

## ADVENT, SECOND SUNDAY DECEMBER 6, 2020

Light a Candle for Peace today, the Second Sunday of Advent. And say a prayer for peace: first, acknowledge the condition of our world.

‘When I look at our world today, I still see wars and rumours of wars. I see countries internally divided by differences of opinions, politics, values. Families are isolated and set apart by serious illness, and by differences of opinion, even regarding a serious pandemic!

But in the face of all that I see, I light a candle for peace. This peace is coming to earth as it is already in Heaven. Let this one humble light say to a weary world, “be not afraid! God’s Peace is at hand!” And let peace be in me, and begin with me. Amen.’

The Scriptures for Advent, second Sunday:

Isaiah 40:1-11  
2 Peter 3:8-13a

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13  
Mark 1:1-8

### SOME REFLECTIONS:

I have spent a lot of time watching the moon this past week. Mostly because it is so rare to see her this time of year. I have watched her traverse our back yard (which isn’t huge, and obscured by sizeable trees, so not an extreme time commitment) and have observed her diminishing phases. At times I am overcome by a sense of isolation and loneliness as she makes her journey. Her friends the stars are so far away, and lessened by her brightness, which makes her look all the more lonely. This appearance of loneliness somehow evokes the spare and singular tone of the Gospel of Mark.

The word “Gospel” translates to “Good News.” Mark’s “good news” was written at a time following Jesus’ death, after a Jewish uprising against Rome. Rome’s retaliation was swift and brutal, including the desecration and destruction of the Jerusalem Temple. To the Jews, the Temple was the centre of their world, so this was supreme, soul-wrenching devastation. The people felt utterly lost, perhaps abandoned by their God.

Mark’s is likely the first Gospel written down; brief, direct and to the point. Almost reflective of the times. However sparse it may appear, it is rich in backstory and eternal themes of hope. For Mark’s Hebrew audience, there are four defining events in their history: the Creation, the Exodus from Egypt and

to their promised land; the return from the Babylonian exile; and finally, God's hoped-for return to establish an eternal rule of peace and the restoration of his Chosen people.

Here's a point of reflection before we move on: imagine, for a few minutes, being a Jew, before the time of Jesus. Your hope is in God and God alone. Your identity, your life story, your future longings, are tethered only to God. Your history and your prophets all proclaim your deep and abiding connection to the Lord, Yahweh. This is the lens through which you reflect on your nation's history and future. Can you imagine that? . . .

Now let's return to Mark: in just the first four verses of this Gospel, he recalls the creation (Mark 1:1, the 'beginning' of a 'good news'), calls in the prophecies of Isaiah (and Malachi), and then brings to the story a new prophet, John the Baptizer, who announces God's new reign of forgiveness, of peace between the people and their God. Mark speaks of a new beginning, bringing hope to a seemingly hopeless situation; his Gospel is a reminder of the life, the miracles and healings of Jesus—lest our current situation causes us to forget—and the greater purpose for his death and resurrection. Jesus will return, bringing with him Peace.

Peace.

Not just absence of war, but a sense of security, a surety of being infinitely loved and valued. Peace speaks of being inspired to a life of generosity, to a love of neighbour, friend and foe. Peace evokes scenes of natural beauty (like the moon) and our emotional and spiritual response to nature, guiding us to live in harmony with God's creation. Peace is something we share, not just on Sunday mornings (remember Sunday mornings?) but in every encounter with another.

Peace. Reminding us that everyone has a story, a reason for how they believe, think, or react; a story that deserves to be considered when greeting, listening, responding. Peace reminds us that every place, and its people, has a history and a culture to be considered and respected.

Today, "peace" can speak to us of a near future full of good health, family, friendship, closeness, connection. Peace tells us that there is a future that calls to us to be faithful and resolute, undaunted and ever hopeful, knowing that God is the God of our lives, our hopes and fears, our limitations and our limitless dreams of peace. May Peace be with us all!

*An Affirmation of Faith, from New Zealand:*

You, O God, are supreme and Holy. You create our world and give us life. Your purpose overarches everything we do. You have always been with us. You are God.

You, O God, are infinitely generous, good beyond all measure. You came to us before we came to you. You have revealed and proved your love for us in Jesus who lived and died and rose again. You are our God.

You, O God, are Holy Spirit. You empower us to be your gospel in the world. You reconcile and heal; you overcome death. You are our God, we worship you. AMEN

### SOME HYMNS FOR THE DAY;

#240 Light One Candle

#255 There's a Voice in the Wilderness

#256 Comfort, Comfort Now My People