

Unwrapping Advent
"Peace – It's what I always wanted!"
December 6, 2020

Overarching theme: In 2020, FUMC will be a **GO** church!

Instructions:

When using this material as teacher, feel free to pick and choose the point you want to emphasize in the lesson. *The format of the curriculum is designed to have an abundance of information in which to refer as desired.*

Core Point:

The past is the past. There is nothing that can be done about it. The past can only be used to gain wisdom for the future. What can change is the future. When we, as God's people, are willing to follow God in our daily lives, God will make a good way in the future. The way may be bumpy at times and have curves, but the process will be filled with God's love and grace.

Luke:

The Gospel of Luke was written by an unknown Christian who, after reading other accounts of the life of Jesus and after careful study, decided to write another. The same person also wrote the Acts of the Apostles. Ancient tradition says the author of both books is "Luke, the dearly loved physician" (Col 4:14), who was with Paul during parts of his missionary work. Nothing in the Gospel of Luke confirms or refutes this tradition. The Gospel was probably composed between 70 and 100 CE, after the destruction of the Jerusalem temple but before the Roman government began regularly putting Christians to death.

Luke and Acts are both addressed to the "most honorable Theophilus" (Luke 1:3; see Acts 1:1). The name means "God's friend" and could have been an imaginary or ideal audience, a kind of godly reader Luke's author kept in mind as he wrote. But Theophilus was more likely a real person, perhaps a wealthy and influential convert – like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10); Cornelius (Acts 10); or Crispus (Act 18:8) – who served as Luke's patron, helping him distribute his book. Luke's Gospel presents Jesus as good news for Jews and Gentiles.

Luke seems to have had a copy of the Gospel of Mark, which he expands considerably by adding stories of Jesus' birth and childhood (Luke 1-2);
-adapted from the CEB study bible, pp 103 (NT)

Reflect on these Scriptures: Luke 1:67-79 NRSV

Then his father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke this prophecy:

68 "Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,

for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them.

69 He has raised up a mighty savior^[a] for us

in the house of his servant David,

70 as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,

71 that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us.

72 Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors,

and has remembered his holy covenant,

73 the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham,

to grant us ⁷⁴ that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, ⁷⁵ in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

76 And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;

for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,

77 to give knowledge of salvation to his people

by the forgiveness of their sins.

78 By the tender mercy of our God,

the dawn from on high will break upon^[b] us,

79 to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Commentary:

The haunting phrase. "to guide our feet into the way of peace," ends Zechariah's blessing upon John, his newborn son. This is the first of fourteen references to peace in the Gospel of Luke. The *Benedictus* links the promise of salvation and redemption inseparably to the achievement of peace. God's people cannot have redemption without peace, for each is necessary for the realization of the other.

Throughout the Gospel peace is closely associated with God's redemptive work and the salvation that comes to God's people. Angels announced Jesus' birth with the refrain "peace on earth" (see 2:14), and those who followed Jesus answered antiphonally, "Peace in heaven, /and glory in the highest heaven!" (19:38). Jesus brought peace to those who received him: Simeon (2:29), the woman who wept on Jesus' feet (7:50), and the woman with a hemorrhage (8:48). Through faith, each found peace.

Luke also explores the ways of peace. Disciples on mission announce peace and are received by sons and daughters of peace (10:5-6; Act 10:36). There are various kinds of peace. Peace that is achieved by strength is always vulnerable to the attack of one who is stronger (11:21-22). A king whose troops are outnumbered will, therefore, make peace with his enemy (14:32). Paradoxically, in a saying

regarding the sifting that revelation inevitably causes, Jesus says that he has not come to bring peace but division (12:51). Affirmation of the “way of peace” provokes hostility, often with terrible consequences. Jesus himself suffered violence from those to whom he offered peace, for Jerusalem did not know “the things that make for peace” (19:42). Bringing peace, he died, but (following the reading now favored by text critics) when Jesus appeared to the disciples his words of common greeting still echoed his ultimate purpose: “Peace be to you” (24:36). The *Benedictus* affirms that God’s purposes are being fulfilled in the delivering of God’s people from their oppressors. Their feet are being guided in the way of peace so that they may worship without fear. Where then are the sons and daughters of peace who can receive this work of faith?

– adapted from the New Interpreter’s Bible Commentary, Vol IX p. 60-61

This week – “Peace – It’s what I always wanted!”

Today we focus on unwrapping the gift of God’s peace. Biblical peace (“shalom”) is far more than the absence of war, it is the gift of God’s wholeness, completeness, and abundance. This peace is God’s desired gift for his creation, but too often we downward spiral into confusion, chaos and conflict, both intra-personally and interpersonally.

In the advent season we are reminded in passages like Luke 1:79 that Jesus came to “*guide our feet into the way of peace.*” The earliest Christians believed that Jesus came as the “*prince of peace*” (Isaiah 9:6), to offer God’s gift of peace. But like little children receiving a Christmas gift, we must unwrap this gift *expectantly* in order to be able to experience God’s peace inwardly and in our interpersonal (even international?) relationships.

To receive the kingdom like a child (Luke 18:17) is to let go of things that get in the way of peace (sin), and receive the belovedness and peace that can transform the way we see ourselves and others. This “way of peace” is likely what we have always wanted.

Questions to Ponder for accountability in the group:

As you think about this passage, how can you respond to this Scripture?

1. Share some of the way that you have seen humanity at its best during the past few months. Conversely, where have you seen humanity at it’s worse? When have you seen the best/worst in yourself?

2. Luke 1:79 speaks of One who will “guide our feet in the way of peace.” Jesus later called his followers to receive the Kingdom of God like a little child. What would being receptive like a little child look like in your life?
3. The sermon observed that we humans need to continually ‘unwrap’ the gift of God’s peace, letting go of the things that don’t make for peace (inferred by Luke 19:42). What is something you do that gets in the way of peace? How can you personally unwrap the God’s gift of peace on a regular basis?
4. When you experience interpersonal conflict, how do you tend to deal with it? How might seeing yourself and others through a “beloved child of God” lens help “*guide your feet into the path of peace?*”

Activity for the life of a disciple:

1. Remember to “unwrap peace” each day by reading the daily devotional from FUMC.
2. Ponder and pray on this Scripture this week: Luke 1:76-79 NRSV
⁷⁶ And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High;
for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways,
⁷⁷ to give knowledge of salvation to his people
by the forgiveness of their sins.
⁷⁸ By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon^[b] us,
⁷⁹ to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
to **guide our feet into the way of peace.**”
3. Chose one person that you have had conflict with in the past and pray daily that they would experience God’s peace.