those who love you have rest. Let there be peace on your walls; let there be rest on your fortifications."

For the sake of my family and friends, I say, "Peace be with you, Jerusalem."
For the sake of the LORD our God's house I will pray for your good.

Jesus said: "I have spoken these things to you while I am with you. The Companion, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything and will remind you of everything I told you.

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give you. I give to you not as the world gives. Don't be troubled or afraid.

The Apostle Paul taught from Jesus' words: Therefore, as God's choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other.

As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other. And over all these things put on love, which is the perfect bond of unity.

The peace of Christ must control your hearts—a peace into which you were called in one body. And be thankful people. The word of Christ must live in you richly.

Teach and warn each other with all wisdom by singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Living the Word

It is the second Sunday in Advent. The first Sunday just slipped away, even so are you now calm? Let's now begin with a breath prayer. As you breathe in say in your mind: "Lord God Almighty." As You breathe out say

in your mind: "I am yours." Try in your mind to really turn yourself over to God. Surrender yourself to God's will. Lets do it three times, I will speak the words aloud: Deep breath in – "Lord God Almighty...I am yours." Next three times with "Lord Jesus Christ...dwell in me." And lastly three times "Come Home Spirit...speak to me." Amen.

It was my idea to spend these two weeks trying to find rest as we dive into the pre-Christmas season. I know that it is helping me to keep my eyes on God and the gift of Christ we can receive every year. As I contemplated 'rest', I realized there is need for at least two kinds of rest: Rest of mind and rest of body, which can lead us to rest of our spirit and soul.

We need physical rest to keep going with a clear head. Every evening I measure out at least 8 hours for sleep and set a time to lay my head down. When I was younger, I would sleep right through and get a good eight hours. Now it seems there are plenty of nights when I wake up for whatever reason and I begin to re-hash all of the things on my mind.

If it includes something I am struggling with, or even anger, I can stew away enough of my eight hours, to not feel rested in the morning. Anyone else out there with me? Telling myself to go back to sleep doesn't really help. Knowing that negative thoughts almost always are based out of some kind of fear, I can put some thought to recognizing what is really going on.

Even so, at 2am most things cannot be resolved... If I can surrender it all to God until morning, hearing my mother's voice in my head saying: "Get some rest, and it will look better in the morning," then I am better off, and can sleep. If I still can't sleep, I have just laid awake with my eyes closed hoping at least that they are resting.

Last resort is to open my Bible and start reading the Bible, particularly the list of begets in Genesis Chapter 5 or the specific details to how a meat or grain offering should be prepared from the book of Leviticus, and before long I am too tired to go on. Actually, prayer is more productive..."Lord God Almighty, I am yours." Rest your mind and then your body will follow...

Paul's words are helpful for when the morning comes, if you still have to face the fear. There is a functional purpose for *"putting on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone, forgive each other."*

With a rested mind and body you can hopefully bear with one another, forgiving each other, binding us all to each other – such work is not for a tired mind! This is not conflict-avoidance advice.

Paul isn't suggesting we put on a happy face and accentuating the positive. This is about what to do when bare-knuckled emotional brawls break-out. The common experience is that most bruising disputes are with the people we know well. Maybe it is because of how close we are that our family disagreements get so prickly.

We live in a culture that barely praises kindness, humility, gentleness and patience, but historians have seldom honored them in print as well. Such qualities are held up as a kind of politeness for our personal relations, but ignored – and even scoffed at, by real-life decision makers. Being 'tough on crime' and 'strong on national defense' are coveted reputations among electoral candidates; and even as we choose leadership for our organizations, sometimes even the church.

"Come, thou long expected Jesus, born to set thy people free; From our fears and sins release us, Let us find our rest in Thee." Now we are no longer talking about the rest of sleep, but the rest of the soul in Christ: the rest of stillness and silence – listening for God.

Jesus said: *"I have spoken these things to you while I am with you."* He then goes on to speak of his ally, the Holy Spirit. Here Jesus says basic things about the Holy Spirit: First, the Holy Spirit who has come now - to teach us all things.

