

Introduction

Check-in & Introductions

Peace is... A Way of Life

Old Testament Lesson

Isaiah 35:1-10 (NRSVUE)

¹ The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad;
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly
and rejoice with joy and shouting.

The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.

They shall see the glory of the LORD,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!

Here is your God.

He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.

He will come and save you."

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf shall be opened;

⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.

For waters shall break forth in the wilderness
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp;
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,
but the redeemed shall walk there.

¹⁰ And the ransomed of the LORD shall return
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Gospel Lesson

Luke 1:46b-55 (NRSVUE)

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked with favor on the lowly state of his servant.

Surely from now on all generations will call me blessed,

⁴⁹ for the Mighty One has done great things for me,

and holy is his name;

⁵⁰ indeed, his mercy is for those who fear him

from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts.

⁵² He has brought down the powerful from their thrones

and lifted up the lowly;

⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things

and sent the rich away empty.

⁵⁴ He has come to the aid of his child Israel,

in remembrance of his mercy,

⁵⁵ according to the promise he made to our ancestors,

to Abraham and to his descendants forever."

Bible/Sermon Focus

The 1994 confirmation class of Manchester UMC had a theme song they were taught, and would sing together. The youth and the adult choirs of our church learned the song as well. It was written by Allen Pote and is called, "The Journey is Our Home."

This idea has been heavy on my mind recently, I have found myself in deep contemplation the past few weeks about what makes life worth it. I always come back to the same answer...you. All of the "you" in my life, the "other" the creation outside of myself, especially in human relationships.

If the way we get somewhere is as important (or maybe more important) than the destination, then keeping good company along the way seems like a vital part of our journey, our lives.

And there are so many people in this world that live in oppression daily. There are people struggling to make ends meet, struggling with their health. There are people, neighbors who believe that they are alone and no one cares about them.

When I hear Mary's "Magnificat," I hear her witnessing that God cares and is willing to do something for those who are down trodden and cast aside. I hear God calling to judgement those who would dare to overlook and harm people and populations for the sake of power and wealth. I hear a call to right living, and how we are to respond to, to be in relationship with, each other, mirroring how God is in relationship with us. We should fill each other when the other is hungry and come to the aid of each other.

When writing on the Magnificat, Dr. Jane Schaberg says, "Focus is on the might, holiness, and mercy of God, who has promised solidarity with those who suffer and who is true to those promises. God is 'magnified' for effecting changes - now, in history."

If the journey is our home, if the way is as important as the destination, then beloved, we have some work to do.

In this series, we have been talking about God's vision for peace.

The Hebrew concept that we usually translate "peace" is shalom. Shalom means much more than the *absence of conflict*. Shalom means *wholeness*. Shalom is a way of being. Shalom is a way that allows all of creation to flourish. Shalom doesn't just concern itself with my flourishing for there is no shalom if my neighbor, as well as creation are not flourishing.

Shalom is the way we are to journey together, and shalom is the destination.

The Journey is Our Home

*Awake, arise, the journey's begun.
We travel on together as one.
We know not where the road will lead,
but we move in faith, making love our creed as we follow;
The journey is our home.*

*Good trav'lers walk with company,
sharing bread with those in need.
Giving help along the way to those who fall,
who wander astray as we follow;
The journey is our home.*

*Join with us in jubilee.
Celebrate God's family.
Sing together joyfully.
Alleluia. Alleluia. Alleluia.
Praise for evermore!*

*God moves with us as we go.
He hears our cry, our pain He knows.
Yet far beyond the setting sun,
there shines a light of a victory won;
The journey, the journey is our home.*

(by Allen Pote)

Discussion Questions

1. What does it look like to live in such a way that we are “overtaken” by joy?
2. What are tangible examples of how we can live in the “way” of Christ?
3. What is our destination?
4. Reflect on this quote from Rev. Lesslie Newbigin, “None of us can be made whole till we are made whole together.”
5. How will you seek peaceful wholeness this Advent season?

Prayer

God of the way, guide your people on our journey. Let others find in us good community, and an example of your shalom in the world. Remind us that your way is not the way of the powerful or the wealthy, but the way of peace. Sing into life, the song of Mary, so the most oppressed may find hope and peace. **Amen.**

*Peace is not only a part of our destination,
peace is the way to get there.*