



ELIZABETHTOWN
CHURCH OF THE BRETHREN

PRACTICING PEACE, SERVICE AND OPENNESS TO ALL

*Time to Wake Up!
to True Peace*

Romans 13.11–14; Isaiah 2:1–5

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This Advent we're going to wipe the sleep from our eyes and look for how God's light moves among us even in the dark times!

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it." John 1.5

ROMANS 13:11–14, THE MESSAGE

But make sure that you don't get so absorbed and exhausted in taking care of all your day-by-day obligations that you lose track of the time and doze off, oblivious to God. The night is about over, dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing! God is putting the finishing touches on the salvation work God began when we first believed. We can't afford to waste a minute, must not squander these precious daylight hours in frivolity and indulgence, in sleeping around and dissipation, in bickering and grabbing everything in sight. Get out of bed and get dressed! Don't loiter and linger, waiting until the very last minute. Dress yourselves in Christ, and be up and about!

INTRO TO THEME:

Do you ever feel like the world is more chaotic, confusing, and cantankerous than ever? A little bit darker. Leaders exercise coercive rather than cooperative power, stoking fears and rallying against, rather than banding together. Peace comes at the end of a sword. Hope is for us at the expense them (because it really is their fault after all). Joy is found in more things rather than life in God (and the market is up, what could be wrong?). Love is held rather than released... *Where's the good news!?* These can feel like dark times.

The narratives of Jesus' birth paint similarly dark pictures—a foreign power occupies the land. Despotism forces people to travel to be counted for the sake of tax collection. Indentured servitude, coerced religion, and economic injustice rule the day. Fear abounds ("afraid" is mentioned often in Advent scripture). *Where's the good news!?*

We can sometimes think that the present day is the darkest things have ever been. But then comes Advent. At the risk of being a Scrooge, **Advent—this season before Jesus'**

2 **birth**—is not a warm-up to get us in the Christmas spirit. I heard a radio DJ say the other day, “You may be feeling the Christmas blues, but I’m going to keep playing these cheery Christmas songs until you get in the Christmas mood!” That’s not Advent. Advent is a time to acknowledge that darkness is part of life. But that God is always breaking in, reaching out to us. Inviting us to see the light! Urging us to seek the true meaning of Christmas. To “Be up and awake to what God is doing!”

Advent is the annual alarm clock to wake up to what God is doing in the world, and we are going to do that over the next four weeks. Not a Christmas warm-up, but seeking the true spirit of Christmas through the four Advent themes of Peace, Hope, Joy and Love.

THEME OF THE DAY: TRUE PEACE

Isaiah 2:1–5

*There’s a day coming
when the mountain of God’s House
Will be The Mountain—
solid, towering over all mountains.
All nations will river toward it,
people from all over set out for it.
They’ll say, “Come,
let’s climb God’s Mountain,
go to the House of the God of Jacob.
He’ll show us the way he works
so we can live the way we’re made.”
Zion’s the source of the revelation.
God’s Message comes from Jerusalem.
He’ll settle things fairly between nations.
He’ll make things right between many peoples.
They’ll turn their swords into shovels,
their spears into hoes.
No more will nation fight nation;
they won’t play war anymore.
Come, family of Jacob,
let’s live in the light of God.*

FALSE PEACE

The Governor of Western Equatoria thought that true peace would come when South Sudan attained freedom, and that the only way to attain freedom was with military hardware.

Here's the thing: Eventually South Sudan did attain freedom in 2011 via a nation-wide voting referendum. However, the civil war continues in South Sudan as southern factions jockey for power and resources, and harbor resentments against one another for previous violent actions. There seems to be no end in sight to the deadly tit for tat reprisals.

And again we learn that peace at the end of the sword is never a true peace. It does not and cannot solve problems. That's why it's called the myth of redemptive violence. Violence might stop violence, for now, but it will never create a lasting peace. Violence cannot redeem us.

But when we remember the Christmas story, we see what can redeem us, we see TRUE PEACE.

PAX ROMANA OR PAX CHRISTI?

Think back to the Christmas story, we remember a tyrant ruler who forced a head count in the most inconvenient and demoralizing ways: *Travel to the place of your birth to be taxed*. For Mary and Joseph that meant a 70+ mile journey, loss of wages while traveling, not to mention the fear of traveling while quite pregnant.

It was the epitome of how the world uses power; control exercised through threat of violence, economic hardship, and psychological intimidation. To Rome this was peace. In fact, they called it that: *Pax Romana*. Of course to the people it was anything but peaceful; if this was peace, it was a dark and lifeless peace.

TRUE PEACE

But then in this darkness we see what God can do. We see true peace. God doesn't come in and crush Rome. We see a baby—the light of the world! The antidote to this dark and lifeless peace. The one who will grow to show us another way

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of living that offers true peace. Let's go back to our scripture.

*God will show us the way God works
so we can live the way we're made."*

God will settle things fairly between nations.

God will make things right between many peoples.

*They'll turn their swords into shovels,
their spears into hoes.*

*No more will nation fight nation;
they won't play war anymore.*

*Come, family of Jacob,
let's live in the light of God.*

Where is true peace found? Here are a few more images from Southern Sudan. This is young men in Yambio in 2011. Let's live in the light of God! They say that educating women is the best way to alleviate poverty, slow climate degradation, and to decrease violence. This is a picture from a girl's school that this congregation contributed to a few years ago. Let's live in the light of God!

When violence is viewed as the way to peace, Let's live in the light of God!

When the world tells us division is the way to solve problems. Let's live in the light of God!

When we feel drawn into hopelessness and want to throw in the towel. Let's live in the light of God!

When those moments arise in our life when we have the chance to make a difference in someone's life, Let's live in the light of God!

Come family of Jacob, brothers and sisters in Christ, Let's seek TRUE PEACE, let's live in the light of God.

BENEDICTION

True Hope: For next week. Title: True Hope; Found in God or in our own devices?

The good news lies in Light. The Light of the World represents true Peace. True Hope. True Joy. True Love. Advent reminds us that God is always moving towards us—AND...invites us to move towards God!

