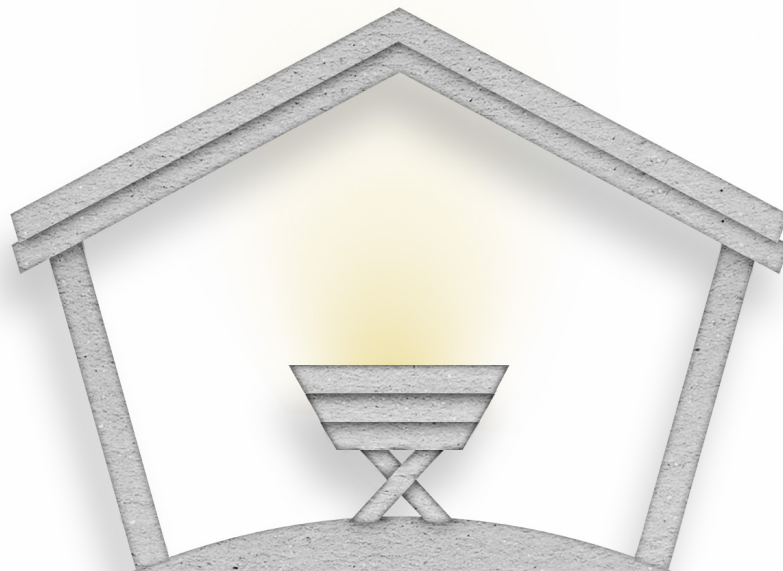




Prepare Him Room
Spiritual Practices for Advent

Week Two: Peace
December 6th-12th, 2020



PEACE

And he will be called:
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

-Isaiah 9:6-7

What does “peace” mean to you? Often when we think about peace, we imagine a beachfront vacation, a relaxing night at home, a simply an absense of conflict and violence.

But Scripture speaks about peace as something that goes much deeper than that. The Hebrew word for peace is “shalom,” and it conveys a sense of wholeness, completeness, and rightness. Shalom exists where things are as they should be. Where people are flourishing, where communities function in alignment with the ways of God, and where relationships are characterized by love.

In a well known passage from the book of Isaiah, the promised Messiah is referred to as the “Prince of Peace.” For generations, the Jewish people anticipated that the Messiah would be a mighty warrior who would conquer their oppressors and put Israel in a position of power.

But Jesus, the ultimate fulfillment to this promise, showed us another way. He taught us how to live as peacemakers, he sought to restore justice and wholeness to everyone he encountered, and then He gave up his life in the greatest act of sacrificial love known to humankind.

Through his death and resurrection, Jesus reconciled us to God and made true peace possible. In Him, we have peace with God, peace with ourselves, and peace with one another.

We have peace with God because our sins are no longer held against us. We have been set free. When God looks at us, he sees us as holy and blameless - not because of anything we have done (phew!), but because Christ overcame the power of sin and evil on the cross. We are free to come “boldly and confidently into God’s presence (Eph 3:12),” knowing that we are loved and accepted there. This is true peace. The is the source of *all* true peace.

In Christ, we have peace with ourselves. So many of us spend so much of our time comparing ourselves to others, striving to get ahead, or feeling bad about ourselves because we don’t measure up. By God’s grace, he accepts us just as we are, with all of our failures and weaknesses. By opening ourselves up to receive His love, we can learn to accept ourselves as we are, too - knowing that His Spirit is moving in us, transforming us from the inside out.

And in Christ, we are called to live at peace with others. In Scripture, reconciliation with God and reconciliation with others go hand in hand. We have received God’s forgiveness, and so we forgive. We have experienced God’s grace, and so we extend it to others. God calls us to be *agents of reconciliation* - people who do the hard work of restoring peace within our relationships, our communities, and our world.

Ephesians 2:14 tells is that Jesus *is* our peace. As we move into the second week of Advent, may we open ourselves up to receive His peace and let it overflow to everyone we encounter.

Sunday, December 6th

READ AND MEDITATE

In Matthew 11:27, Jesus makes the bold declaration that He is speaking and acting on behalf of God, His Father. His unique relationship with God makes Him the only one who is fully equipped to reveal God's true identity and invite people into His way of life.

