

“The Coming Peace”

2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-3, 7-8

As most of all of you are well aware, Barrie and I went up to VA over Thanksgiving for the birth of our granddaughter Caroline Porter, and Barrie stayed another week (which would have been two had she not come home early for the memorial service for her Uncle Bill in BR). During that time (and the ensuing ‘busy-ness’) we got way behind in one of our more pleasurable ‘diversions’—watching certain television series. Ones like “NCIS/LA/NO,” and their ‘relative’ “Bull” (that’s right... ‘NO BULL’); “Scorpion” (NOT about cults or outdoor reality show); military ones like “Brave” and “Seal Team”; and that very popular, critically-acclaimed series, **“This Is Us.”**

How many of you familiar with this one? As many of you know, it is a very well-done show that features a family of ‘triplets’ who grew up in the seventies and eighties, and very creatively flips back and forth between those earlier days and the present. It quite poignantly deals with how their experiences in the **past** very much influence their life in the **present**. Of how they dealt with things growing up... as children and their parents, both in healthy and unhealthy ways... which relates to how they are living their lives as more ‘mature’ adults. And that as they come to grips with the effects of the past on the present... and future... they don’t try to hide from their problems, but embrace the truth that “This is Us.”

As we consider the experiences of faithful followers of God in the past in Scripture, we acknowledge that they did take place in different times and cultures. As was suggested in Adam Hamilton’s book, we are reading ... at least in the Apostle Paul’s case... his personal letter to fellow believers in particular situations and circumstances. Ones much different than our own. That being said, however, I think it is very important that we yet consider just how Paul, and the other Bible authors, ARE speaking directly to US. That like the characters in our favorite secular TV show, we must learn how the experiences of those in the past can influence our own in the present. That as we continue to mature as followers of Christ, we must come to grips with both the healthy, and unhealthy, ways that we live our lives. That as we listen to the words of ancient believers, we recognize that in truth, “This IS Us.”

And so we continue in this Advent season to consider just how the Kingdom of God, made flesh in Jesus Christ, both has 'already come' in the past, and is 'yet to come' in the future... how those experiences of **yesterday** shape our **today** in anticipation of **tomorrow**. Last week we pondered the coming **HOPE** that we have in Christ... in our fellowship **together**, in the '**tools**' we've been given, in the **trust** we can have in Him. Today we will give thought to how we are to look forward not only to HOPE, but also, to "**The Coming PEACE.**"

As we read in the second letter of Peter's of the need to 'strive for Peace,' there were some other '**P's**' that stick out. The first comes in the second verse of our 'pericope': "**The Lord... is PATIENT with you.**" (2 Peter 3:9) I don't know about you, but I find GREAT 'peace' in this statement. Considering how we ALL fall short of the glory of God... all sinners justly deserving His displeasure... I find it very comforting to think of God as that loving parent who suffers through our every mistake, but STILL loves us, no matter what.

Of course, God's **patience** is not simply with regard to the everyday transgressions we make against His holy laws... but much more importantly, patient with His creation's preparation for the coming Judgment. "***The day of the Lord which will come like a thief.***" Followed very closely by heavens passing away with a loud noise and dissolution by fire. Or, in Jesus' words in Matthew, "***wars, rumors of wars, nation against nation, famines, earthquakes, a darkened sun.***" Hmmm. Sound like front page news to you? Sure, I know that every generation could point to such events, but Jesus' has tarried now about 2000 years. **HowmuchLONGER?** **I'm ready. I hope and pray that you are too.** And for those who are NOT ready for Christ's return, we can take solace and find peace in the God who is "***not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance.***" But ... 'the clock IS ticking'...

