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Midweek Advent 3

Isaiah 53:2-5

**He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. <sup>3</sup>He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup>Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup>But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.** (NIV 84)

Theme: Christ: The Prince of Peace

People always talk about peace. A beauty pageant contestant or a politician talk about what they would do to work toward peace in the Middle East. Police officials might hold a press conference to discuss the measures they are taking to promote peace in their cities. With all the riots and demonstrations going on in many different cities and colleges, all sorts of different leaders are trying to work toward a peaceful resolution.

People talk about peace—and for good reason. This world is full of hate and discord. Terrorists are becoming stronger and bolder as the days go on—often attacking unsuspecting civilians who are just going about their everyday lives. Violence is a daily thing in many cities. There are wars going on all over the world, which, of course, is nothing new; but it doesn't make it any less appalling. So it doesn't surprise us that so many people want to talk about peace.

Have you ever thought about how those who are trying to bring about peace are those who cause the violence and hate? That is because we are sinful human beings. It is in our nature to hate, and to fight, and to start wars.

Of course, there is no one here tonight who is a suicide bomber, no one here has started a war, nor have any of you murdered someone. But that doesn't mean you are without violence. We have all been violent at one point in our lives—for most of us when we were younger, and for others when we weren't so young. We've all said some hateful things that didn't exactly calm down a situation but actually escalated

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it. And so we don't have any peace of mind. We know our sins, we know the hate and violence that often rises in our hearts. And we know there is nothing we can do about it.

Today we look at the final name of the son of the virgin: "Prince of Peace." Jesus is the one who would bring peace to the world. This is true peace, not peace in the Middle East, not freedom from wars and rumors of wars. No the peace that he brings is true spiritual peace. The angels announced to the shepherds this peace on the night Jesus was born: **Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.** We love to talk about this peace that Jesus brings; many ornaments or other Christmas decorations have the word, "peace" on them. There are a good number of Christmas songs that mention peace. And many may have a feeling of peace and joy in their hearts when they think about the Christ-child.

But that child grew up. He had to in order to bring us peace. That is the thing about the Promised Messiah and his birth in Bethlehem. He is only the Prince of Peace, who brought peace into the world because of what he would do over 30 years later. But peace isn't what many people think of when we remember how Jesus brought peace into the world. That's talk for Lent and especially Good Friday, not Advent and Christmas.

But you can say that Jesus brought peace into the world by being peaceful himself. We talk about Jesus' passive obedience—when he did the will of the Lord by not doing anything. When he was arrested, beaten, spit upon, flogged, and nailed to a tree, it doesn't seem all that peaceful. But Jesus didn't have to go through it. He could have easily gotten out of it and put a stop to the whole thing—gotten even with those who were mistreating him and trying to kill him. But he didn't. Instead he let it all happen to himself.

Just look at how Isaiah depicts Jesus. Everyone likes to look at a baby. We sing a Christmas hymn, "O Jesus, so Sweet, O Jesus, so mild." But he was so abused and beaten at the time of his death, that he was disfigured. Isaiah writes in verse two, **He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.** And then in verse three Isaiah says he is **like one from whom men hide their faces.**

What a stark differences from the sweet little baby born in Bethlehem! He was so beaten and abused that most couldn't even look at him. Struck in the face, crowned with thorns, and flogged possibly almost to death. That is what happened to the Christ child. And of course, it wasn't just physical pain that Jesus' endured, but emotional pain as well; the affliction that he had to bear would have been too much for us all.

But the worst thing that Jesus had to suffer through didn't come at the hands of the soldiers or being betrayed by Judas or denied by Peter. It was being struck by God. You heard Jesus cry out in our gospel for this evening, **My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?** God forsook his one and only son because he became a sinner. As Isaiah wrote in verse five, **he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities.** All the times we rebelled against the Lord and ruined our relationship with him, Christ became guilty of. All the guilt in our hearts from crossing the forbidden line and failing to live up to the perfection demanded of us was placed upon Jesus. He became a sinner guilty of our sins.

And because he became a sinner he was rejected or forsaken by the Father. It was at this point that Christ suffered through hell. He suffered through the eternal punishment that we deserved because of each and every one of our sins. This makes Jesus' passive obedience all the more remarkable—he willingly suffered through the punishment of hell for us!

And notice what his work has brought us: **the punishment that brought us peace was upon him.** His punishment brings us peace! That is the peace of forgiveness. The peace of mind knowing that our sins are not counted against us, but because of Christ we stand as pure and innocent in the eyes of the Lord. It is the peace of mind knowing that we will not be condemned or suffer through the eternal punishment that we deserve because Christ suffered that punishment for us. It is peace knowing that when we die we'll be in heaven living a perfect life from sin and its effects.

2. This is true peace—spiritual peace, the peace of forgiveness. That is the peace that Christ came down to earth to bring. This peace the angels sang about on that first Christmas evening. It may seem a bit odd to focus so much on Christ's suffering and death just a week and a half before Christmas. But you can't talk about the Prince of Peace

without mentioning how he won us our peace. The two are inseparably connected.

And this peace of forgiveness leads us to live at peace with one another. Paul exhorts the people in Romans 12, **Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath.** Christians are never to be the instigators.

And yet there will be times when people are hateful and hurtful toward us. In such times, instead of getting revenge ourselves and trying to pay back others for what they have done, we leave it up to God. We put things in his hands and know that he will take care of us.

So the peace that he has won for us motivates us to live according to his will and to live at peace with each other—especially our fellow believers that we may grow up in his Word together and mutually encourage one another in the one true faith! All sorts of people talk about bring peace to certain places throughout the world. And while that may be a good idea, often their tools are wrong. There is no real peace in this world without the Prince of Peace. Only he can change our hearts and minds to live at peace with each other according to his Word. Every attempt to achieve peace outside of the gospel is flawed from the start.

People love to talk about peace especially this time of year. And that is fine. But let us remember the end of Christ's life—a life that ended on the cross as he suffered and died and brought us peace of forgiveness. And this peace is ours not just to today but also into eternity. The peace only Christ can bring—and this peace is ours to share and spread to the world and make it a place filled with true peace: the peace of forgiveness. Amen.