

Advent 3B/1
Trinity, Bend
Isaiah 65:17-25
I Thessalonians 5: 12-28
Psalm 126
John 1: 6-8, 19-28

This is *Gaudate Sunday*, Joy Sunday. It is time for us to take a break in Advent and rejoice because our Savior is coming. John the Baptist says he is the voice of one crying in the wilderness, "Prepare the way of the Lord." That is a call for us to prepare ourselves for God coming into our hearts.

How do we do that? We work our way into it. We prepare inwardly by rearranging and tending to the outward. And we go back to the basics, the "Three Rs" of inward preparation during Advent.

Returning: "Be still and know that I am God," says the Psalmist. We have to set aside some time daily to be quiet with God. Time that we set aside all our activity of preparing for Christmas and other things and just sit with God.

Reverence: Albert Einstein said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One as though nothing is a miracle. The other as though everything is a miracle." We need to cultivate a sense of wonder or reverence so we come to recognize God working in and through all things, then we will become more alive spiritually.

Relationships: Frank Bianco has written, "If you live your life looking for God in all that is around you, every moment becomes a prayer." This is what is needed now. We need to look for God in every one we meet. When we do so our thoughts and actions become prayers for the good of our neighbor.

Isaiah is speaking to us today, when he says, "that the time coming will be a time of peace where the wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox: ...'they shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain,' says the Lord."

This might seem unrealistic when we look at the world we live in but it's not unrealistic when we look at our immediate neighborhood and family.

This past Thursday was the 11th Anniversary of the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Scarlett Lewis, whose son Jesse was killed that day, looked into the profile of those who are the shooters at these mass killing events.

She discovered that those who commit these horrible crimes usually grew up in homes where they did not know they were loved.

We can do something to help kids who grow up in homes where there is not enough love to go around. Not enough time for parents to spend with their kids because they are working two jobs to be able to put a roof over their heads and food on the table.

We can make a difference in lives of those young people . That is what Kids Inspired Do Succeed does. K.I.D.S. lets young people know they are loved . They use your money to help underserved kids be able to participate in things their parents can not afford.

The kids we serve know that somebody at Trinity Church loves them. I don't think we will ever know what a positive difference we make in the lives of those we serve.

You have shown love when you took a tag from the giving tree and shopped for a child at Christmas whose parents cannot afford gifts. You made a difference in that child's life.

Paul calls us to” be at peace among yourselves.....encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.”

There is a story about an old man who lived in the center of a desolate and hopeless city. The man would walk outside of his house, walk into the streets and yell: “love, peace and righteousness!”

The next day he would do the same thing, he would leave his house, walk into the street and yell at the top of his lungs: “Love, peace and righteousness!” he would do this every day, rain or shine, like clockwork.

One day the man’s next-door neighbor, who was tired of the daily yelling, went out on the street and confronted him.

He said, "Hey, man, are you crazy? What do you think you are doing? Every day you come out of your house and yell 'love, peace and righteousness!' Fool don't you know nobody is listening to you!

"This city is full of hate and crime and hopelessness, there is not love of neighbor and there is no peace and righteousness to be found, so give it a rest and save your breath! Don't you know that you can't change the world?"

The old man said, "You are right, my yelling and shouting about 'love peace and righteousness!' may not change the world, but one thing it will do is stop the world from changing me."

Rather than yell about love, peace and righteousness we can make an effort to make this a more peaceful world.

A number of years ago a group of families launched a long term campaign to counteract violence. They formulated the Family Pledge of Non-violence. I think this is a good time to look at that pledge. It goes as follows:

Making peace must start within us and in our family. Each of us, members of this family, commit ourselves as best as we can to become nonviolent and peaceable people:

We will respect others and ourselves.

Respect myself, affirm others, and avoid uncaring criticism, hateful words, physical attacks and self-destructive behavior.

Communicate better.

Share my feelings honestly, look for safe ways to express anger, and work at solving problems peacefully.

Listen carefully.

Listen carefully to one another, especially those who disagree with me, and consider others' feelings and needs rather than insisting on having my own way.

Forgive.

Apologize and make amends when I have hurt another, forgive others, and keep from holding grudges.

Respect nature.

Treat the environment and all living things, including our pets, with respect and care.

Play creatively.

Select entertainment and toys that support our family's values and avoid entertainment that makes violence look exciting, funny, or acceptable.

Be courageous.

Challenge violence in all its forms whenever I encounter it, whether at home, school, at work or in the community, and stand with others who are treated unfairly.

The families who accept this pledge have each family member sign it and then try to the best of their ability to live into their promise.

It is our job to witness to the peace and joy of Jesus Christ in the world. We witness by the way that we live not just by what we say.

Edward Hayes offers this prayer in the spirit of Isaiah 65 to help us live into our call.

Awaken, my heart,
God's reign is near,
the Peaceable Kingdom
is in my hands.

If the world can be a
guest of the lamb,
and the bear and the cow be friends,
then no injury or hate
can be a guest
within the kingdom
of my heart.