

Year A, December 4, 2016  
2 Advent  
Christ Church, Mexia

I'm going to ask you to do something difficult – can you remember January 2000? Yes, I know it is difficult – let me tell you a few things I remember or googled. The “On This Day” website had only one significant event for that month: Gisbourne, NZ, population 32,754, was the first city in the world to welcome the new century. And we realized on the morning of the 1<sup>st</sup> wherever we were that Y2K didn't happen! That seemed to be our biggest, most recent worry prior to that day. Bill Clinton was President, but it was the beginning of an election year. I had a son in junior high school and two daughters, who because their ages, didn't make me feel old, like they do today. I lived in a different house with a smaller mortgage. I only had two jobs and traveled often, including internationally. My point is that it seemed to be a peaceful time without an undue amount of stress. Maybe it's my mind playing a trick on me, but I think not.

Fast forward two years to January 2002, approximately four months after the events of 9/11, all of which we witnessed/could have witnessed while they were happening after news of the first plane striking the tower became widespread knowledge. Suddenly, it was like Pearl Harbor again, only in New York and Washington, DC, and we were there as witnesses via the media. The feeling of security we had enjoyed for years, especially with the end of the Cold war and nuclear proliferation, was ripped from us in a matter of minutes and hours. We were surprised and stunned and angry, and we were drawn into conflicts in the Middle East that continue today. In the early part of this century we have been involved in the longest lasting wars of our history. And if that weren't enough, in 2008 we suffered one of the worst recessions in our history.

So it is no wonder that we truly yearn for peace on this second Sunday of Advent. A peace that we may not be able to visualize because of all that has happened, is happening, and the frustration and anxiety that has been produced. Let's face it, our world is different now, and we are struggling to cope, especially when we are reminded every time we go to the airport that bad things can happen. And the news reminds us that we are not secure in malls, schools or nightclubs, to name just a few locations. These are anxious times!

It is different than Pearl Harbor; that was one event carried out by the military of a nation state. We knew who they were and where they

were for the most part. Although our paranoia did cause us to imprison tens of thousands of innocent, loyal Americans of Japanese descent in this country. We could declare war, raise the personnel and material needed to conduct a war against them and ultimately to defeat them and put it behind us. But now we face a threat from people of many countries, including our own, who are radicalized through religion or ideology, who hold very little territory and who operate from the shadows to inflict pain and maintain the anxiety we feel when it happens. And traditional military solutions haven't solved the problem.

The gospel today presents a counter-cultural person in the form of John the Baptist, who screams at the Jewish leadership coming to be baptized, "You brood of vipers!" And who warns that those found unworthy, the chaff, will burn in the unquenchable fire. Hardly words to encourage thoughts of peace. Fortunately, as we gaze at the second candle in the Advent wreath, we are reminded of Isaiah's description of what future peace may be like – "They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

A very nice vision, but how are we to find the peace for which we long and need now? First, I am reminded of something that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote in his book, *The Gulag Archipelago*: "The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties... but right through every human heart." We have to accept then that peace starts with us. I recall a story that I read about a WWII experience. Having been hit repeatedly by flak and enemy fighters during a raid, the compass of a US B-17 bomber had been damaged and so the bomber kept flying deeper into Germany. A German pilot at an airfield they flew over was ordered into the air to shoot the B-17 down. But when he saw the plane he couldn't believe his eyes; he had never seen a plane in such bad shape. So he flew alongside the B-17 and saw the scared American pilot struggling to keep it going. Aware that the crew had no idea where they were going, the German motioned to the pilot to turn 180 degrees and guided/escorted them slightly over the North Sea on a course for England. The German pilot then saluted and flew back to his base, reporting that the plane had been shot down over the sea. That one person's compassion didn't end the war, but it did save the lives of the crew of that B-17, and in the midst of war there was a moment of peace.

One person can make a difference; you and I can make a difference. Somehow, we need to find a way to set aside the past. As Miroslav Volf said in a lecture at Camp Allen recently: If the past would stay in the past, forgotten, it would be nice. But it has a way of entering our present and influencing the way we envision our future. We need to let go of our fear and anxiety and our notions of the way things should be, finding freedom to work with things as they are. If we can believe that God is at work in the world and focus on the future as promised to us in Christ - if we can keep Jesus in our hearts, as difficult as that may be, then we can know peace. And, if we are at peace, then we can help to make peace in the world. It starts with us.

In the name of the one God, the Creator, the Word and the Spirit.

Amen.