The religious system of Jesus' day burdened people with a strict collection of rules that people needed to follow. It favoured a small minority of people who were part of the religious elite, but kept the poor, marginalized, and outcast on the outside based on the belief that God's blessing did not extend to them.

Whether people were weighed down with their own sin or with the endless striving to live up to the religious laws of the day, Jesus invited them to experience his rest.

In our world today, there is no shortage of reasons that you may be feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, or burnt out.

Maybe today your soul is tired. Maybe you have been weighed down with anxiety, with guilt, or with a sense of inadequacy. Maybe you are struggling to keep up with the to-do list or live up to the expectations of others.

Today, Jesus is inviting you to experience His rest. Today, Jesus is inviting you to receive his grace and let him carry the weight of your situation. Today Jesus is inviting you to come to him. Take a moment to receive his invitation and enter into His rest.

Spend some time meditating on this passage from Matthew 11:28-30. Use your imagination. Picture Jesus speaking these words to you. What does the tone of His voice communicate to you? What expression do you see on His face? What feelings does this encounter evoke in you? Consider writing down a phrase from the passage and meditating on it throughout the day.

Meditative Reading: Matthew 11:28-30

²⁸ Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest.

²⁹ Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰ For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light."

PRAY

Take a moment to rest in God's presence. In what area of your life are you weary or carrying a heavy burden? Imagine yourself handing this burden over to Jesus. Allow yourself to experience the rest for your soul that He promises to us. Ask Jesus to fill you with His peace so that you can share it with others today.

Monday, December 7th

READ AND RECEIVE

Read the following verse over several times slowly. Pay attention to the key words that Jesus speaks here and let your heart connect with each one of them..

I am leaving you with a gift—peace of mind and heart. And the peace I give is a gift the world cannot give. So don't be troubled or afraid.

-Jesus

John 14:27

REFLECT AND JOURNAL

Prayerfully reflect on the following questions. Consider writing your responses to one or more of these questions in a journal.

When in your life have you experienced God's peace in a powerful way?

What does it mean that peace is a gift? How do we receive this gift?

Where do you turn for peace?

How does the peace that Jesus gives us differ from the peace that the world offers us?

In what area of your life do you need to receive God's peace?

PRAY

Spend some time thanking God for the ways you have experienced His peace. Ask Him to help you experience his peace today, and to extend it to the people you interact with.

Tuesday, December 8th

READ AND REFLECT

Read through the following passage slowly and prayerfully. Allow yourself to be reminded of how deeply God cares for you. Be encouraged and receive God's invitation to place your trust in him.

⁶Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. ⁷Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

-Philippians 4:6-7

Go through the Palms Down/Palms Up posture prayer as described below, focusing on releasing an area of worry to God and opening yourself up to receive his peace.

PALMS DOWN/PALMS UP

Palms Down/Palms Up is a posture prayer that can help us surrender our worries and challenges to God, and open us up to receive the blessings that he wants to pour into our lives.

As we go about our day to day lives, we all experience moments of discouragement, defeat, anxiety, and frustration. In the season we are all living through, it can be easy to lose sight of the hope that we have in Christ.

Palms Down/Palms Up is a practice that you can continue to use throughout the day to release those things that are overwhelming you or cluttering your heart and mind over to God, and open yourself up to receive God's hope. Here's how to do it:

Turn your palms down, and release your concerns to God

Start by resting your hands on your knees and turning your palms down as a symbol of releasing your cares to God. What has been causing you discouragement lately? What has been causing you to feel defeated, anxious, or frustrated?

Allow your heart to surrender these burdens to God. You might pray something like "God, I surrender my discouragement about...to you.", "Lord, I give you my worries about this meeting", or "God I release my fear about...to you". You might feel a sense of release in your heart or in your hands as you pray. Take a few moments to lean into this posture of surrender.

Turn your palms up, and receive God's hope

Now turn your palms upwards and posture your heart to receive from God. Ask God to provide you with His peace in the area you have been struggling. You may pray something like "God, I pray that you will fill me with Your peace as I face this challenge" or, "Father, please give me Your peace as I enter into this conversation". Take a few moments to enjoy God's presence. Allow your heart to rest in fellowship with Him before continuing on with your day.

