

Sermon 12-24-18  
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Trinity Lutheran Church  
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### **Peace On Earth?**

Peace on earth. Good will toward men. The other day someone confronted me with one of their pet peeves about God. Why doesn't He just show Himself and come down and stop all the wars. Then I would believe in Him.

But that's not the way God does things. First, who starts and fights wars? We do. Therefore, who should stop wars? Why, the people who start them and fight them. November 11<sup>th</sup> was the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the armistice that stopped four horrible years of trench warfare in Europe known as World War I. That war never should have begun. Once it did, the people who started it should have brought it to a swift conclusion, but could not and would not until a clear winner had emerged from the death and destruction.

As far as God is concerned, He is content to let us go at our wars until we're sick of them or someone wins. Therefore, it's our responsibility to stop the wars we start, not God's.

But let's think for a minute. If God were to stop all wars, how would He do it? One way would be to use His almighty power to fry all the people who have war in their hearts. Right?

Well, there are several problems with that. First, the people who rage against God for not stopping wars sit in judgment against the people who start and fight wars. Correct? At the same time they believe they are innocent of war in their own hearts. But is that really so? Not in God's sight. In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus taught that anger in the heart is really murder in the heart, and will be judged accordingly. Therefore, how many of us are so innocent of war in our own hearts that we can sit in judgment over those who make war? How innocent of war in our own hearts are we that we can demand God judge those who make war? We'll all be judged in the process. We'll be among the fried.

Second, if God were to eliminate the present generation of warriors wouldn't another generation arise to take their place? So that wouldn't really do the job.

But there's the final solution. In order to destroy war, God would have to make a war against humanity and every last human. Besides pleasing a few people in the green party who think humans are the death of the planet, there's something definitely wrong with that.

No doubt, the best way to stop all wars would be for God to change all human beings into total saints. That would do it. Right? So, are you prepared to live without war in your heart? Are you prepared to live pure and holy? Pure and holy? Well, not me, man. I like my sins here and there. But, tell me. How else is God supposed to stop all wars without changing the human heart – meaning not just everyone else's heart, but your heart?

On the night of Jesus' birth, the angelic host sang, "Peace on earth, good will toward men." What does that mean if there is no change in the human heart – if there is no change in your heart and mine?

You can tell God is quite serious about those words. For one, He sent the holy angels to sing them. That definitely means something. But more importantly He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus, in a mortal human body to make peace on earth. And Jesus did precisely that. He made peace between us and God.

Now, in order for there to be real peace between our Creator and ourselves, we've got to be as good as God is. For, there is not even the slightest hint of evil in our Creator God. Therefore, in order for there to be real peace in this universe, there can be no evil in you or I. We must be as good as our Creator is – perfectly good. Jesus was sent to make that possible.

To do so, the Son of God had to take on all the evil of this world. He had to endure our rebellion. He had to endure all our hostility and rage toward our Creator. We all desire to kill God and live in our own private universe where we set the rules. Jesus, the Son of God, had to take on our rebellion, hostility, rage and murder against God in order to destroy it.

Think there's no rage against God in your heart? Think again. Every time you disobey one of His commandments – every time you fail to love God with everything in you, every time you exempt yourself from loving your neighbor as yourself – you inwardly rage against God, the giver of those commandments.

And our society rages. All the fuss about human sexuality and what it means is really rage against the one who made us biologically male and female and established the monogamous marriage of one man and one woman as His perfect will for humanity.

When Jesus took on our outrage and rage against our Creator God, He did so alone, forsaken, horribly bloodied and tortured – hung on one of the most hideous execution devices ever invented, a cross. God on a cross. The 19<sup>th</sup> century philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche proclaimed, "God is dead and we have killed him." Nietzsche meant this in a different way, but he was more correct than he realized. We crucified God 2,000 years ago. We 21<sup>st</sup> century people are in the midst of expelling God from our societies, our countries and our lives. Mary and Joseph had to flee to Egypt with the baby Jesus because King Herod sought to kill the true King of the Jews and King of the universe.

God on a cross – St. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 1:23, "... we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." It was then. So it is now. But if we read the complete teaching it says, 1 Corinthians 1:23-25, "23... we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, 24 but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. 25 For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

The child whose birth we celebrate this night was born to endure our rage. But specifically He was born to end it – not with judgment and wrath, but with something the gospel calls salvation. Simply put, salvation is the power of God and the wisdom of God – the power and wisdom of God to heal our rage and make us as good as God is.

Jesus is the salvation of God because He was obedient to God – even unto death on a cross. And for this God rewarded Him with resurrection in the first ever immortal human body. God also rewarded Jesus with the gift of new birth and eventual resurrection in immortal human bodies for all who put their faith in Jesus. This gift is made possible by two things Jesus won for us – the forgiveness of our sins and His imputed goodness. This is the miracle of salvation. On account of faith in Jesus and what He did, God counts us rebels to be forgiven of our sin and therefore as perfectly good as He is. This is the incredible miracle of salvation that Jesus was born for. We have peace with God through the forgiveness of our sins. God can come to us in perfect goodness, we can go to Him in perfect goodness. That’s what we were created for. That’s how it will be for believers in Jesus at the resurrection of the dead. And by faith in the resurrected babe of Bethlehem, it’s even true for us in these who yet live in these sinful, mortal bodies.

Now, when God calls to you through His Word you can do one of two things. You can run from Him. But if you run, you’re running away from pure goodness – God who is everything good. That means you’re running toward pure evil. And that means you’re running straight toward the ultimate place of rebellion – hell.

You can run. Or you can stand still and let the power of God overtake you and the love of God envelope you. The power of God comes with true repentance for sin and God’s forgiveness of our sin. It brings a powerful change of heart and life orientation. For God stills our rage, makes us content to get off His big throne and cease defining good and evil for ourselves. Salvation makes us content to let God be God and do the defining for us in His Word to us, so that we can call good what our Creator calls good, and call evil what He calls evil. God’s power does that and more.

But, even when we love what God loves, we find ourselves unable to do it. The sinful nature is more powerful than our good intentions. That’s why gym membership peaks just after New Year and then peters out. The sinful nature is more powerful even than God’s commandments.

But Jesus Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. He is more powerful than the sinful nature. Therefore, He fills us with His Holy Spirit so that God’s Kingdom can come to us and His will be done by us even in our incredible weakness. And even when we miserably fail to do the good appointed for us, Lord Holy Spirit leads the believer in Jesus into repentance and the forgiveness of sins.

Through this wonderful gift of repentance and forgiveness our lives are justified before God, the judge of all the earth. We have genuine peace with our Creator and His good will. There is no greater gift anyone could ask for. It comes through the miracle child of Christmas.

Therefore, when God calls, don’t run. Stand still and let the grace of God envelope and permeate you. God is faithful and just. His Spirit and His Word will lead you in faith to Jesus. Jesus will justify your life by His blood. For through His blood Jesus has reconciled to God all people and all things in heaven and on earth.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Colossians 1:19-20, “For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Jesus], 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.”

In spite of earth's warring, this is real peace – peace with God. Peace on earth. Good will toward men. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the NIV.