

Advent 2 – 7th December 2025

Isaiah 11: 1-10 – Romans 15: 4-13 – Matthew 3: 1-12

A man was undergoing a course of counselling to overcome months of trauma and stress. At the end of one session, his counsellor suggested he could write individual letters to everyone who he felt had contributed to his situation and then burn them as a significant path towards his inner healing and peace. They made an appointment for another session in a week, after which the man returned and said he'd done what the counsellor had recommended. He then asked what he should do with the letters. While peace is an important virtue, any lighting and burning, especially at Advent, is best kept for the candles.

Jokes aside, peace is the second virtue we celebrate within the season of Advent. And which is therefore represented by the second candle that we light during this time. As with hope, it represents another inherent quality of the Light of the World, Jesus, to the world. The Light that shines in the darkness (John 1:5), and of whom we are to reflect as believers in our daily lives. As we wait and prepare for our Lord's return.

For most of us, the word peace raises a multitude of images and responses. Many would more often than not immediately associate peace with a world being free from wars, persecutions, and the fallout of dictatorially oppressive regimes and people. Then of course, there is that almost at times elusive, inner peace of mind, that never quite seems to be there when we so often yearn it. Whether confronted with something totally unexpected and which proves to be at first almost unassailable. Or when managing everyday run of the mill hardships, difficulties, or trials. Exacerbated by any number of exponentially increasing demands that come with living in a hectic and ridiculously ever-changing world. Equally there is the peace or sense of satisfaction that can arise when we have successfully negotiated a difficult yet rewarding undertaking or achievement. Even overcoming an illness, or significant personal issue.

This brings us to a similar though paradoxically different peace which we can also experience and acquire through enduring times of difficulty, hardships, and various trials. Though which doesn't seek a reprieve from everything that burdens and overwhelms us. But one that no matter the degree of the chaos going on around us, enables us to nonetheless remain calm, and unfazed. Filled with a deeper inner sense of security, an assurance, a knowing that in the end, and irrespective the circumstances or outcome, as trying as they maybe, Jesus is always with us. This peace is actually impossible to genuinely experience outside of being filled with the Holy Spirit. Outside of being a Christian. It is the peace that Christ gives, (and) not as the world gives... (and why we are) not to let our hearts be troubled, nor be afraid (John 14:27). This is the peace that ensues from being in righteous relationship with God. That which passes all understanding, when we let our requests be made known to God (Philippians 4:6-7). Not the temporary superficial worldly peace to which we can periodically escape via gratification and/or distraction. Such as self-medication. Nor the peace that emanates from the counterfeit, the liar, and the fruit of which we can discern because they still deny Christ. All of which, as we know, never lasts. Like trying to catch the wind.

When we consider that Advent centres on both the return of Jesus, the Parousia, and the pre-empting end times, or Apocalypse, then we would think the peace of Christ which enables us to traverse most of life's challenges calmly, would obviously be the most preferable. As Jesus Himself was able to do so courageously, even to the point where at times He chose to say nothing whilst still being brutally accosted and abused by his accusers during and following His sham trial (Matthew 27:14). No doubt the same peace of mind with which John the Baptist was able to call a spade a spade so courageously when he called out Herod Antipas and his adulterous farce marriage to Herodias. And as he did with the Pharisees and Sadducees who came to also be baptized with all and sundry by John.

John was of course calling everyone near and far to repentance, in preparation for the imminent arrival of the long-awaited Messiah. The first Parousia. Remembering too, that both repentance and the cleansing

ritual of baptism (more often used by Jewish proselytes in those times) were already familiar realities to the Jewish people anyway. Repentance was as equally significant to the Jews as it would become for Christians. And pivotal to being restored and maintaining a right relationship with God. To repent actually means “to turn”. To turn away from whatever sin or transgression, either in action or words, that we are engaging. And turn toward God. That is to confess our need to repent to God.

To repent, as we know, also requires the humility to confess that we have an issue, often from which we also have an issue stopping. Let alone the humility to do so. Perhaps because we are unable, unwilling, or incapable of seeing that we are in fact lapsing. One can of course be remorseful at a particular indiscretion. But that is actually an aside. What matters is the intent of our hearts to acknowledge and confess when we’ve become aware we’ve transgressed. And even more so, to change our behaviour, and desist even when subjected to similar circumstances, or when the opportunity/s under which we are tempted to offend recur or eventuate. Which they invariably do. Such as when struggling with addictions, and yet where the strongholds and bitter root judgements that imprison us to as much, can with the Holy Spirit be broken to set us free. Which is again why repentance is imperative to salvation. For if we refuse to acknowledge that we transgress, then there is no need for forgiveness. There is no need for a Saviour, through whom we can secure perfect forgiveness. Again, because of our inability to not sin. Which comes back to John’s criticism of the religious elite when they showed up. Either for a nosey. To give their five cents worth. Or otherwise.

Arguably, perhaps John was being a bit strong with his fleeing brood of vipers analogy. Not an uncommon sight in the Palestinian sticks where John was abiding. Or within agrarian communities. Particularly when snakes and all kinds of crawling creatures (i.e. rodents) would scurry to safety from inconveniences such as grass fires and harvesting. Perhaps in attending, the Pharisees and Sadducees wanted to impress with a bit of religious PR. Reinforcing their religious fervour, as much as tacitly approving all was kosher. Penitent or perhaps not. And herein lay the proverbial stick. As heirs to Abraham, they mostly believed that their salvation was automatically secured. Such was the immensity and uniqueness of Abraham’s favour with God, that it sufficed to inexhaustibly and vicariously cover all his descendants’ shortfalls as well (v. 9). For the religious elite, reinforced by their unwavering adherence to every letter of the Law. Meaning, no need to repent. No need to really turn from legalistic and hypocritical ways. And so already condemned (v. 10).

As we know to experience the peace of Christ can itself often seem as achievable as flying to the moon. Yet as with hope, joy, and love, it remains a virtue that whilst not yet present, we can aspire in the knowledge that whether today or tomorrow, we will cultivate and hold onto. Such as the allegorical text from Isaiah 11:1-10. One of those times when Isaiah takes a breather from castigating Israel’s rebellious elite and encourages those afflicted by the elite’s persistent failure. The poor, the meek, and the children. And those, like Isaiah himself, who had sought to at least try and live righteously. As Paul exhorts us, when we are called to live peaceably with each other, which in turn glorifies God the Father and Jesus.

It is not an easy thing to walk the talk. And then to do so calmly, and at peace. But in a world that is growing increasingly hostile to spiritual truth, the time is fast approaching for Christians to step up and challenge the ideologies and beliefs and even legislation that has so deceptively and speciously conflated and distorted works of the flesh with works of the Spirit. Thankfully, we have our Lord’s promise of the Holy Spirit. A Spirit of power, love, and self-control (2 Timothy 1:7). Who enables us to set our minds on things of the Spirit and live according to the Spirit. That is Jesus. And which is (ultimately to live in) peace (Romans 8:5, 6). Empowering us to humbly and penitently confess and be forgiven. Paradoxically trained via difficulty and hardship. To turn, and stay turned, irrespective of what sin, evil, or death (and stress) may throw at us. To claim, and praise God, for the strength to discern and speak God’s truth. Empowered, as Paul says, to enter into the peace of God, with the certain hope, that being baptised in Christ, we have eternity in Christ. Whether in the here and now. At the end times. Or at the Advent of our Lord.

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