Wednesday, December 9th

LECTIO DIVINA

Lectio Divina is an approach to reading the Bible that opens us up to hear God speak to us in the present moment. Central to the practice of Lectio Divina is the belief that the Holy Spirit actively uses the Scriptures to lead us and change us. Lectio Divina places us in a position to be transformed by the Scriptures as we immerse ourselves in them and surrender to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

In John 10:11, Jesus refers to himself as *The Good Shepherd*. Try practicing Lectio Divina using Psalm 23, keeping this truth in mind. Beneath the passage, you will find the steps that will walk you through Lectio Divina.

PASSAGE - ROMANS 5:1-5

The Lord is my shepherd;
I have all that I need.
² He lets me rest in green meadows;
he leads me beside peaceful streams.
³ He renews my strength.
He guides me along right paths,
bringing honor to his name.
⁴ Even when I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will not be afraid,
for you are close beside me.
Your rod and your staff
protect and comfort me.
⁵ You prepare a feast for me
in the presence of my enemies.
You honor me by anointing my head with oil.
My cup overflows with blessings.
⁶ Surely your goodness and unfailing love will pursue me
all the days of my life,
and I will live in the house of the Lord
forever.

LECTIO DIVINA - STEPS

1) Prepare: Centre yourself in God's presence

Start by taking a few minutes to breathe and quiet yourself in God's loving presence. Express your willingness to hear from God and your desire to be led by the Spirit.

2) Read: Listen for the word or phrase that God lifts to your attention

Read the passage all the way through slowly. Savour the words and let them sink into your heart. As you read, listen for a word or phrase that stands out and seems to resonate with your heart. Don't let yourself feel pressured or worried about whether or not God will speak to you. Lean into the Holy Spirit and rest in the knowledge that God is already with you. Take a moment to sit with the words that have been drawn to your attention.

3) Reflect: How does this word connect with my life?

Read the passage through a second time. As you do, reflect on how this word or phrase relates to what is going on in your life at the present moment. How is God revealing himself to you through these words?

4) Respond: What is my response to God?

Read the passage through a third time. Following this reading, take a few moments to pray to God in response to this encounter. Express your feelings about what you have read. Pay attention for any sense that God is calling you to step out in obedience in some way based on what you have heard. This may be a good time to journal your prayers.

5) Resolve: Live it out!

As you continue on with the rest of your activities for the day, carry this word with you. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring it to your attention throughout the day. Live it out and let the Holy Spirit lead you into a deeper understanding of its meaning as it relates to your everyday life.

This structure follows the approach to Lectio Divina laid out in an article called "Lectio Divina: Engaging the Scriptures for Spiritual Transformation" by Ruth Haley Barton. Read the full article here: transformingcenter.org/2019/07/lectio-divina-engaging-the-scriptures-for-spiritual-transformation-2

Thursday, December 10th

READ AND RECEIVE

Read through the following verses slowly. Be encouraged in knowing that all true peace comes from the gift of God's grace that we have through Jesus' death and resurrection - and it is yours to receive, with no strings attached!

Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. ² Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of undeserved privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory.

-Romans 5:1-2

BREATH PRAYER

Breath prayer is an ancient prayer practice that can help us become mindful and attentive to God's presence and provision in every moment of our day. Breath prayer is simple form of prayer, in which our expressions of worship, declarations of truth, and petitions to the Father, are expressed rhythmically as we inhale and exhale.

Look over the following breath prayers and find one that resonates with you. Inhale deeply as you pray the first half of your breath prayer, and then exhale slowly as you pray the second part of the breath prayer.

Calm your heart and mind and spend a few minutes breathing through the breath prayer. Allow your entire being to be re-centred in God's presence and find rest in the truth that you are declaring as you pray.

**Lord make me
an instrument of your peace.**

-Peace Prayer of St. Francis

**God blesses those who work for peace,
for they will be called the children of God.**

-Matthew 5:9

**The Lord gives his people strength.
The Lord blesses them with peace.**

-Psalm 29:11

**His peace will guard your hearts and minds
as you live in Christ Jesus.**

-Philippians 4:7

**Search for peace,
and work to maintain it.**

-1 Peter 3:11

Friday, December 11th

READ AND REFLECT

Read through the following verse a few times slowly. Reflect on the truth that God invites us to receive His peace, and then to be peacemakers in the world!