Do you find the thought of God's impending judgment... the Second Coming of Christ as a 'ticking clock'... somewhat **disturbing?** Does the thought that perhaps God's patience is running out NOT bring you **peace?** Just keep your heart focused on the **providence**, the **goodness**, the **faithfulness** of God. **TRUST** in Peter's assurance that, "***... in accordance with his PROMISE, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home.***" (2 Peter 3:13)

Yes, there is a LOT to be treasured about our lives in the here and now. There's a lot of GOOD that we can experience in these 'old' lives of ours. (Like, for instance, HS State football championships... ☺ Fresh snowfall. Gumbo. Grandchildren. A good laugh.) But there is still a LOT of **pain** and **suffering** in our world. In our nation. Our state. Our *town*. As we consider the evil and injustice that man can do to man, we can yet find **peace** that this is NOT the end. Life doesn't end in a wooden box, or an urn, or at the end of a gun or pill. WE, as 'children of the **promise**,' can look forward to **"a new heaven and a new earth,"** where, in the 'revelatory' words of John, **"they will be his people, and God himself will be with them. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."** (Rev. 21:3-4) I know that 'new' is not always 'better' ... but in this case... OH Yeah, Baby!

Sooo, convinced that we should not fear the future... that, in the words of the 'Gospel acc. To Hobby Lobby: *"I may not know what tomorrow holds, but know who holds tomorrow"*... Peter asks the question: **"What sort of PERSONS ought you be in leading lives of holiness and godliness?"** What is our role in preparing our world for the coming of the Lord? Yes, we know that 'God holds tomorrow'... but, to put that 'ownership' in perspective, **"GOD holds it in TRUST with US!** You and I have a vested interest in fulfilling God's will for His world. As His children, God has entrusted us with a great treasure: our **world**. **"Now if we are children, then we are heirs--heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ."** (Romans 8:17)

As 'co-heirs' with our brother Jesus, we are given the task of, in Peter's words, **"hastening the coming of the day of God."** (2 Peter 3:12) Some synonyms for that word 'hasten' are to *"earnestly desire... wait eagerly... speed."* Through **persistence**. You know... like children the night before Christmas. As **PERSISTENT** as little ones are in wanting Santa to come and bring his presents, how much MORE persistent should you and I be in desiring for our Lord to bring the greatest gift of all: Himself? And just HOW do we 'hasten'... 'speed', 'earnestly desire,' 'wait eagerly'... Christ's return? Through those **PRACTICES** of our faith: like **PRAYER... OBEDIENCE... EVANGELISM**.

It is in speaking of 'EVANGELISM' that brings me to the final aspect of enjoying the **PEACE** of God. And that is by fulfilling His **PURPOSE** for our lives by **PREPARING** the way for His

Son. Just as John the Evangelist was the voice in the wilderness, preparing the way of the Lord, so too are we called to be God's voice in our current 'wilderness.' We are God's messengers TODAY..preparing the way for the coming King. That same 'King' whose final words to His followers at the end of His 'FIRST Coming' were pretty clear: ***"Go and make disciples... baptizing... teaching. And don't worry... I am with you always."*** (Matthew 28:19-20)

And so, in this season of the 'first Advent,' we await the 'second Advent' of Christ. **Earnestly. Eagerly.** 'Eternally' grateful for God's **patience...** His **promise.** Conscious of the **person** God wants us to be: **persistent** in our **practice** of faith, through **prayer, obedience,** and **evangelism.** As we seek to fulfill God's **purposes** for our lives, by **preparing** the way for His Son, may we never forget that our Lord is '**with us always**' in our journey. May we know that Peter was NOT only speaking to **First** Century believers, but to **TWENTY-First** Century ones: ***"Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at PEACE... and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation."*** Rest assured, 'PEACE-FILLED' brothers and sisters in Christ... **'This IS Us'...**

Intro to hymn

This hymn was written in **1642**, during the Thirty Years war, one of the longest and most destructive conflicts in human history, one which resulted in eight million fatalities. A war, BTW, waged between Protestant and Catholic states... yes, in the name of 'religion.' And yet, its author, George Weisell, wrote a hymn that spoke of a **ruler greater** than any earthly **religious group**, who came to bring **peace**, and **unity.** It is based on Ps. 24:7, in which David commanded ***"Lift up your heads, O gates! and be lifted up, O ancient doors! that the King of glory may come in."*** (Psalm 24:7)

In a world that is today ravaged by **conflict** and religious tension around the world... and within our own borders... may we not 'cower' in fear, but lift up our faces to the One who will come again to rule the earth. Let us open our voices and hearts so that ***"the king of glory may (INDEED) come in."*** Please stand as we sing our opening hymn, ***"Lift up your heads, Ye mighty gates."***