

Alright so this never, ever happens, but there is a legend that tells of a story of a pastor that writes their sermon on Saturday but the bulletin goes to print on Friday and so if anything were to happen to change in the sermon writing process, well, that would cause a foreseeable problem in that bulletin. Good news this is just a legend and would never actually happen, but its kind of a coincidence because instead of reading from the infancy gospel of Thomas I'm going to read from Luke 1: 67-79. Because as I writing the sermon I was looking for some context and it led me back to Zechariah's prophecies <<read scripture>> Honestly though, I did write 2 sermons before this one but I honestly hated them both. So, here we are.

You know before we talk about peace we gotta talk about stress. Anyone that was here Christmas Eve for hte 5pm service knows what stress looks like. Merry Christmas Pastor Nick as Pastor Nick was running 5 million miles an hour trying to get some last second thing ready that he didn't account for. Then you get up to the pulpit to preach a message you hope will touch the hearts of those gathered to only see a crowd of people before you and you know all about stress. I made Ross run the AV equipment off no training on the biggest night of the year, the dude hasn't texted me back since. Rob almost took my head off over the sound board not being dialed in right and we got some feedback. I mean Christmas Eve is stressful business. But we aren't out of that season yet. We are still doing last second travels, might be hosting parties for New Years Eve. We are asked to celebrate the season of the prince of peace but it feels a lot more like the season of stress if you all know what I mean.

Let's play a little game to start us off, I like games. Close your eyes and think of the thing in this season that is causing you the most stress. (wait) and you better not be thinking of me. (haha) alright, got em? Now open your eyes. Lemme show you a little trick that seminary has taught me in my preparation to be a pastor. I can read your minds. I bet that I can narrow down your stress into 4 categories, a place, a pace, a problem, or a person. Or maybe people. Peoples. All of em, every last one of them, just human beings. So it's either a place you're traveling to or your coming back. The pace of life seems to be another source of stress, my Christmas Eve sermon was all about that. I ask people all the time, how ya doing? (grumble) I'm busy. Busy, busy, busy. I'm busier than a one armed wallpaper hanger, busier than 3 legged cat trying to cover up its poop on ice, running around like a chicken with my head cut off. So violent. All I asked was how're you doing? (haha.) Sometime it comes down to a problem in your life that is persistent and sometimes it's one you are pushing through right now. Some of you are having a hard time sitting through church today because of a pain that you are pushing through in your body or a person that is in pain and you can't do anything to comfort them. People, the last category, is really the whole thing.

I think it's important to talk about the path of peace to talk about the source of stress because whatever you determine the source of your stress will determine where you seek your peace. The Christmas story and the childhood story of Jesus today challenges us in our expectation of peace and how we label and relate to that source of peace. Jewish people had a very particular expectation of the kind of peace that the Messiah would

bring . Zechariah talks very specially about the kind of peace that the messiah would bring. It features such expectations as found in verse 74. This messiah would rescue us from our enemies. Notice the word from. That God would deliver them FROM their circumstances, from their oppression, from them being marginalized, from their poverty, from their despair, from their darkness. It was surprising then to see the shift that Zechariah than made in verse 79. He says that the one to come will shine on those living IN darkness and IN the shadow of death.

So it represents a shift in perspective that God does not always rescue me from but sometimes visits me IN my trouble. For so many years I have thought that thief of my peace was other people, certain places, the schedule of my life which is kinda funny because I'm the one that said yes to all those things but now I'm asking God to take away all of those things I have committed too. I have tried more recently to arrange my life to avoid those types of stressful events, stressful people and if everyone would just act the way I want to them to act this holiday season.

What I realize the more I sit with this prophecy of peace and this story of stress is that it reminds me of Isaiah 9:6, the scripture the Crawfords so wonderfully read on CHristmas Eve at 5. It says that he will be wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and the prince..of peace. Notice the prophet didn't call him the prince of convenience, the prince of ease, or the prince of comfort, or the prince of my preferences. Because a lot of times when I hear God promise me peace what I hear in translation is that God is promising me convenience, or God is promising me ease, or God is promising me my preferences will be had but it is impossible to experience

peace when you are envisioning what that peace is. What I'm coming to realize in these scripture passages and in my daily living as God's child is that it's not other people, it's not the place, it's not the pace, and it's not the problem. The problem is not the problem. Jesus was the person that stressed Mary, Jerusalem was the place that stressed Mary, losing Jesus was the problem and the fast pace of traveling 60 miles in 5 days was not the stress. The stress was her expectation of who Jesus was to be, that Jesus was to be her son, not God's son, but when she accepted the conditions otherwise it was then that she was pleased in all things.

