

**Mary's Peace**  
(Luke 1)

12-24-23  
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It is Christmas Eve morning, and so we join with Mary this morning, as she anticipates the gift of a child that is coming her way tonight; a gift that will transform her life and ours, if we are prepared to receive it.

And the lighting of our fourth Advent candle this morning reminds us, that one of the things that will come to us as part of this gift is peace. An experience of peace both in and around us.

If there is anything we need in this anxious world we live in today, it is peace. We need a peace that keeps us calm and centered, even in the midst of the hectic goings on around us; a peace that will preserve us in the face of rapid and unsettling change. We need the kind of peace that comes from having a place where we can feel safe and have no fear of being overwhelmed; the kind of peace that comes from living within an unbreachable fortress;

**References to Blood Relationships**

There is something I loath to introduce at a time of year such as this, when only the best of sentiments ought to be cultivated. But I feel that it is my obligation as a minister in the Christian faith to speak to an unsettling recent event that is a deliberate and direct attack on the very spirit of Christmas.

I am referring to the now repeated claims of a political figure that our nation's blood is being "poisoned" by immigrants. This is the most dangerous and evil myth ever created. And it requires immediate condemnation. It is a myth that has caused the murder of countless millions. It is a myth rooted in prejudice and that has no scientific basis in fact.

One fact alone should expose this lie for what it is. If I were to need a blood transfusion, I would be a fool to assume that it should come from someone who looks and talks and acts just like I do. And the same goes for you. Because if that person has a different blood type, you or I would die immediately.

On the other hand, if I were to get a transfusion from someone who looks completely different from myself, and who comes from half way around the world, who doesn't speak my language or even share my worldview, but who does have my blood type, I will have received the gift of a longer life.

This talk of the "poisoning of our blood" has always been used to make other people seem incompatible and less human, and it is a way of speaking that goes against the heart of the Gospels and the ultimate commandment of God, "to love your neighbor as yourself." And as Jesus made clear in the sermon on the Mount, this means everyone.

Jesus was very specific in rejecting the idea that we should base our relationships on anything like a "blood" connection. At one point, he even turned away his own

mother in order to emphasize that it is not “blood”, but our commitment to God’s love that we should understand as what truly connects us.

### **Where our Peace Comes From**

This morning the promise of the Gospels to those who believe is peace; that we shall receive the gift of peace in the birth of Jesus; a “peace that passes all understanding.” That peace will become ours, not by excluding people who are different, but as the result of entering into what Luther called a “Mighty Fortress.”

It is a fortress with unbreachable walls to protect us from the dangers in this world. And one reason the peace we receive is beyond our understanding, is because the walls of the Mighty Fortress that will protect us and provide us with our security and our sense of peace, is not one that is constructed of brick and mortar.

The “Mighty Fortress” that is given to us by God to live in is none other than the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit, by its presence, will provide us with an inner peace that does not depend on external walls. It depends upon the power of God’s love to defend us in every situation. When we dwell in the Holy Spirit, the forces of sin and death may assail us, but they cannot destroy us. Yes, the belief in this invisible protection makes no sense to those who have not been touched by the Holy Spirit. But it a sure defense and source of peace to those who have.

## Inner Fortresses and Outward Walls

That God gives us a “Spiritual Fortress” within which to dwell is a very important thing for us to experience and recognize today, because of the tremendous temptation we have to protect ourselves by building walls of brick and mortar to protect ourselves.

I will say that I am not opposed to creating barriers of some kind to provide security where it may be necessary and feasible. We need, for example, to have a secure and stable border. Immigration needs to be an orderly and well regulated process, that is both compassionate and sensible. That is something that most of us agree on.

But I also think that it is important for us to be clear that Jesus himself rejected the idea that either his security or ours, should be based on building walls and boundaries of brick and mortar. For him the fortress provided by the presence of the Holy Spirit in his life was his only source of peace and security, and with the confidence this brought him, he basically ignored the warnings and the barriers, that had been set up to keep people separated in the interests of safety.

Jesus’s love was for all people. He sat and ate with tax collectors and sinners. He touched people with skin diseases and various threatening disorders. He crossed borders into enemy territories and was quick to identify the good in foreigners as in the case of the Good Samaritan. And he refused to deny blessing to anyone who

asked for it, regardless of who they were or where they came from. He identified with people, not on the basis of “blood” but on what is in a person’s heart.

On one level, building walls can provide us with good physical protection; but on another level, I think that they separate us in a way that makes us more ignorant of what lies beyond and therefore more paranoid. Because when we don’t actually spend time with people who are outside our walls, we become more willing to form opinions based on hearsay rather than on the evidence our own eyes can provide. We begin to fantasize about them and to project our fears onto them.

I’m not saying that we should do away with walls altogether. Clearly, there are people in this world who cannot be allowed to roam freely. But I am saying that, the example of Jesus provides us with a basic direction in which to move toward a world that is truly at peace. Jesus did this by forming relationships based on the love of God and through freedom of movement, rejecting the walls that were meant to prevent him from forming ever wider circles of relationship.

### **Fear of Losing our Culture**

Related to all of this, I would like to address a particular fear that goes along with the surge in numbers of people seeking to enter this country. The fear is that we are experiencing a tidal wave that will wash away the common culture that holds us together as a nation. And for those of us who have grown up with the Christian

faith, the fear is that our Christian values will be washed away by the tide of newcomers.

As someone who regularly visits Mexico and associates with Mexican people, I think I'm fairly well qualified to comment on these fears. There are certainly bad people in Mexico, who should not be allowed into our country. But I'm not worried about the quality of the vast majority of people who want to enter our country. They are no better or worse than we would be in their circumstances.

For one thing, a larger percentage of people South of the border go to church and take their faith seriously than do those of us who live north of the border. Ours is a far less Christian country in that respect. I also find the people I have met be respectful and friendly and very hard working. As far as I can see, focusing the blame for the collapse of our social fabric on immigrants has more to do with shifting blame away from where a lot of it belongs, with appetites and greed that originate in this country.

And so, coming back to the celebration of Christmas, our solution to this whole dilemma lies in birth we will celebrate tonight, because the light of the new born Christ, which we will hold in our hands and that we will take with us as we go out into the night, as fragile and delicate as it seems, is still and always will be the most powerful force in the world. It is a better wall for shutting out evil, than any physical wall we could build. It is, in the end, our one true fortress. No matter what happens, no matter how confusing our world becomes, we belong to the

Prince of Peace, and as long as we keep nursing the flame of his love in our hearts, that peace that cannot be taken away from us by a changing culture. That flame is the foundation of all civilization. It is the foundation of Mary's courage and optimism for the future. And it is the foundation of our peace.