To the end of the day we, as Christians must continue to be learners, for the Holy Spirit will continue to lead those who will follow, deeper and deeper into the truth of God.

Second, The Holy Spirit will remind us what Jesus has said. I don't know about you, but I need lots of reminders...

Jesus also speaks of his gift, and his gift is peace. In the Bible the word 'peace', 'shalom', never simply means the absence of trouble. Peace means everything which makes for our higher good. The peace which the world offers us is the peace of escape, the peace which comes from the avoidance of trouble, the peace which comes from refusing to face things.

The peace which Jesus offers us is the peace of the knowledge that God has the final victory, though it may not look like it in this moment. It is the peace which no experience in life can ever take from us. This peace cannot be diminished by sorrow, danger, or suffering. It is the peace that stands taller than any worldly circumstances for the victory has already been won.

Caryll Houselander, in her book The Passion of the Infant Jesus, wrote these words about the time beginning with Mary's pregnancy: "In Advent while Christ remained hidden in Mary, His rest was a tremendous activity; He was making her into Himself, making Himself from her. From her eyes He was making the eyes that would weep over Jerusalem, that would shine upon the wild flowers, that would close in death and open on the morning of resurrection.

From her hands He was making the hands that would heal and raise the dead and be nailed to the cross. From her heart He was making the heart whose love would redeem the world. The same thing happens when, allowing the infant Christ to rest in us, we wait patiently on His own timing of His growth in us, and give Him just what He asks, the extremely simple things that are ourselves – our hands and feet, our eyes and ears, our words, our thoughts, our love. Not only does he grow in us but we are formed into Him."

When I read this quote from Houselander's book, I was reminded of the many paradoxes of life – particularly within the Christian life. Paradoxes, that leave us scratching our heads, but with the assurance that they are true. Rest as an incredible activity. Silence as joyful communication. Solitude as union with the Creator.

Advent and the notion of rest, as a tremendous activity. I am trying to take this advent with more calm and more rest, than past years, but it is always a time of just plain busy! The need for rest, the invitation to rest can all too easily be drowned out by all the noise. And yet, in the midst of busyness, I find gifts of grace where the Lord is inviting me into a moment or two of gentle rest.

Maybe for you it is a moment in the morning as you watch the dawn arrive. Maybe it is in the still of the night sitting to gaze at the lights on the Christmas Tree or the stars in the sky. Perhaps it is coming here and

sharing in Holy Communion surrounded by a community of faith; sharing our faith in the remembrance of who we are together as we celebrate the body of Christ.

Be assured that it is true that no matter how busy you are, with a little attention, we will hear the Lord's gentle invitation to rest in Him; and within such rest in Christ's incredible activity. My soul rests and Christ within me grows and prays within me. My soul can rest in the great longing of Advent and I am formed into Him. This is what Houselander is saying. It is powerful and life-changing and so full of hope. It is not dependent on our productivity or performance, so we can safely let our ego sleep...what a relief! It is dependent only on Him, on His work of transformation, on His bearing fruit in us and through us to others. We quite simply cooperate by being still, and silent, and deeply at rest.

One of the moments of Christmas grace I stumbled upon this week was a gift from Friar Giavanni entitled – Letter to Friend, Christmas Eve 1513 – Verona, Italy.

"I salute you. I am your friend and my love for you goes deep. There is nothing that I can give you which you have not got. But there is much, very much, that while I cannot give it, you can take. No heaven can come to us unless our hearts find rest in today. Take Heaven!

No peace lies in the future which is not hidden in this present little instance. Take Peace! The gloom of the world is but a shadow. Behind it, yet within our reach, is joy. Take Joy!

Life is so full of meaning and purpose, so full of beauty...that you will find earth, but cloaks your heaven. Courage then to claim it, that is all! And so I greet you...with profound esteem and with the prayer that for you, now and forever, the day breaks and the shadows flee away." AMEN