

Letting Peace begin with Me. Romans 12:9-21

When WWI began in July of 1914, most people expected it to only last for a few months. But by December of that year all thoughts of quick victory had faded. Indeed the war was to last for over four years, causing the loss of 10 million military and another 10 million civilian lives making it one of the deadliest wars in world history. But on Christmas Eve of that first December along a thin strip of land bordering Germany, France, and Belgium, known as the Western Front, where the fighting was at its most fierce, a miracle happened. If only for a day the fighting stopped and soldiers from the opposing sides embraced each other in peace. Let's remember that day together.

watch "The 1914 Christmas truce" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6KH0VBK2EVE>



On this Sunday, which ironically marks the 78th anniversary of the Pearl Harbor bombing bringing the US into WW2 (Dec.7 1941), we light the second Advent Candle for PEACE. Even while recognizing that true peace; peace between individuals, peace between religious and ethnic groups, peace between nations, in our world is both rare and a very fragile thing.

Several years ago a retired couple, alarmed by the threat of nuclear war and world-wide conflict carefully studied all the inhabited places on the globe in search of someplace that would be least likely affected by a war — a place of ultimate safety. After much study and travel they found that place: a lightly populated, cold, windy, rain swept island off the South American coast. So they moved to their new paradise in the **Falkland Islands** just before it turned into a war zone between Great Britain and Argentina (Illustrations Unlimited, 402).

Many people today are like that couple searching for peace and willing to go to great lengths to find it. **It's obvious that our world needs peace.**

On the night of Christ's birth, the angels sang, "*Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, peace, good will toward men*" (Luke 2:14).

However, since that glorious evening, this **world has seen very little peace.** Why not?

Ultimately it is because this world has not embraced Jesus Christ as both savior and Lord. There will be no real or lasting peace for our fallen world until Jesus returns again as King of kings and Lord of Lords. But how about the intimate world around you: your family, your neighbors, your acquaintances what can you do to bring more peace on earth for both yourself and these others?

To answer that, let's first begin by clearly understanding the problem. **While most people say that they yearn for peace, there is a strange break that exists between our hopes for reality and our choice of entertainment.**

We long for a day when all in the world will be peaceful. A day where we are not worried about rogue nations building nuclear weapons. A day where our children are safe from kidnapping or random school shootings; A day when our young men and women are not called to go to war. A day when we don't have to watch innocent people hurting and being mistreated on the evening news.

Why then as a people do we seem attracted to violence? That so many people have this seemingly innate desire to vicariously participate in violence is why boxing and wrestling shows are not only getting more popular, they are also getting more extreme. And why one of the more popular daytime shows intentionally escalates tensions between two estranged parties until they are throwing chairs at each other.

That's why the most popular teen video games are also the most violent. And most of our favorite "action" movies are filled with lots of destruction, lots of death: Die hard, all of the Fast and Furious, James Bond, and especially John Wick movies. And any movie produced by Quentin Tarantino.

On the interpersonal level, television offers us game shows such as Big Brother, now in its 21st season, which locks contestants up together in a house filled with cameras; or Temptation Island where engaged couples are intentionally tempted by other would be suitors; or the latest show – if you can believe this – named "Your Ex on the Beach" where newly rematched couples are brought together for a painful reunion with their former romances. What is it that attracts us to such programming?

I think that the movie "Gladiator" best explains this innate attraction for conflict that we find within. Set in the days of the Roman Empire, this movie centers around a former soldier now enslaved as a gladiator and forced to fight for the amusement of others. The only problem is that he is too efficient at quickly killing his opponents; his handler keeps urging him to slow down for the benefit of the paying customers. One day in a fit of temper, he singlehandedly and quickly dispatches every opponent in the arena, after which he screams out at the shocked crowd, "**Are you not entertained?**"

So the question is, if we are for peace, why do we find violence so attractive? Have you ever stopped to think where violence first originates? Jesus said it all begins first right in our own sinful hearts.

The world has gotten older, but humanity has not grown up, Technology has advanced but we still have the same rebellious nature. And though we wish for a day of peace. Jesus said that day will not come until the kingdom of God completely takes the world back out of our fallen human hands.

It is our fallen human nature that predisposes us to violence and warfare. Ever since sin entered the world there has been the potential for war. The first murder recorded in the Bible was of Cain killing his brother Able;

- because he was jealous of his brother?
- Because he was angry with God?

