

As we observe the Second Sunday of Advent, we draw a week closer to Christmas and light the candle of peace on our Advent Wreath. This peace, however, is not the kind found in isolation, tuning out the world, or the mere absence of feeling.

This active peace is rooted in the Christmas story. At Christmas, God undermines the notion that a better world is a far-off, future possibility—somewhere beyond this time and place. Instead, by coming down to earth and living among humanity, God instills in us a sense of possibility for the present moment. This taught us that God's work is not done elsewhere, but right here, right now. When Jesus was born and began his ministry, he didn't preach, "One day you shall love your neighbors." He said, "Love your neighbors. Right now. Love God. Right now. Love yourself. Right now."

The peace inherent in the Christmas story is not passive, but active. It is the deliberate act of turning *away* from fear and turning *toward* God. Fear is what manifests in our world as scarcity, greed, and the prioritization of a few's safety over the well-being of all.

Peace, on the other hand, is the result of rejecting those fears. It flows from the trust that God is actively transforming the world, leading us to the relationships and resources necessary for us to thrive. While peace is often described as a stillness or a temporary pause in the world's chaos, it is fundamentally an action: a shift away from chaos and toward God's love, moving from fear toward a Spirit that sustains and gives life.

The prophecy from Isaiah opens with the vivid image of a shoot sprouting from the stump of Jesse. To fully grasp this, we should first visualize a family tree. A family tree shows branches of descendants, with each new generation growing from the previous one, stretching both upward and outward. It records marriages, births, and deaths, but more importantly, it chronicles a family's legacy—stories emerging from earlier stories—a generational record of their influence on the world.

In the Bible, there was one family tree that was followed for generations and not only shaped the members of that family, but shaped the future of the Hebrew people. This family was believed to be the carriers of God's goodness and righteousness, the spiritual rulers who helped connect all other people to God and who interpreted the way God wanted them to live. This deeply important family begins with Abraham. Abraham began a legacy of over ten generations of leaders serving God and leading God's people, all the way to a man named Jesse, grandson of Ruth and Boaz.

The family's lineage shifted dramatically with Jesse's generation. Due to either a foreign empire's actions or an exile—scholarly details are uncertain—the trust previously placed in this family's leadership vanished. This created deep uncertainty about the future of the Hebrew people. Fear gripped them concerning their leadership and destiny, leaving the people feeling lost, as though wandering through a thick fog. This desperate state is what the prophet refers to as "the stump of Jesse": not a robust, forward-looking family tree with strong branches, but a stump, seemingly dead and cut off from its roots.

Isaiah offers an image of reassuring peace: a new shoot emerging from a stump, a growing branch symbolizing a family tree still full of life and a future yet to be determined—a message that God's work is ongoing.

The prophet assures his people that this lineage will endure, and the succeeding generation will possess wisdom, understanding, and an intimate knowledge of God's will. According to Isaiah, this next generation will rule with justice for everyone, particularly the poor, ensuring that wickedness is eradicated and righteousness prevails.

Isaiah then presents the well-known vision: a wolf and a lamb dwelling together, a leopard reclining beside a young goat. This imagery completely upends our understanding of typical relationships—predator and prey living in harmony, and a small child as their leader. When Isaiah offered this vision to a people consumed by fear for their future, it shifted their focus from anxiety back to trust in God. They were filled with a profound peace—

a peace born not from certainty about future events, but from the unwavering trust that God is actively working, weaving their destinies together toward a future defined by love and justice.

Out of the seemingly lifeless "stump of Jesse" emerges a shoot, a sign of renewed life and hope. This branch represents a lineage that leads to Jesse's son, David, who would become King David, the most celebrated and beloved ruler in Israelite history. This prophecy from Isaiah was preserved across generations as a powerful call to reject fear and embrace peace by trusting in God.

Centuries later, early Christians inherited this very scripture passage and gave it a new interpretation. They traced the family lineage from Jesse to David, all the way to Jesus, finding renewed peace in the understanding that God was continuously at work in the world to establish justice for everyone.

We are continually called to be a people of peace. This means turning away from fear and the mindset of scarcity, and instead, turning toward God with trust that love and justice are actively at work in our world.

To embody peace requires constant reorientation—a courageous movement against the overwhelming current of negativity, doubt, fear, and heartache. We must boldly assert, through God, a future for ourselves where thriving is attainable, hope is restored, love is experienced, and justice is victorious.

Peace is an active process. Therefore, the world needs peacemakers to demonstrate this vital work and remind us of our calling. Peacemakers are not timid or passive individuals who wait on the sidelines, hoping things resolve themselves. Instead, they are people who engage, guiding others toward our shared goal, and affirming that God is still active in the world.

John the Baptist was a peacemaker in his time. John the Baptist didn't attempt to comfort or soothe people; instead, he was known for shouting at

them. His message was meant to startle them—to shake them out of their complacency and away from their fears—and compel them toward a new life. John preached repentance, a concept that, in Hebrew, means "to turn." He loudly urged everyone to turn away from evil and embrace Love, emphasizing that God's time had arrived. His core demand was to turn away from anything that created separation from God and to prepare to live according to God's way. While John's words must have been alarming, those who truly listened responded by seeking peace: they turned toward faith and the life God offered.

Today we know a lot of peacemakers. We know people who remind us that God is still writing our story and that we are called to be participants in the unfolding of love and justice in our world.

We recognize peacemakers in the collective actions of people who share resources, feed their neighbors, and ensure everyone has what they need. Peacemakers call us to reject the notion that some people are more deserving than others, or that essential rights like clean water, fresh food, shelter, and safety are things one must earn.

This second week of Advent, the week focused on peace, calls us to change direction. I invite you to consider: Where in your life do you need reorientation? What single aspect of your time might you use differently? Is there an activity or practice—new or renewed—that you should adopt, or perhaps one you should let go of? Is there a relationship that needs tending?

In short, what part of your life is seeking peace? How can you turn away from what has been controlling that area and instead turn toward God? Allow the Holy Spirit—of love, justice, and reconciliation—to be your foundation. Reflect on how peacemaking itself might serve as the path to your personal reorientation.

Peacemaking is a universal calling, meant for all who choose to embrace God's love and reject fear. It requires us to abandon what divides us and

work toward unity. In this Advent season and always, it is the task of anyone willing to reorient their lives toward God's vision for the world.

Amen