

## Sermon – **Prince of Peace?**

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Nutana Park Mennonite Church

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Theme: Prince of Peace

Scripture: Isaiah 9:6-7, Psalm 85:8-13

Resources: Walter Brueggemann, *Names for the Messiah*

Meghan Larissa Good, *Divine Gravity: Sparking a Movement to Recover a Better Christian Story*

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Isaiah 9:6-7, New Revised Standard Version

<sup>6</sup>For a child has been born for us,

a son given to us;

authority rests upon his shoulders,

and he is named

Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,

Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

<sup>7</sup>Great will be his authority,<sup>[a]</sup>

and there shall be endless peace

for the throne of David and his kingdom.

He will establish and uphold it

with justice and with righteousness

from this time onward and forevermore.

The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Psalm 85:8-13, Common English Bible

<sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup> God's salvation is very close to those who honor him  
so that his glory can live in our land.

<sup>10</sup> Faithful love and truth have met;  
righteousness and peace have kissed.

<sup>11</sup> Truth springs up from the ground;  
righteousness gazes down from heaven.

<sup>12</sup> Yes, the LORD gives what is good,  
and our land yields its produce.

<sup>13</sup> Righteousness walks before God,  
making a road for his steps.

Good morning. And thank you for the invitation to participate in your Advent worship - this time at the beginning of the church calendar when we wait for the Messiah, the God who saves us. Our activity together through the structure of MCC reminds us daily that we so very much long for the Messiah to come and to save us from the violence and pain and despair that persists in many places near and far.



[Photo: Munther Isaac, Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church, Bethlehem]

Today, and since the beginning of Advent, at the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem, this is the nativity scene. A babe amid the rubble. Rev. Dr. Munther Isaac, a pastor at the Christmas Church, preached a sermon titled, "God is Under the Rubble in Gaza" on Oct 22 after the Israel Defense Forces bombed Gaza's oldest church, the historic St.

Porphyrius Greek Orthodox Church, where more than 400 people were taking shelter. Munther said, “We were broken and are broken again every day by the images of death, especially when it comes close to us — our families, our sisters, our relatives, and loved ones to whom we spoke daily. We are all broken ... The people of Gaza are still asking us to pray, and they are still praying. Where do [they] get this faith?

We prayed. We prayed for their protection ... and God did not answer us, not even in the ‘house of God’ were church buildings able to protect them. Our children die before the silence of the world, and before the silence of God. How difficult is God’s silence!” Munther goes on, “Beloved, in these difficult times let us comfort ourselves with God’s presence amid pain, and even amid death, for Jesus is no stranger to pain, arrest, torture, and death. He walks with us in our pain. God is under the rubble in Gaza. He is with the frightened and the refugees. He is in the operating room. This is our consolation. He walks with us through the valley of the shadow of death.”

Our scripture texts today, from Isaiah and Psalms, come out of a longing for safety and salvation. Empires were controlling the lives of people (this is an old story), seeing them as pawns to be manipulated for the benefit of the powerful. Into this context, the prophet Isaiah speaks of a child that will be born that will be called the Prince of Peace. This will have been a welcome message to those experiencing oppression. And it was probably received with a big basket of expectations, you know, like destroying the bad guys and protecting the borders. Let’s wonder together about the Prince of Peace. First of all what does Peace look like?

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Peace-Shalom

- uninjured, safe and sound
  - welfare, wholeness, wellbeing
  - flourishing, delight
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The Hebrew word here is shalom which is a deep and wide and strong concept meaning everything from being uninjured to flourishing. This isn't just a word for ceasing hostilities, it is an all-encompassing understanding of wellbeing. It is a daily greeting, shalom or salaam, in Arabic (peace to you), and it is a prayer for wholeness in our relationships with God, each other and all of creation.

Psalm 85 continues to describe this peace, this shalom, which is linked to salvation. I'm especially intrigued with verse 10.

<sup>10</sup> Faithful love and truth have met;  
righteousness and peace have kissed.

This verse names the interplay of love/mercy and truth and righteousness/justice and peace/shalom. So, love, truth, justice and peace are in a dance with each other. John Paul Lederach, long time Anabaptist peacebuilder, notes that the Psalm treats these concepts as alive – they meet, they kiss. What happens if we think of these four as persons. If you had to choose one of these as your persona – love, truth, justice, peace – which would you choose? Which do you resonate most strongly with? As Love or Truth or Justice or Peace, what are you most concerned with? What do you need? And which of the other ones are you most afraid of or

frustrated with? The Psalmist suggests that all of these dancing together will make a good way forward. Each one provides medicine for the excesses or the weaknesses of another one.

Given the teachings of Isaiah 9 and Psalm 85, what kind of kindom does a Prince of Peace bring or create?

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What kind of kindom?

- land
- citizenry
- law
- culture

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I've chosen to use the word "kindom" rather than "kingdom." I do this to disrupt our thinking a little bit. Just like the prophet Isaiah was trying to disrupt the expectations of the people of Israel. Let's imagine a different way of organizing the world, a very relational way, away from empire, but still stay very focused on social arrangements and public realities which affect our very real lives.

