

## The Gift of Peace

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Isaiah 40: 1-11

Psalm 85

Mark 1: 1-8

December 7, 2008 - UM

Will you join me in a moment of prayer?

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts and minds be acceptable in your sight O God, our strength and our redeemer, amen.

There is some terrible irony that on the week in which many Christians celebrate the theme of peace, 3 more Canadian soldier were killed in Afghanistan.

There will be little peace in those households today and the coming weeks and perhaps even in the coming years.

And this season, where there is so much pressure on all of us to be happy, may be one of the most difficult for these families... and for a variety of reasons, it may be a difficult one for some of us.

So what do our scriptures say about these kinds of situations?

The reading from Isaiah starts with these words, "Comfort, comfort my people."

This to a people who had been taken from their land, enslaved for generations, and thought that their God had abandoned them.

God speaks words of comfort... and words of a future "In the desert prepare the way for the LORD; make straight in the wilderness a highway for our God.

Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low; the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.

These words are picked up again in the gospel of Mark: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way" "a voice of one calling in the desert, 'Prepare the way for the Lord, make straight paths for him.' "

How do we prepare for the Lord?

How do we welcome the one whom we call the Prince of Peace into our lives?

Mark writes that John the Baptist came preaching a message of repentance...

Repentance isn't simply saying I am sorry...

Repentance is looking at our lives and our world and

Repentance is changing the way we live...

We lit a candle of peace this morning.

I don't think John was a peaceful man to have around.

And according to Mark, he was clear that he was not the one for whom they waited... there was someone more powerful than he who was coming after him.

And I don't think Jesus was a peaceful man... at least not if we think of peaceful as calm and serene.

But he presented a vision of God's Shalom to us, just like Isaiah gave us in our scriptures...

A vision where there was nobody left out...

A vision of a place for each one of us...

But he didn't just leave us with the vision... he left us with the responsibility to work for the vision...

That's harder than waiting for a saviour to come and make everything right...

Instead Jesus taught us these things...

Love God and love your neighbour as yourself...

And that whoever welcomed one in his name, welcomed Jesus and God.

So, this Christmas season, as you prepare once again to welcome the Prince of Peace into your homes and hearts...

Take comfort and strength for the work of peace... a peace that is not the absence of war in parts of the world... but an absence of war throughout the world...

A peace that is not just food for some... but for everyone...

A peace that sees each naked person clothed... each hungry mouth fed... each oppressed one freed....

A peace that starts with how we interact with each other in small ways and large ones...

A peace that begins in your own hearts and spreads to the world...

Thanks be to God for the gift of peace, amen.