

Sermon Title: **Peace - Troublemaker or Changemaker?**

Bible: **Isaiah 40:3-5, 10-11 & Mark 1:1-8**

Where & When: at Gilroy UMC on the 2nd Sunday of Advent, December 6, 2020

Audience: about 25 YouTube Live-streaming viewers

Opening Prayer

Gracious God, we are waiting for your coming. In the season of Advent, please help us to prepare your way. Please use us to make your path straight. In this time, please be with my lips in your love and grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

1. Second Sunday of Advent for Peace

Traditionally, each Sunday of Advent has its meaning. Today is the second Sunday of Advent. When we lit the second candle of Advent, it meant peace.

How do you describe peace? Where can you see or experience peace? To me, it is like a prayer, especially a silent or centering prayer. I want to make a short experiment of silent prayer.

Usually centering prayer is 20-minutes, but please give me a minute. Let us do just a one-minute silent prayer. Just one minute. Let us choose the word "Peace." When you breathe in and out, please meditate on the word "Peace" in your mind. Please sit comfortably and close your eyes. After the first gong sound, let us pray silently. (The first gong sound is for the one-minute silent prayer, and then we will hear the closing gong sound) After this gong sound, please slowly come back. Thank you so much for participating in my experiment. It might have been difficult to pray, because it was very short. What happened in your mind during this silent prayer? What was in your mind? Silence might awaken many thoughts, worries, plans, feelings,

or ideas in your mind. Those might bother you while trying to focus on praying. However, to me, all of these are prayers. That's because prayer is not just our asking and God's answer, but also encompasses the whole relationship with God. I believe that this relationship with God is the key, and the power of prayer. Likewise, I understand peace. What I mean is that peace is not just no war or no stress, but also the whole process of finding harmony and balance. So, when I read today's Isaiah reading "Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill be made low; the uneven ground shall become level, and the rough places a plain," it means to me, not just a result, but also the process.

2. John the Baptist

Unfortunately, this process of peace cannot please everyone. That's because it requires constant change. If some want to maintain the status quo, this peace cannot be peaceful to them. Let us go back to the times of John the Baptist. If we were people 2000 years ago, and we needed to repent of our sins, where should we go? To the river Jordan or to the temple? For a long time, there has been a ritual of repentance and forgiveness in the temple. To repent and to be forgiven, people had to go to the temple. On the other hand, there was a man, not in the temple, but in the river Jordan. He was wearing and eating very weirdly. He baptized just with the water, which came from the river. It was not holy water, but normal water. He even denied himself, because he was not the one, the Messiah. Let me ask one more time. If you were people living 2000 years ago, where would you want to go? To the river or to the temple?

3. Troublemaker or Changemaker?

As we read the Gospel of Mark 1:5, many people went to the river Jordan, and were baptized by John the Baptist, and confessed their sins. John the Baptist was a changemaker. However, he was a troublemaker to the temple priests, who wanted to maintain the status quo. They did not like John the Baptist and the baptism at the river. They made him stop the baptism and put him in prison. As you might know, John the Baptist was killed in the end.

To us Christians, John the Baptist was still a changemaker. Even Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist. The baptism by water is not only for repentance or forgiveness, but also a celebration of new life. And we remember our baptism.

4. How can we be a changemaker?

How can John the Baptist be a changemaker? What do you think? Unlike the temple priests, he went to where the people were. He prepared the way of the Lord, not in the temple, but in our normal life. This is the exact same as Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ could be in heaven with God, as He is God. However, He decided to be a human being just like us. Because He wants to be with us in this messy or complicated world. Like “every mountain and hill be made low,” He does not want to be high, but wants to be low with us. Because of His self-denial, we are lifted up, as “every valley shall be lifted up.” Today, we will have a holy communion. While waiting for the coming of the Child Jesus, let us remember God’s self-denial. Let us remember God’s coming down to the earth. When we eat and drink, let us follow His way. We might be troublemakers to some people, because they might not like His way. But we are changemakers. And we will bring peace to the people and this world.

Closing Prayer

Gracious God, your love is so great. You denied Godself, and you became a human being like us. You are a changemaker. As you deny yourself, please help us to deny ourselves, and help us to be changemakers or troublemakers. Please be with us when we follow your way. In Jesus' name. Amen.