We are not quite sure, but we do know that God had earlier warned Cain of sin, crouching outside his door like an animal, and that would either master him or be mastered by him. Sin won that battle and has been causing and winning battles ever since. As it was in the beginning so it continues to be when we fail to master our own fallen desires we still unleash a world of evil both on ourselves and others.

Jesus was a powerful man and at times he expressed great passion – tipping over the Temple merchandise tables, crying over stubbornly lost Jerusalem - but never once did his anger come out in the form of violence against another human. In fact when the men came to arrest Jesus, Peter drew a sword slicing off a guard's ear. Jesus picked the ear up and put it back on while telling Peter that, ***violent people die violent deaths.***

Jesus was a peacemaker to the point of consciously accepting his own necessary death, enduring the cross for the sake of our salvation. He taught that if someone slaps your face you should give them another chance to do it again.

Both before and after his conversion, Paul remained an aggressive person; but after meeting Christ we see Paul's aggression pointed in a positive direction, giving strength and commitment to his mission among the Gentile nations. Where Paul had once aggressively hated, now he aggressively loved. His change of heart came from his encounter with Jesus. Because Saul of Tarsus, could not write the advice that Paul the Apostle now gives to us...

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, ...
but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.
**If it is possible, so far as it depends on you,
live peaceably with all.**
Romans 12:17-18

If we ever hope to bring peace on earth – we need to come at it three different ways:
(*not necessarily in this order*)

1. We need to make Peace with others
2. We need to make Peace with God
3. We need to make Peace with ourselves.

**Peace with others – begins with taking responsibility for your part of the war.
"As Far as it depends on you ... live peacefully with everyone."**

Jeff Foxworthy tells a story about coming home to find **crayon** writing on the wall so he asks his 2 year old who did it and **she tells him that the dog did it**. He said *that will start to bother you as a parent because we've had that dog for 10 years and now he starts writing on the wall.*

But that's who we are. As kids we all learn – very early - the phrase **I didn't do it**. Some adults have never grown out of that phase. Refusing to take responsibility for their own part in contributing to conflict.

- A woman burns her thighs from the hot coffee she was holding in her lap while driving, she blames the restaurant.
- Your neighbor crashes into a tree while driving home drunk, he blames the bartender.
- A deranged person goes on a shooting rampage, people sue the gun manufacturer.

We love to affix blame on someone else – particularly if it has a financially rewarding aspect – but we're reluctant to take responsibility for our own actions.

- Everyone knows you shouldn't hold a paper cup full of hot coffee in your lap.
- And yes, the bartender is responsible for cutting you off, but not for getting you safely home.
- And if you have a mentally unstable person living in your house, you do NOT give them unrestricted access to weapons.

The process of living at peace with others demands that we first take responsibility for our own actions. **Until you first begin to change within your own self, how can you hope to change the world around you?**

Here's an analogy that might help us to understand our need to first bring peace into our own lives.

You are holding a cup of coffee when someone comes along and bumps into you or shakes your arm, making you spill your coffee everywhere.

Why did you spill the coffee?

You spilled the coffee because there was coffee in your cup.

Had there been tea in the cup, you would have spilled tea.

The point is that Whatever is inside the cup, is what will spill out.

In a similar way, when life comes along and shakes you (which WILL happen), whatever is inside you will come out. It's easy to fake it until you get rattled.

So we have to ask ourselves... "what's in my cup?"

When life gets tough, what spills over?

Joy, gratefulness, patience, and humility?

Or anger, bitterness, harsh words, and violent reactions?

The choice is ours and it begins with how we have worked to shape our own lives: With what are we filling our own cups? For the answer, look both to your entertainment habits as compared to your Christian disciplines; *Garbage in Garbage out* applies to our lives as well as it does computers.

whatever is true, whatever is honorable
think about these things.

Keep on doing these things ...
the God of peace will be with you.

Philippians 4:8-11

As Paul advises us,

*Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, **think about these things.** Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.* Philippians 4:8-11

So the first step towards peace with others,

- Is in the acceptance of our own responsibility for the war.
- And then figuring out how to bring all of our life into consistency with the peace that we say we desire.
- So that we may better live in peace with those around us?

"As Far as it depends on you, live in peace with everyone." ... But because you can only control yourself but not the evil in other people, there may nothing which you can do to live peacefully with some individuals ... but you need to exhaust every opportunity to defuse the situation.

