

## **Advent Bible Study**

*The Light of Grace*

Dec. 9 Session II

Peace: Isaiah

### **Opening Prayer**

Almighty God,  
when the time was right,  
you fulfilled your promise  
and sent your Son to be our Savior.  
Even his holy name—Jesus—  
means that he came to save his people from their sins.  
Through faith in our crucified and risen Lord,  
we have forgiveness for our sins and the gift of eternal life.  
We are buried with him in baptism  
and raised to walk with him in newness of life.  
Help us, in that new life,  
to walk in love as Jesus did  
and to serve you by serving others.  
When we grow faint and weary in our walk of faith,  
lift us up and renew our strength in the power of the Holy Spirit.  
Amen.

What is peace?

For St. Augustine, peace is the “tranquility of order. Due to our human nature, our souls became “restless”. This restlessness created a longing for peace. But peace would always remain elusive as long as it is regarded as a direct object of choice. We cannot choose peace the way we can pluck an apple from an apple tree. We must choose something else before we are eligible to experience peace. That something else, Augustine tells us, is order. But there are many different kinds of order. What is the specific order that this great saint has in mind? It is an order of virtuous acts that lead to God. Augustine’s most celebrated phrase appears in the beginning of his *Confessions*: “Our hearts are restless and will not rest until they find rest in You.”

Peace replaces restlessness when our lives are directed to God. We should live in accordance with virtue, which Augustine defines as “the order of love.” We now see two things clearly: Why we are restless and desirous of peace; and the solution to our restlessness. If we want peace, we must first direct our love to God. Then we will experience the tranquility of order that is peace.

What is peace, then? It is the tranquility we experience once we direct our love, through virtue, to God. This love, naturally, includes love of neighbor. Therefore, peace is compatible with all of our life activities, including the burdens of life. We should not be searching for peace, but loving God. Peace is something that “happens” to us when we have found something else. It is very much like happiness which, as Nathaniel Hawthorne has stated, “is like a butterfly which, when pursued, is always beyond our grasp, but, if you will sit down quietly, may alight upon you.”

Last week, we heard in the story of Zechariah how the light of grace shines hope over the darkness of despair. This week, we pick up where we left off with a part of Zechariah’s promising song: “to guide our feet into the way of peace.” Peace is that which overcomes all darkness and sinfulness.

Peace brings people back into relationship with God and with one another. But peace, real peace, is always an act of God’s grace. We turn to the story of the prophet Isaiah to see how this light of peace shines upon us. Isaiah was called to be a prophet of the Lord. Yet the first words that Isaiah speaks in the moment of his calling are not words shared in “peace,” but words of self-incriminating “woe” as he stands before the throne of God.

Make no mistake, God would speak words of compassionate peace. And truly, we need God’s word of peace to have real peace. But there is nothing that we can do to merit God’s peace. In our sinfulness, we are always running away from God. We turn in upon ourselves, and trust in our own limited abilities, and bask in all our accomplishments. But we are denying the deep truth that we are afflicted and stained with sin and its judging guilt that we cannot wash away

In Christ’s light of grace and peace, we not only have peace with God. We get to be bearers of that light of peace for all the world. And we bear it so that all who are still living in the darkness of sin and judgment may come to God’s healing grace and peace in Christ. We get to point to Christ’s future. But even now through faith, God’s plan in Christ unfolds for us new growth that blossoms and grows. Our fear and foreboding will give way to peace for one and for all, and the peaceable kingdom of God’s reign will dawn upon all of humanity and creation. R The wolf shall live with the l