**December 6, 2020 2 Peter 3 8–15**

***Peace***

**Scripture:** 2 Peter 3:8-15 NRSV

*(8)But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. (9)The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (10)But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. (11)Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, (12)waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? (13)But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. (14)Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; (15)and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him…*

**Notes:**

1. How are we supposed to live, while we ***wait***?
   1. Live in ***peace***, God hasn’t forgotten His promise,
   2. God is patient with ***humanity***.
   3. Time to God is different, God sees the bigger ***picture***,
2. The images of fire have to do with being ***refined***.
   1. Judgment is about ***purification*** and **redemption**.
   2. The kingdom of God is not yet fully ***realized***.
   3. We must live as people always ready, in ***expectation***.
   4. Jesus is waiting for the time to establish His ***kingdom***.
3. Live as people ***waiting*** for Christ’s return.
   1. Living at ***peace*** is an important idea for us today.
   2. The message of Christmas declares ***peace*** on earth.
   3. Christ’s return will make all things ***right*** and ***whole***.
4. Work toward living ***blameless*** lives.
   1. Righteousness is part of ***peace***.
   2. Loving God and loving others are at the heart of ***peace***.
5. We look ahead in ***hope*** to Christ’s return.
   1. It will look like ***patience***.
   2. It looks like ***holiness***.
   3. It looks like ***peace***.
6. Christ is going to ***return***. It’s a promise.
   1. The people of God are ***called*** to live this way of being.
   2. ***Live*** with an eye toward the kingdom yet to come, as though that kingdom is fully here now.

**Script:**

During advent we look to the future, and the promise of the coming Christ. So many times, I look to that time in anticipation; anticipation of the relief we will find when the Lord comes again, relief from the struggles of this world, relief from the temptations we all deal with, relief from the pains we feel, both physically and mentally, relief from the day to day difficulties we all encounter. We look with anticipation to the hope of seeing our Lord and savior, in person. We look with anticipation of seeing our loved ones again. We look with anticipation of the promises we’ve been told about when we get to heaven.

But there is more to that coming day than joy and happiness. We must remember when that day comes, there will be judgment; there will be those amongst us, who will not see the promises of heaven; there will be those who thought they should get there but are rejected. So, we must live life in anticipation of that day. Living life, striving to be as perfect as possible; Living life in a way that we can be assured of just where we will actually spend eternity. We have a lot of work to do and nobody is really sure how much time we have to get it done. That brings us to our passage for today, 2 Peter 3:8-15.

If I were to begin reading it many of you would recognize it. It talks about time in God’s realm, and the second coming happening really quick. And, this may seem like an unusual passage for the week of Advent devoted to peace. It is not a warm, glowing Christmas text, it is not a Gospel image of shepherds watching over sheep, or even Jesus’s Sermon on the Mount. Instead we get an image of when the Lord arrives; like a thief, in the blink of an eye. We get images that may bring fear, not joy, and certainly not peace. Join me in the sharing of our sermon passage for today

(8)But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day. (9)The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. (10)But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, and the elements will be dissolved with fire, and the earth and everything that is done on it will be disclosed. (11)Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, (12)waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? (13)But, in accordance with his promise, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. (14)Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish; (15)and regard the patience of our Lord as salvation. So also, our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him… 2 Peter 3:8-15 NRSV

We can sometimes get so caught up with our expectations; caught up in the glow of the season and the warm fuzzies, that we forget, while we are celebrating Christ coming to earth as a baby in Bethlehem, we are also looking ahead to Christ’s eventual return. We are living in the time in-between, looking back at the kingdom that came with the arrival of Christ, and looking forward to the kingdom that is still yet to come.

The early Christian believers and recipients of this letter are in the time in-between too, but for them, it is much more surprising. They expected Christ’s return to come more quickly. They expected his return to be during their lifetime. In fact, in this passage today, many aren’t sure why it hasn’t happened yet, and in their confusion, they begin to question what is causing the delay. Is it their fault? Did we do something wrong? Is there something we are supposed to be doing that we overlooked? And if it is not our fault, then how are we supposed to live? What are they supposed to do while they wait?

Peter gives them an answer to these questions: live in peace. While this text is often regarded with fear, it is not meant to be read that way. This is a text of promise and hope. The people are beginning to be concerned about whether Christ is going to return at all. The slowness of God is not because God has forgotten them; God hasn’t forgotten His promise, and it is not because the promise of Christ’s return isn’t trustworthy. Instead, it is because God is patient with humanity as God waits for all of humanity to turn toward Him in repentance. To change their ways; to draw closer to him; and to live according to the instructions found in scripture.

The note that time to God is different is an important one. It reminds us that, though our toils seem endless, day in and day out we find struggles. But God sees the bigger picture, and he knows what it is going to take to get some peoples attention.

The images of fire often make us think of judgment, but in this context it has more to do with being refined. Refiners of fire are mentioned in other scriptures as well, they point to and indicate a purifying process: just as precious metals must be refined, many times with fire, in order to be purified, so must creation be subjected to a perfecting and purifying process. Just as chaff, which is bad, is burned while the wheat, which is good, remains, so too shall the world be. This is a hopeful word, hopeful that the painful and sinful places of the world will be removed, and hopeful that what is good remains. In Verse 10 many mistakenly interpret this as the destruction of the world, since the NIV even uses the word “destroyed,” which may not be the best translation. The point of this verse is actually about a great disclosure. There will be a judgment, and the hidden will be revealed: this is about purification and redemption, not destruction.

