

Today, the Downs Family lit the Peace candle. For many churches, the second Sunday of Advent is when we light the candle of peace. This is a time of coming together, of building a community of faith that is open to all.

So, what exactly is peace? Well, the world's definition of peace is absence of conflict. I don't know about you but knowing mankind, that is not going to happen anytime soon – especially with all the things we have seen as of late. So much anger out there.

But what does the peace of Christ mean to Christians? Philippians 4: 6-7 says, “⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus”.

That is a recurring theme – deep prayer, humbly and earnestly asking God for something, but remembering to thank God for our blessings. This does bring about a peace in our hearts and minds. Think of the words you heard in Zechariah's prophecy full of thanksgiving and praise but the history of this man's joy requires a little explanation. The Bible tells us Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were “righteous in the eyes of God, observing all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blamelessly”. The problem was Elizabeth was barren, which in those days was considered a curse or punishment for sin. I can't imagine how many times both Elizabeth and Zechariah had prayed fervently for a child but now they were old, and hope had passed. Zechariah served as a priest and one day, it was his turn to burn incense in the sanctuary. When he went in, while the congregation was outside praying, an angel appeared to him and said, “Do not be afraid”. Same phrase Mary heard when she saw an angel, but Mary trusted and believed the angel, sweet young girl that she was. Zechariah however is old, and when the angel tells him that Elizabeth will bear him a son, that will bring great joy to many, He doubts! The angel explains this child is to be named John and the child will be filled with the Holy Spirit and will turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God. He is not to drink wine or strong spirit and will be dedicated to God's service, but Zechariah is not buying it.

“How shall I know this? I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years”. Not the reaction the angel expected because he said, “I am

Gabriel, who stands before God. I was sent to speak to you and to announce to you this good news. But now you will be speechless and unable to talk until the day these things take place because you did not believe my words". And right there, Zechariah can no longer speak but when he comes out of the sanctuary, people could tell something had happened - he had seen a vision. After Zechariah goes home and Elizabeth becomes pregnant, she is elated. I want to stop for a second and just say if you are praying hard for something – something you really did not expect but really wanted and God sends an angel to tell you it is going to happen, give thanks, not doubt. Imagine a wife pregnant for 9 months with hormones raging and hubby cannot say a word, but he can hear!

Of course, Zechariah's speech returns and he is happy and filled with the Holy Spirit as he recites the beautiful canticle of prophecy and praise that Brian read ending in the encouraging words, "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." I feel like we Christians bring that light to others.

I remember President George W. Bush coining the phrase a "thousand points of light" and in *Thoughts from the Road Blog*, I read this after President Bush passed,

"Recently, the nation bid farewell to former President George H. W. Bush. As we have continued to reflect on his life and his legacy of service, it is obvious that he placed a high value on service, volunteers and nonprofit organizations.

When President Bush accepted the presidential nomination at the 1988 Republican National Convention, he spoke highly of America's volunteer organizations, calling them "a brilliant diversity spread like stars, like a thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky." He repeated the sentiment in his 1989 inaugural address. During his presidency, President Bush handed out Point of Light Awards six days each week to recognize volunteers, and in 1995 he helped create the Points of Light Foundation to promote non-governmental solutions to social issues."

Yes, we have a different kind of peace when we are right with God, and this allows us to shine our light on those who are in darkness – whether it is the darkness of addiction by supporting Teen Challenge, the darkness of

hunger by supporting Bourne Food Pantry and Backpack Ministry for children, the darkness of not having enough money to buy necessary items like those we support at Cape Winds Rest Home, the darkness of severe depression or illness that we support with the knitting and praying of our prayer shawls, the darkness of a third world country lacking resources supported by our Watoto ministry of three children in Uganda and the darkness of incarceration supported by our Prison Ministry. This does not even include the visitations that Pastor Joe and Christine do to bring light to those who are lonely. This is what our church does and now we will be taking angels off our Christmas tree so we can purchase gift cards for those moms and their children in shelters. We are being asked for gift cards due to Covid concerns but what is exciting to me is they are also asking that we purchase gingerbread house kits so there is a fun project for mom and kids to do.

I did something this week that all pastors hate doing: No, not the graveside service for Bobbie Rowell, someone who gave much to this church. No, worse than that – the stewardship letter! Ugh, the appeal to ask for your pledge of your treasure, your time and your talent. Ben gave me that idea and I like it because it is not just about money, it's about giving of yourself to your church. Pledges are not *I promise to give \$1,500, cross my heart and hope to die*. It's about saying, here is what I think I can give to support the works of our church in 2022. It is only to help us budget and know how much of a shortfall we will have. It's about knowing we have enough greeters, ushers, coffee hour hosts, helpers for fundraisers, and the one we have constantly asked for: a Sunday School teacher for the 10 year old and up kids.

I titled this sermon, *Can you Really Go Home Again?* Because I was originally going to talk about the good old days. It is not so much about going home, just going back in time. Time when families got together for big dinners on a Sunday, time when you watched uplifting or funny television shows together, shows like: Happy Days, Laugh In, the Andy Griffith show, That Girl, The Flying Nun, The Waltons, and I could go on. Those days when the biggest concern at Christmas was what I was going to get for Christmas because I had been good – really good. Well, except for that one Christmas. My baby sister, younger by 6 years, was the happy child who always had pink cheeks, curly hair, and made everyone laugh. One day she came to me crying with papers from school that demanded

my mother's signature as the grades were failing or near failing. She and I both knew she would be in BIG trouble and she and I both knew that I could write just like my mom. She promised to do better and stop being the class clown, so I signed *Frances E. Constant* perfectly. All went well until parent-teacher night shortly before Christmas. I can still remember Mom coming through the door with that look – one eyebrow raised that meant I was doomed! My mother found out my sister was failing and indignantly told the teacher it would have been nice had she been notified prior to parent-teacher night. The teacher, just as indignant replied, "what did you think when you signed all these papers? Isn't this your signature, Mrs. Constant?" My Mom said it *looked* like her signature, but it was not. She had not signed the papers, but she knew who did. Let's just say my mom was not impressed with my forgery skills as learned I would no longer be attending the Christmas party and the dance. If I am honest, there were some very difficult times I never wish to revisit.

Yes, sometimes the reason we really can't go back home is because our memories are selective and often that's a good thing. What about our kids and grandkids? What will they remember as the "good old days"? I asked Julia to talk to the Sunday School kids to find out what they liked about church. Apparently Cece likes Sunday School and the songs her mother sings, and Audrey likes all the coloring she gets to do while Miles likes the activities and the church bazaars. Liam loves thinking and learning about God and walls and walls down with Joshua and Katherine also likes learning about God and her Sunday School friends and loves her teacher, which is good since it's her grandmother! The thing that struck me most however was what they all liked: The beautiful stained-glass windows, their classmates, seeing all the nice people and coffee hour. Cookies may have something to do with that! The overriding theme is one of being safe, happy and peaceful. That will be what they remember when they are older. That is what this church and you, the loving congregation, give them. What do they give us? You only have to see those happy faces come upstairs with whatever project they have and see the smiles, hear the giggles to know our church is alive. We have another generation coming along.

That is why I could write the stewardship letter. So, we can continue showing our children there are good, generous, caring people in this world because we are people who have the Peace of Christ, we are the points of

light and someday, they will be the parents bringing their children here to learn about God. * "Living is giving. We live life best as we give our strengths, gifts, and competencies. We are called to serve, not survive. Our giving makes a difference in our families, our congregation, our community, and our faith". So please consider this as you complete your pledges.

*adapted from Kennon L. Callahan.