

Sermon Title: **Peace - Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight**

Bible: Matthew 3:1-12 (& Isaiah 11:6-9)

Where & When: Second Sunday of Advent at Gilroy UMC on Dec. 8th, 2019

Audience: about 33 English-speaking Church Members

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, you sent us the prince of peace. As Jesus Christ, we want to be peacemakers. Teach us and guide us in the way of peace. Please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Lectionary Year A in 2019 Advent

	Meaning	Color	Old Testament	Gospel
12/01	Hope	Purple	Isaiah 2:2-5	Matthew 24:36-44
12/08	Peace	Purple	Isaiah 11:6-9	Matthew 3:1-12
12/15	Joy	Pink	Isaiah 35:3-10	Matthew 11:2-11
12/22	Love	Purple	Isaiah 7:10-14	Matthew 1:18-25
12/24	Christ	White	Isaiah 9:6-7	Luke 2:1-20

In 2019 Advent, I am following the Lectionary scriptures and the meaning of the Advent candles. Last Sunday's Advent candle meant Hope. And today's Advent candle means peace.

2. What is Peace?

What is Peace? We love peace. When we greet each other, especially in the worship service, many Christians say, "Peace be with you." Then, what is peace? In the English dictionary that I use, peace means: 1. the absence of war 2. harmonious relations 3. the absence of mental stress

or anxiety. According to these definitions, do you have peace? Are you peaceful? To me, according to number 1 definition, I am not at peace, because the Korean War, which began in 1950, has not ended yet. The war stopped in a truce without a peace treaty. My body still remembers my two years of mandatory military service. I hope and pray for peace to come to the divided Korean Peninsula.

What is peace in East Asian countries: China, Korea, and Japan? Peace is 平和 in Chinese characters, even though each country pronounces this word differently. Each part of the Chinese characters comes from picture symbols, and it has its own meaning. The first word means sharing equally. The left part of the second word is rice, which means food. The right part of the second word is a person's mouth. Thus, peace (“平和”) means sharing the food equally with others.

I guess that the most famous foreign word for peace is “shalom” in Hebrew. “Shalom” means peace, harmony, wholeness, hello, and good-bye. And I am surprised when I found out another hidden meaning of “שלום Shalom.” Like Chinese characters, each Hebrew word also has its own picture symbol and meaning. Because Hebrew was written from right to left, the first word means strong teeth, to destroy, the second word means shepherd's staff, authority, the third word means tent peg, to attach, and the last word means water, chaos. Thus, “shalom” means to destroy the authority attached to the chaos.

3. In God's Peaceful Kingdom

I thought that the word “peace” is kind of passive. But now peace sounds like it is very active, and even somewhat aggressive. In the reading of Isaiah, “the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” The lion became a vegetarian. The lion does not eat the lamb, but lies down together with him. Where do you see the peace: when the lion eats the lamb, or when the lion lies down with the lamb? Is it easy for the lion, not to eat its natural prey, but to live together? Isn’t it scary for the lamb just to sit next to the lion? In God’s peaceful kingdom, the wolf, the lamb, the cow, the bear, the lion, and the child play together.

4. In the River Jordan

I do not know how the lion became a vegetarian. Do you have any ideas? How about people? Do you think that people can change? When John the Baptist shouts out “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near,” to some people, the kingdom of heaven is good news. They repent and get ready for it. However, for some people, unfortunately, for religious leaders, the kingdom of heaven is not good news. They do not want to repent, and change themselves. They might think that they themselves are more important than the kingdom of heaven. They might want to be against the kingdom of heaven. Can people change? How can the lion eat straw like the ox?

5. I am not worthy to carry his sandals.

The attitude of the John the Baptist might be one answer. “I am not worthy to carry his sandals. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” The most important one is Jesus. What I have, what I do, or even who I am can be changed for God’s kingdom, because Jesus is

the way, the truth, and the life. In front of Jesus, with the power of the Holy Spirit, all things can be secondary.

I do not want to block the way of the Lord. This is one reason why I choose the United Methodist Church. Unlike other denominations, the United Methodist Church sends pastors to where the pastors are needed. This also means that pastors can be moved away, like a voice in the wilderness. This is challenging to the pastors and the congregations. But I believe that this system guides us to focus on Jesus more. Which one should increase? The pastor? The congregation? Jesus? Only Jesus should increase. The pastor, or even the congregation should decrease. I hope for us to know each other more, and love each other more. But, what I really want is to guide you and me to Jesus more and more.

6. Peace - Prepare the Way of the Lord, Make His Paths Straight!

Our denomination, the United Methodist Church, has a long history of social justice. We are peacemakers, and we do not close our eyes on contemporary human issues. Peace is not just the absence of war or stress. Peace can be an active and aggressive action to destroy the status quo. Even though there is still racism in the States, our founder John Wesley worked for the abolition of slavery, even in the 1700s. I see more female Methodist senior pastors, even though I still hear sexism stories. Even though there are still cultural differences that we cannot understand, I am here and you are here. Every year, we help those who are in need. Every Monday, we feed the homeless. When we face the challenges, it looks like there is no end. However, we are making a way. The way becomes clear and straight. Beyond race, gender, culture, and class, we

are making God's paths straight. Yes, we answer the voice, "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." We have that way, those paths, in our hands and our feet.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, thank you so much for giving us your peace. We are your peacemakers. We prepare the way of the Lord and make your paths straight. We are waiting for your coming. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Questions.

1. What is peace to you?
2. Where can you be peacemakers?