Here's the whole message, the antithesis to your peace is not other people, it is not other places, it is not how fast life is going, it's not how things are going, it is your insistence on the expectation of peace to look one way whereas Jesus said it "must" look like something else. When heaven came down and appeared to humanity he didn't look like a deliverer, he came down looking like a dependent. When the prince of peace came down he didn't come dressed in power he came dressed in pampers. Why? Because God wanted you to know that God is going to bring you peace but not like you expected God to do it. It's not going to look like you pictured it, it's not always going to fit your preferences, it's not always going to live up to your specifications so if I'm going to live at peace.....I have to give up my expectations of where to find Jesus.

The path to peace is a strange path that God would send his Son as a Child through an unlikely and hesitant couple. If God wanted to come down to set things right he should have come as a warrior, not as a weakling. The gospels of John and Mark skip past this infancy and childhood stage

right to 30 year old Jesus. Why did Matthew and Luke, and even Thomas include these childhood stories? To show us that as Jesus made the shift from Son of Mary to Son of God we too are called to allow our own relationship with Jesus to grow to new, and sometimes uncomfortable places. The path to peace is a strange one. It would lead Jesus to Gethsemane where he, like us, would pray for God to remove the circumstances from his life that have ruined his peace. The path to peace for us would lead Jesus through the kindren valley. The path to peace for us would lead Jesus back to the very temple court he was learning in at 12 where he declared he “must” be but the next time he is there is tried with the death penalty. He mother present for it both times, and both times stressed and anxious and heartbroken. The path to peace leads Jesus to a hill on Calvary where he died at the hands of sinful men. It’s a strange path to peace we have to admit. That he would come in weakness and die in weakness in order to become our strength and redeemer. The path to peace is a strange thing. Whatever you identify the source of your stress is the path you will take to lead you to peace.

What did Mary say to Jesus when she found him? “Why have you brought such anxiousness to your father and I?” In the presence of God, Mary did not feel faith, it was anxiousness! See we think that presence of God will always make us feel better, and comfortable, but the first thing she felt upon seeing him felt was stress. Now eventually Mary did feel peace, but she found it through worry. I know some of you are worried about the state of our church. The language of a financial deficit, this idea of being an unhealthy church, the inevitable and uncomfortable changes we are going

to need to make, the change in staffing this past year with losing Bob, Nicole and now Connie.

As I was saying my goodbyes to Connie on Friday she said to me “I have not been more excited about where the church is going in all my six years than I am now. I have been praying to God every single morning and every single night, and God has told me that the right person for this time period is here and ready for my role. God’s got this.” Connie Hasman is a beautiful soul of God who constantly challenged all of the staff to be in prayer more often, to listen to God more often, and to get out of our comfort zones. I can think of no better way as a church we can honor her than by finding peace through the anxiousness we feel now about the future, by trusting in God where God needs to be, and not where we want God to be. When I was the anxious Mary begging Connie to stay, she was the confident Jesus who said that she is doing God’s will. God’s will is not always easy, just ask Mary. In some cases, it’s even heartbreaking, but to build God’s kingdom we must deny our own desires and preferences. In the process of the sword being turned into a ploughshare we do end up losing a whole lot of swords.

That video that played between our two scripture verses, the one about What If? That’s a story of the poet saying how he is so caught up in wondering about the what if questions of God that he misses the mission of God around him. That when these questions about God are confirmed then he can fully believe and find peace. But the mission of God is not somewhere to get to. It’s a path we already on. The inevitable questions of what if that consumed Mary as she desperately searched for Jesus robbed

her of her peace. Do not let what if's win the day today. The story of Jesus in the temple is a story of a boy accepting his role as savior, our story as a church is to accept our role as a world changer even if it means difficult conversations, our role as an individual is to follow God's will even through trial and triumph alike. If we can commit to praying day and night like Connie did for this church, I truly believe that 2019 will not only be an exciting year for us as a church, but a year in which we take even just a few further steps on the path to peace. AMEN.