

## **Pastor Roy's Sermon from Dec. 9, 2013 - Advent 2**

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Today we have Advent promises. Back in the dawn of Israel's history, the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob trusted that God was with them and would bless them. Over time, Israel's religious leaders and common folk came to believe that they were God's favorites. Don't we all? The prophets then came reminding Israel that the blessing was only deeply meaningful if it was shared with the poor among them and with the nations around them. A light to the nations.

“A shoot will spring from the stock of Jesse, a new shoot will grow from his roots. On him will rest the spirit of Yahweh, the spirit of wisdom and insight, the spirit of counsel and power. The spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh: his inspiration will lie in fearing Yahweh. His judgment will not be by appearances. His verdict not given on hearsay. He will judge the weak with integrity and give fair sentence for the humblest of the land. He will strike the country with the rod of his mouth and with the breath of his lips bring death to the wicked. Uprightness will be the belt around his waist, and constancy the belt about his hips. . . No hurt, no harm will be done on all my holy mountain, for the country will be full of knowledge of Yahweh as waters cover the sea.”

The prophets always proclaimed that God's children are blessed as they identify with the poor among them. If not, their “blessing” will be lost and trouble will take the place of the ease and pleasure which they mistook for blessing. The prophets scoff at the promises of wealth and power, even the might of soldiers and weapons of war. The priorities of societies are called into question by the prophets. True blessing is not security and abundance—a predictable future, but trust, gratitude, and interdependency. When we give and receive with all who are around us and everything which is around us. That is the good life. Anything short of that will lead to misery, paranoia, and fear.

The promise of God is a blessing for all those who walk in the wisdom of God, who live the peace of God. The blessing of the children of God is not a personal blessing but a shared blessing—Shalom—peace which reaches far and wide for the good of all. No other blessing brings lasting joy. Most importantly, though the prophets often spoke of divine punishment, failure to live the justice of God is simply a failure to fully live.

Joy is not happiness. Joy is deep contentment that is mingled with a strong sense of the pain and sorrows of others rather than the momentary glee of happy thoughts and emotional highs.

As you see, only true joy is sustainable. Happiness is always seeking for the source of another emotional experience—another comfort, another vacation from the pains and responsibilities of love.

We cannot secure happiness. The more we grasp for it, the more it flows like water through our hands and fingers. Like holding an ice cube in your hand. It will melt. Every single time.

Contrary to happiness, joy depends only on our practice of faithful and compassionate love. If we want to be joyful, we will learn to love. It's never easy to love. If it's easy, it's not likely love. Love will hurt at times, but that is only because we are giving away and receiving what we cannot keep to ourselves.

In Romans we read, “The root of Jesse shall come, the one who rises to rule the Gentiles; in him the Gentiles shall hope. May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may

abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Belief and hope in what? In the power of the Holy Spirit. In the power of true love, true peace, which always seeks to give more than it seeks to receive. John the baptizer speaks of the message of the prophets which will be increased in the message of the coming Son of Man as a baptism of the Holy Spirit and fire. “His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor and will gather his wheat into the granary; but the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire.

We want our lives to be wheat, not chaff. The chaff is fluff, it takes up space, it might even look and feel really nice, but it is worthless in the end. God is in the process of burning away the chaff of our lives. Life has a way of doing this. We have the chance to let go, to release the stuff that does not last, and to cling to God, to the Spirit, to faithful love.

This is all a good thing. We love because to love is to live. Purification within us and all around us is ongoing. It will never cease. It cannot cease, for the Spirit of God doing what the Spirit of God has always been doing and will always do. Making all things pure. Bringing unity and hope not by imagining peace but by enacting it one relationship at a time. Every moment, every experience, every relationship the Spirit is teaching, leading, offering freedom and peace.

John the Baptist’s warning to the religious leaders is real. Bear fruit worthy of repentance! Make a difference. Live lives of justice and peace. Nothing else matters! Nothing else will last. Nothing else engages the fire of the Spirit of God. Nothing else will result in true joy. Whether or not we are happy, we can always strive for justice and peace—for love. We, as our Lord, can always pour out our lives in actions of love and mercy.

Mahatma Gandhi said, “If you love peace, then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed—but hate these things inside yourself, not in another.” Of course, hating the evil within others moves us away from peace. When we compare ourselves to others, the real progress we can bring toward peace is lost in self-righteous pride. If we seek peace within ourselves, seek to be purified of hate, fear, and greed, then we are doing the one thing we can do to promote peace. We cannot force peace on others. They must choose it for themselves.

Mother Theresa said, “If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.”

Peace begins within us when we allow the Spirit to lead us and then the Spirit finds the connections in relationships of hope and trust and generosity.

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing in faithful love, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. So that you may know the purifying fire of God's mercy. This is how we watch and wait for the Spirit of Christ which is coming in the world today.

Amen.