

The Gift of Peace
Luke 1:26-33, 46-55
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
December 6, 2020
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

In the children's book titled *The Peace Book*, Todd Parr writes this, "Peace is making new friends. Peace is keeping the water blue for all the fish. Peace is listening to different kinds of music. Peace is saying you're sorry when you hurt someone. Peace is helping your neighbor. Peace is reading all different kinds of books. Peace is thinking about someone you love. Peace is giving shoes to someone who needs them. Peace is planting a tree. Peace is sharing a meal. Peace is wearing different clothes. Peace is watching it snow. Peace is keeping the streets clean. Peace is offering a hug to a friend. Peace is everyone having a home. Peace is growing a garden. Peace is taking a nap. Peace is learning another language. Peace is having enough pizza for everyone. Peace is keeping someone warm. Peace is new babies being born. Peace is being free. Peace is traveling to different places. Peace is wishing on a star. Peace is being who you are. Peace is being different, feeling good about yourself, and helping others. The world is a better place because of you."

If you listen closely to all the things the author connects with peace, you will notice that nowhere does he say that peace is easy. Yes, there are some pages in the book where he names things like watching it snow or wishing on a star - things that we might say take less out of us. But for the most part what Todd Parr names are things that require our being committed to a different kind of world. After all when we make new friends...when we keep the water clean and plant trees...when we work to ensure everyone has a home and food and is kept warm...when we travel to different places and listen to different kinds of music...all of these are about thinking beyond ourselves and envisioning a world that is better than our current reality.

And, isn't that what Mary and Joseph did when they said "yes" to God?

See, too often we treat them as if they are mere props in Jesus' story...as if they had no choice...as if they had no questions. But if we listen to the parts of Mary's story Melea read for us today and if we remember Joseph's story as told in the Gospel of Matthew, we remember that both of them had questions and hesitations. Both of them understood that in saying "yes" they were agreeing to participate in something life-changing.

And, even though we most often talk about the personal implications - after all, based on what the story tells us about Mary she could have been stoned or at least ostracized due to this pregnancy, and Joseph could easily have become the laughing stock of his community - but we underestimate Mary and Joseph if we think that their only questions and hesitations were about their own wellbeing.

After all, have you ever really listened to Mary's song? These words that we call the Magnificat, are full of powerful images about the implications of this news on the whole world. These words, which come a bit later while Mary is visiting her relative, Elizabeth, are not naive words that celebrate a soon-to-born baby, but they are powerful words that recognize that in bearing the Prince of Peace she will be helping to usher in the overthrow of powers-that-be as they are replaced with the reign of God's kin-dom.

Christianity has liked to call Mary "meek and mild" but if we listen we see that she is powerful.

And so is peace.

Peace is not laying down like a doormat or giving in during an argument so as not to cause any conflict.

Peace is not just a comfortable feeling inside that causes us not to worry.

Peace often does not come easily.

Rather, when we think about real peace, God's peace, a Savior called the Prince of Peace...then we are reminded that the peace of God's intention is a peace that is often hard-fought and that doesn't just make you or I feel good, but instead that brings justice and equity for all people.

And if we listen, we will hear that in Mary's song. Here is a woman, who by all accounts - from gender to socioeconomic status to hometown - shouldn't have been thinking much beyond the edge of her yard and the chores on that day's to-do list. But, Mary not only said yes to a scary and scandalous pregnancy, but she sang a song of resistance declaring that she was invited to participate in God's act of bringing down the mighty and lifting up the lowly, of sending the rich away empty and setting a feast before the hungry. Mary declared in that song that God's attention was on all of God's people, especially those who earthly rulers were neglecting. And she caught a vision for a time when God's intentions would come in their fullness.

Friends, today is Peace Sunday. And perhaps the greatest surprise for us is that peace is not the easiest of the Advent values to choose. Peace is not a feel-good commitment that situates us under a cozy blanket in front of a fireplace.

Rather, when we make a commitment to peace we are making a commitment to choose the ways of God.

When we make a commitment to peace we are making a commitment to keep fighting the good fight, the fight of the prophets, the fight of Jesus, the fight that led to the cross, a fight that was and is about reshaping this world with the upside down, last shall be first values of God's kin-dom.

When we make a commitment to peace we are making a commitment to think beyond ourselves and to work for a better world for all, especially the least, of God's children.

See, perhaps the unexpected gift of peace is that when we embrace its fullness, then it isn't just a gift for us but for the world.

Amen.