Meghan Larissa Good, in her new book, *Divine Gravity: Sparking a Movement to Recover a Better Christian Story*, has a chapter "The End of Occupation: A Bigger Gospel" which examines the real limitations of political nationalism for Christians and asks the question - what kind of kindom was Jesus bringing.

When Jesus arrives on the scene, expected from the prophecy in Isaiah, he is, Meghan writes, “an utter failure and disappointment to most who initially admired him. He arrives at the capital city, and they do their part in declaring him king. But when the moment comes to ignite the revolution, Jesus steps down instead of up. He rallies no troops. He starts no fights. He takes no land. He topples no despots. Disappointed, Jesus’ fan base turns on him, chanting for his death.” (Good, p.65-66)

Meghan goes on to describe how Jesus’ kingdom operates with different parameters. The characteristics of this kingdom are in stark contrast to empire. (Good, p. 66-67).

Rather than defend the borders of a specific piece of land, Jesus’ community expands around the world via outposts of people voluntarily demonstrating a different way of living.

Rather than an ethnic enclave of citizens, in Jesus’ kingdom, citizenship is open. You can transfer in from any nation, speaking any language, pledging allegiance to Jesus, creating a little “spot of the earth where God’s will is done as it is in heaven.” (Good, 66)

Meghan writes, “Every kingdom must have laws. God’s new, dispersed kingdom has one: the law of self-giving love. Love God with all your being; love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew 22:37-39). According to Jesus, that pretty much sums it up. This single, two-part universal law undergirds all the others, which are locally contextualized expressions of it. In this system there are no outdated rules or rigid legalism. Where true love is enacted, [Jesus’] will is accomplished.”

Every community or nation has a culture. Our kindom culture is shaped by the teachings of the long-awaited Messiah Jesus – teachings of hospitality, open-handed sharing, humility, service, justice with mercy, forgiveness, truthful living, loving enemies, seeking the welfare of the vulnerable neighbour. These signs will witness to the way of Jesus, the peace of Christ.

Where are you seeing glimpses of the kindom of peace/shalom? In your family, in your neighbourhood, in our world?



*Mennonite Central Committee (MCC), a worldwide ministry of Anabaptist churches, shares God's love and compassion for all in the name of Christ by responding to basic human needs and working for peace and justice. MCC envisions communities worldwide in right relationship with God, one another and creation.*

This church community, Nutana Park Mennonite Church, is a steadfast partner of the ministry of MCC which seeks to embody peace/shalom even and especially in the midst of a broken world. In defiance of the way that the world is organized which creates vulnerabilities for so many, we choose to build relationships across divides, give over our resources, and whisper love and peace in the fury. It's far from perfect, and some days it feels so small, but it is our offering to demonstrate our allegiance to Jesus, the Prince of Peace.



[Photo courtesy of Al-Najd Developmental Forum]

In Gaza today, a glimpse of the kindom looks like MCC partner staff from A-Najd Developmental Forum, themselves homeless and grieving, distributing ready-to-eat food baskets to families. This work is more challenging by the day as bombardment increases throughout Gaza and very little humanitarian aid is able to cross into Gaza from Egypt.

Our prayers and our advocacy continue for an end to the violence, a return of hostages, and a different path forward to honour the dignity of everyone who calls this land home.

We are deeply inspired by organizations like The Parents Circle and Standing Together which are made up of Palestinian and Jewish people who have all lost much and are committed to a shared future.

From the organization, Standing Together, we hear this attempt to tell a bigger story:

“YES, the Hamas attack against civilians in Israel is an indefensible crime against humanity, AND nothing can justify the indiscriminate bombing of civilians in Gaza. YES, Israel was founded to address a prolonged historical injustice, AND Israel’s founding caused another grave historical injustice ...

This is our darkest hour. We, Israelis and Palestinians who believe in a



shared equal society are grieving, we are violently attacked by the warmongers on both sides, and we are rejected by our international allies for not turning our backs against each other. We need your help, not through short-sighted one-sided empathy, but through sincere, stubborn and hopeful compassion.”



[MCC/Fairpicture photo/Justin Makangara]

In the Democratic Republic of Congo, a glimpse of the kingdom looks like Melanie Mafinga, who works as trader, participating in the Women Situation Room of Kikwit, where members are offered skills and knowledge to promote peace and resolve local conflicts in their daily lives.



In Bangladesh, a glimpse of the kingdom looks like these beautiful girls - Brsha, Afia and Asha – able to participate in a multi-lingual education project where they have a chance to start learning in their own Indigenous language, easing their transition to a government school where instruction is in Bengali. We hope for these young, Indigenous, girls - who are vulnerable in every way to the rules of empire - that they will experience not only being uninjured but that they will be able to flourish and experience delight in their lives.



Here, in the middle of December, we await the coming of the Messiah, the Prince of Peace, Immanuel/God with Us. Against all the facts on the ground, we steadfastly witness to undying hope and the possibility of God's shalom, of deep flourishing for babies and their tired parents, for teenagers and elders, for the earth and all her creatures.

Come, Lord Jesus.

Benediction:

Jesus, Prince of Peace,

we offer our week to you.

May your kingdom break in,

surprising us and inspiring us,

to offer your peace into the lives that we touch. Amen.