SERMONS THAT WORK

Advent 2 (B)
December 6, 2026

[RCL] Isaiah 40:1-11; Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13; 2 Peter 3:8-15a; Mark 1:1-8

Good Tidings of Comfort and Joy… and Peace

It may be too early, but the Merry Gentlemen have been proclaiming tidings of great comfort and joy from the radio for more than a few days now. "Comfort and joy, comfort and joy!"

If you listen to our consumer culture, 'tis the season of comfort. We hear it everywhere, from stores promising that the perfect gift or the perfect self-care tool will finally bring us comfort, to the cookies and special foods that comfort our taste buds, to the warm jackets that comfort us when the seasons change, and of course the promised comfort of family time and traditions that bring us together.

The world offers us plenty of comfort in the lead-up to Christmas—or at least promises of comfort. But is that what God offers in Advent? And if so, what does the comfort of God look like?

In the book of Isaiah, God's comfort comes like a hug: "Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and cry to her that she has served her term, that her penalty is paid." These lines come from the opening of the second part of Isaiah, and are the opening of the prophet's message to a people exiled. The tone for the entire prophetic message is one of comfort: tenderness, healing, care for a colonized people. The prophet reminds this lost and broken people that God says, 'I've got your back. You are not alone. Come in, let me take a look at you, welcome, have a plate, have a cup, there is plenty. Be at peace.'

In the Second Letter of Peter, we hear about how hard it is to wait for the coming of Christ, how hard it is to live in the midst of all that is difficult—and all that is good—while we wait for the day of salvation. And so, while we wait, what can we practice? Peace. "Strive to be found by him at peace."

And in Psalm 85, we hear that righteousness shall go before him, and peace shall be a pathway for his feet.

Peace—it's everywhere.

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Christ might not be singing tidings of great comfort and joy—not here in the second week of Advent—but even here, he absolutely brings tidings of peace.

Looking at the culture, looking at the world, looking at politics and advertisements and pressures and calendars and budgets and expectations, it can be hard to find peace. But the season of Advent is one of expectation and invitation, a reminder that no matter how bleak or frightening the world can become, no matter how unmoored we may feel, we await Immanuel, God with us.

The season of Advent is about waiting, searching, expecting something better, something with more hope and love and joy and peace. And the Second Sunday of Advent, in our tradition, uplifts this peace, as we look to the coming of Christ as the Prince of Peace.

Amidst the changes and chances of this life, this world, this season, where do you look for holy peace? Where do you find it? And how do you sink into it?

One hope is that the Church, the community of believers, will bring peace to one another. That we will find together the peace that comes from stepping away from a busy, confusing, and broken world as we step into a community of busy and confused and broken people, take a deep breath, let our shoulders drop, and let God love us.

Letting God give us God's peace. Letting God give us God's comfort.

The peace that surpasses all understanding—even the peace that undergirds all of our questions—this peace comes only from faith in the one true God. We are invited to remember God's peace, to expect it, to welcome it, to anticipate it, not as something that we can manufacture or achieve on our own, but as a gift that God offers us, even when the world around us feels anything but peaceful.

No one reminds us of this anticipation of Christ's peace better than those who call out the way of the Lord. The Merry Gentlemen may bring tidings of comfort and joy, but John the Baptist brings tidings of repentance.

John stands up in this broken and confused and busy world and says, "Wait! Turn around! Prepare the way of the Lord! Repent—he's coming!" The peace Christ brings is not simply a promise that everything will be okay; it is an invitation to turn toward God and to live differently in anticipation of the world God is bringing into being. John brings the voice of prophecy, calling us to pay attention, to turn around, and to get ready for the one who is coming. *That* is our call during Advent.

And we are called to carry that peace into the world. We are called to proclaim the Good News in word and deed.

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How do we do that? We don't have to figure it out alone. We can look to the communion of saints: the saints who came before us, the saints we know and miss, and the saints sitting next to us. They remind us that the peace of Christ is not simply something we receive and keep for ourselves, but something we are called to share with the world.

One of those saints is St. Nicholas, whose feast day we celebrate each year on December 6. Nicholas was born around the year 270 in what is now Turkey, in the region of the Roman Empire known as Lycia. He was born into a wealthy Christian family and, according to the traditions passed down about his life, he used his inheritance to care for people who were poor and vulnerable. He eventually became the Bishop of Myra, and over the centuries, stories of his generosity and care for those in need became central to his legacy.

One of the best-known stories about Nicholas tells of a man who had three daughters but lacked the means to provide for them. In the world of that time, a family's poverty could leave daughters particularly vulnerable, and the story tells us that Nicholas wanted to help without bringing attention to the family's circumstances. So he secretly threw bags of gold through the man's window, providing a dowry for each of the three daughters. In one version of the story, the gold landed in stockings that had been hung by the fire to dry, which is part of the tradition that eventually became associated with St. Nicholas and, much later, with Santa Claus.

The story has endured for centuries, not simply because Nicholas gave gifts, but because he noticed someone in need and found a way to help, offering generosity without asking for recognition in return. I wonder what kind of peace the father of those girls felt when they found the gold in their stockings… what peace, and wonder, and security came with the gift of gold.

Nicholas' example reminds us that the Christian life is not only about receiving the gifts of God, but about allowing those gifts to move through us, into the lives of others. It is "meet and right" to rest in the comfort of God, but it is also our calling—and our joy—to share that comfort with others. When we get good news, we share it!

The peace of Christ is not just a feeling we have inside ourselves. It is something we can help bring into the world, in the small, ordinary ways we care for one another. We receive that peace here, in this community, as we gather around tables, pray together, and remember that God is with us. And then we carry it with us when we leave, into our homes, our schools, our workplaces, and all the ordinary places where we encounter one another.

The peace of Christ is a gift, but it is also a calling. As we await the coming of the Prince of Peace, we practice peace, we make room for peace, and we offer peace to one another, trusting that even the smallest act of love can become a sign of the comfort and hope God promises to the world.

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Let us hear and proclaim the tidings of comfort, and joy… and of peace. May the Peace of Christ be always with you. *Amen*.

The Rev. Anna Sutterisch *is passionate about new ways of being and doing church and sharing the Gospel in a way that is relevant and life-changing to today's people in today's world. She does this with the small, strong congregation of St. Martin's Episcopal Church in Chagrin Falls, Ohio. Rev. Anna holds degrees in English and Viola Performance, and is a proud graduate of Bexley Seabury Seminary, where she serves on the Board of Directors. She lives in Cleveland with her spouse (also a parish priest), their two small boys, and two cats, and loves to run, cook, and craft.*

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