2. But its hard to make peace with ourselves or others if we have not first made Peace with God.

Cain killed his brother Able because he refused to make peace with God. The truth is that while peace comes from God. I can't have peace with God until I have claimed responsibility for my sin. But after we claim responsibility, we can ask for and receive both the forgiveness and the peace that only God can give us.

Contrary to all the westerns you have watched on t.v., “**making peace with God**” is not something that you wait to do at the end of your life. **It’s something you need to do to begin your life with God.**

The Bible says that until we came to faith in Christ we all lived as strangers, aliens and **enemies of God.** (Romans 5:10).

Now maybe you never pictured your life that way.
You might say I was a stranger but I was not an enemy.
I didn’t know God but I never actively rejected Him.

Perhaps ...
Do you know what the definition of **enemy** is?
In the middle east ... *It’s simply whoever is not your friend.*

While we are quick to reject that definition, Webster’s definition still catches us
An enemy is anyone who is actively opposing you, such as a nation at war with your country ... and **any citizen of that nation.**

Before we made peace with Christ, we lived only for ourselves, feeding our fallen nature; we lived as citizens of a world that is in active opposition to him – thus we were enemies.

And it wasn’t just our indifference or our “citizenship” that made us enemies of God it was also **OUR SIN**

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.
Colossians 1:21

That’s what sin does it separates us from the one who wants to save us, as God first warned Cain, sin will devour you if it is given the chance.

A man purchased a live **mouse** to use as food for his pet snake. He dropped the unsuspecting mouse into the snake’s glass cage, where the snake was sleeping in a bed of sawdust. The tiny mouse had a serious problem on his hands. At any moment he could be swallowed alive. Obviously, the mouse needed to come up with a plan.

What did the terrified creature do? He furiously started digging, covering the snake with sawdust chips until it was completely buried. With that, the mouse apparently thought he had solved his problem.

But the real solution, however, only came from outside when the man took pity on the little mouse and removed him from the cage.

No matter how hard we try to cover or deny our sinful nature, it does not change who we are. Sin will eventually awake from sleep and shake off its cover. Were it not for the saving grace of the Jesus reaching in to pull us out, sin would eat us all alive.

This is how the Bible describes our life before we came to Christ.

You were dead through the trespasses and sins in which you once lived, following the course of this world, following the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work among those who are disobedient. All of us once lived among them in the passions of our flesh, following the desires of flesh and senses, and we were by nature children of wrath, like everyone else. But God, who is rich in mercy, out of the great love with which he loved us even when we were dead through our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:1-5

So before we can ever find peace for ourselves or with others, **we must first make our peace with God**. Which is to admit our own responsibility for our lives – to ask God’s forgiveness and to receive God’s peace. Or as John the Baptist liked to proclaim: **“repent and be saved.”**

And here’s the real nice bonus for making peace with God – you can finally find personal peace

Rejoice in the Lord always ...

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus

Philippians 4:4-7

The Bible instructs us as believers to: ***Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.***

It is only after we have admitted our sin and accepted His forgiveness can we ever begin to “Rejoice in God’s presence” before He was our judge, our enemy, now He is our Savior and our eternal Father. Only as we come into His presence now as his adopted and deeply loved children can we experience the peace of God.

It is this peace that come from God, that is beyond human understanding, that gives us our identity.

It is this peace that comes from God, which refocuses and re-centers our lives around Jesus, that makes us recognizable as "Christian".

Personal peace can only come from owning our responsibility for our own and lives and our own sin and in getting these matters right with Jesus. And once we've gotten right with Jesus – He gives us the power to get right with our neighbors (at least on our side of the battle lines).

I don't know where you're at today. I don't know if there is stress in your life or if your life is so hectic. I don't know if you are struggling with bitterness or envy. But I can tell you that God knows. Because God is always watching. And he's not just waiting to see the snake feed.

If you need a peace that is life transforming, this is what God has long been waiting to give to you. Like the prodigal's father, God has been long watching and waiting for you to come to your senses and return home to Him to receive the peace in life He has always wanted to give you.

Coming to Christ does not mean your financial problems will go away or your tough spots will immediately disappear, but it does mean that you can have a peace in your heart that your friends and family might not understand, unless they have found the same peace for themselves.

This holiday season, let nothing keep you from accepting God's offer of forgiveness and peace for yourself and then getting about the business of sharing it with others.

Let's pray about this.