The heart of this text is focusing on the already/not-yet kingdom of God. Christ brought the kingdom of God to earth through His incarnation. On the day that Christ was born, the day of the Lord was realized in many ways: the blind saw, freedom was declared for the captive, the lame walked, lepers were healed, justice, peace, hope, and love were revealed to the people. Still, the kingdom of God is not yet fully realized until Christ returns again; while His birth was the beginning of the coming of the kingdom, it is not complete yet: there is still sin and disorder in our world, look around, we still see many in need of healing from disease, we still see high rates of slavery, human trafficking, and wrongful imprisonment globally, we still see acts of injustice, war, and hatred. As Advent people, we live in this great in-between time, celebrating the birth of Christ while awaiting his final return. We do not know the time of Christ’s return, so we must live as people who are always ready, living as people who are always in expectation.

We see a great example of the already/not-yet kingdom in the story of Stephen in Acts chapters 6 and 7. When Stephen is being stoned, he declares that he sees heaven open up and standing there at the right hand of God the Father, he sees Jesus standing. This moment clearly illustrates the situation we find in the kingdom of God. It is revealed in front of them even while they wait, yet the people refuse to look at this vision of the kingdom of God, and Stephen is still stoned. Jesus stands there waiting for the time that he should enter in and return to establish God’s kingdom. In response to the people’s refusal, Stephen prays a prayer of forgiveness for them. I tend to think that this only angers those who are stoning Stephen. But many theologians and biblical scholars think this moment plants a seed; a seed that the Lord will later harvest in Paul’s conversion. Paul’s heart is exposed to the Lord here, and begins to turn toward Christ.

Peter instructs the early church on how to live as people waiting for Christ’s return. While Peter doesn’t go into great detail, he does mention living at peace, which is an important idea for us today. We know that Jesus is the Prince of Peace. There is an overarching message throughout Scripture about God’s desire to bring peace (shalom), wholeness, and completeness to God’s people and, ultimately, the world. The message of Christmas declares peace on earth. Jesus also preached peace during his time on earth. In the Sermon on the Mount he calls the peace makers blessed. If the message of the first coming is peace, then so is the message of the second coming: we know that Christ’s return will make all things right and whole. The message for those living in the kingdom of God now, in the in-between, is also a message of peace.

This declaration Peter makes about peace is joined with the idea of being blameless or having purity, lining up with holiness. If holiness has victory over sin and death, then it is possible to live a blameless life. Peter is saying something about the response of the people of God: the people of God are to work toward living blameless lives, which will lead to peace. Righteousness, also known as justice, or doing the right things for the right reasons, is part of peace. Loving God and loving others is at the heart of living in peace..

This is not a message about passivity, as peace can sometimes be mistaken for, but rather is a lesson about patience. If God is patient with God’s people, then we are also called to be patient and to long with God for the redemption of humanity. There is an active element to peace: “make every effort” indicates that it is something to work toward, even if we may not always accomplish it perfectly.

As people who still await the return of Christ, we are to live as kingdom people now. We look ahead in hope to Christ’s return, but we do not wait passively. We partner with the work of the Holy Spirit to live as citizens of the kingdom of God now. This could look like Stephen: being persecuted for standing in ways that God calls us to, and/or speaking words of radical forgiveness.

It will look like patience toward others, with the patience of God in our desire that all of God’s beloved learn to know they are loved, and desiring none to perish. It looks like holiness: learning to align our entire lives with the Holy Spirit, seeking goodness in our homes, seeking goodness in our neighborhoods, seeking goodness in our cities, and seeking goodness in our world. It looks like peace: finding contentment and wholeness in our own lives, in our homes, and in our communities. In our lives: our holistic selves brought before the Lord, physical health, mental health, spiritual health. In our homes: breaking cycles of violence and abuse, helping our children, nieces, nephews, and others to see and know their belovedness. In our communities: asking “what is best for my neighbor?” and finding ways that God is at work, and joining that work by creating systems that break cycles of poverty, caring for creation, feeding the hungry, advocating for the “widow and orphan” or anyone who doesn’t have a voice, and loving the “unlovable.”

Christ is going to return. It’s a promise. We don’t know when, but we know it will happen. But we are to live as citizens of the coming kingdom of God now. We aren’t called to passively wait for his return, but to actively live as though the kingdom has already been fulfilled; by living holy and peaceful lives in this world. December is a natural time of year to do that.

During this time of year, people are searching. They tend to want to find ways to share out of their wealth when the season is right, but the people of God are called to live this way every day, not just during the Holiday season, not just when the economy is doing well. This calling is not about a season or time of year when things “feel” right, it is about a way of being. This is the way we are called to live; with an eye toward the kingdom yet to come in its fullness. We are to live as though that kingdom is fully here now, embracing others and loving well so that, when Christ returns, he might find us blameless and living at peace.