And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

-James 3:18

EXPERIENCE PEACE: PRAY

Identify a situation in which you have been experiencing stress, worry, or conflict. Spend a few moments holding this situation before God in prayer. How is He calling you to move forward? How does He want to bring His peace to this situation? Spend some time in silence, listening for what He would like to say to you today.

SPREAD PEACE: PRAY

Now spend a few moments praying for others to experience peace.

You can pray using your own words, or pray using a simple blessing like this one:

"May they experience the a deep sense of your peace."

Pray peace over somebody you care deeply about and have a close relationship with.

Pray peace over somebody you look up to.

Pray peace over the last person you spoke to that was struggling in some way.

Pray peace over somebody you don't know very well - the first person who comes to mind.

Pray peace over somebody you find difficult to love.

Pray peace over our church family.

Pray peace over our community.

LIVE PEACE: ACT

Ask God to show you a practical way that you can "plant seeds of peace" today. Maybe you have a relationship that needs reconciling. Maybe you've wronged someone and need to ask for forgiveness. Maybe God is inviting you to learn more about a people group that you have been judgmental towards, or to send a message of encouragement to somebody who has been dealing with a stressful situation. Ask God to show you what he is calling you to do today, and then go for it!

Saturday, December 12th

READ AND REFLECT

Read through the following passage slowly. Thank God for the new life you have through Christ, and embrace your identity as an ambassador of reconciliation.

¹⁷ This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!

¹⁸ And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. ¹⁹ For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation. ²⁰ So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" ²¹ For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

-2 Corinthians 5:17-21

THE EXAMEN

The Examen is spiritual practice that helps us become more aware of and engaged in God's activity in our lives – both in the big things and the small things. The prayer involves reflecting back on everything that happened over the course of the day, paying special attention to how God was moving and how you were responding. As we open ourselves up to the Spirit in this reflective practice, God will be able to speak to us about the gifts he has given us, the way we have been responding to Him and to others, and how He may be calling us to move forward.

While the Examen is often done at the end of each day, today we will use this practice to reflect back over the past week. We will pay attention to the ways we experienced God's hope, the ways we allowed Him to use us to spread hope to others, and how He is calling us to move forward in hope as we look ahead to a new week.

PRACTICE THE EXAMEN

1) Ask the Holy Spirit to lead this time of prayer. Start by centering yourself in God's loving presence. Take a minute to remind yourself that God is all around you, He is closer than the air that is filling your lungs. Try sitting up straight with your feet flat on the floor and your palms up. Take some deep breaths. Breathe in God's hope. His peace. His joy. His love. Breathe out everything that is not of him – your anxieties, your fears, your anger.

2) Give thanks. Take a few moments to express your gratitude for the gifts that he has given you over the course of the week – both big and small. Don't rush to create the longest list that you can come up with. Instead, take the time to really savour these blessings.

3) Reflect: Did I receive and experience God's peace this week? Take a few moments to reflect back on your week, day by day. Were there situations in which you felt anxious? Overwhelmed? Frantic and scattered? Hold those moments before God. Allow His "peace that passes understanding" to flood into your heart. When did you experience peace? Thank God for those moments.

4) Reflect: Did I live as a peacemaker this week? Think about the interactions you had with others. Did you speak and act in a way that created greater unity and peace, or conflict and division? Think about how you spoke about other people. Did you slander or gossip about people? Or did you speak in a way that built others up? What would it look like to be a peacemaker in your relationships?

5) Choose a feeling or situation from your reflection to pray through. Where do you need to experience God's peace the most? Pray through this situation. Speak to God about your thoughts and feelings. Then open yourself up to listening to what he might have to say.

6) Look ahead to tomorrow. Scripture tells us that God's mercies are new every morning. What will it look like experience and live out peace moving forward? Receive God's grace and ask the Spirit to empower you as you move into the week ahead.