

CONNECT! SUNDAY REFLECTION

4th Sunday of Advent | For Sunday, December 23rd, 2018

The Transforming Power of Peace

Written by Anna Carter

Micah 5:1-4a

Hebrews 10:5-10

Luke 1:39-45



What's your favorite Christmas song? Perhaps it's one that echoes the words of the angels in Bethlehem. ["Peace on earth and goodwill towards men!"](#) ["Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me!"](#) Maybe your favorite Christmas media moment is [Linus's speech to Charlie Brown](#) where he shares the story. These moments warm our hearts during the holiday season, but the wintry cold of reality seems to always wait for us — heightened political animus, violence in our country and around the world, the insensitivity and backbiting on online comment threads. Here on this Fourth Sunday of Advent, we're not quite to that reality-defying proclamation in the Christmas Gospel. But our readings do foreshadow what God's peace can look like.

The first reading is a glorious promise of the reign of God. The prophet Micah proclaims: *"His greatness shall reach to the ends of the earth; He shall be peace."* Here we read what we might expect at Christmastime, the hope that this earthly life will be marked by the stilling of conflict, a joy triumphing over sorrow, and a surpassing "peace" across the world. Yet, we celebrate the peace of God, year after year, century upon century, and it can seem we are no closer to an absence of sinful upheaval in the world.

For many of us, we may think of peace as stasis, an absence of war and injustice in world systems. "If you want peace, work for justice," as the saying goes. In the midst of World War II, modern spiritual writer Caryll Houselander wrote a book on Mary called ["Reed of God."](#) In it, she reflects on the confusing promise to peace.

"If the life that Christ came to give us was only natural life, if the peace He promised was the world's peace, of course it would be sheer nonsense to make such a statement. But we know well that Christ's life and Christ's peace are much stronger, much more enduring, much more real than the world's life and peace."

So from where does peace come? What is this supernatural peace promised by God? The second reading gives us a hint. In the letter to the Hebrews, the humble obedience of Christ is emphasized. *"When Christ came into the world, he said ... 'Behold, I come to do your will, O God.'"* This yes to the plan of God is repeated in the Alleluia verse, but from different lips.

"Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word." Caryll Houselander drives the point home:

"Only individuals can bear Christ. Only Christ-bearers can restore the world to life and give humanity back the vitality of love. No league or conference or committee or group can put life into the world; it can only be born into the world, and only individuals can give it birth."

The Gospel reminds us of the vitality of individual faith. Mary did not say yes to an abstract idea, but to a person. She said yes to God. Her Advent, so to speak, was nine months of bearing Christ within her, preparing to give birth to love. The life of God within her compels her to move, to go forth, to live her individual life as a peace-bearing gift to others. *"Mary set out and traveled to the hill country in haste..."* The Christ-life that Mary bears is so powerful, so tangible, that John the Baptist dances in the womb of Elizabeth!

For peace to transform the world, it must transform us first. The peace of God is supernatural, and it must be formed in each individual life. As this Advent season draws to a close, consider your own transformation. Do you take time to listen to the voice of the Lord? Do you reflect on the Scriptures and allow the word of God to grow to fruition in you? Do you find concrete ways to bring the life and love of Christ to others?

These are excellent spiritual practices for Advent, but they are not meant to remain within this liturgical season, or even the "Christmas spirit" of the holidays. The supernatural peace of God, the transformation of heart, the yes that bears Christ to the world — these are our daily invitation.

Peace on earth, and goodwill to men!

Anna Carter

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PRAYER

Heavenly Father,
Your desire for us is peace.
I trust that this peace is not our work alone,
but the work of Your life in us.
I believe that my human life, body, and soul,
are the material for Your will in me,
and that my yes to You
allows Christ to be born anew in my life.
Today and always,
may it be done unto me according to Your word.
May Your life be brought to bear in me,
and may that life quicken to fullness,
and let it bear the fruit of joy, love, and peace
in my life in this world.
Holy Spirit, gift of God, make me a Christ-bearer!
— *words inspired by Caryll Houselander's "Reed of God"*