

The Arms of Peace

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Advent Service

INI - SDG

Ephesians 2:12-18 ¹² that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, ¹⁵ having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man *from* the two, *thus* making peace, ¹⁶ and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. ¹⁷ And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. ¹⁸ For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

Last week we saw how two lines come together in the point of the star. This reminds us how God came to us in the person of Jesus Christ, man and God made one, to bring us peace.

Tonight, our text moves us down to the arms of the star. These arms can be seen as pointing out away from each other. This creates distance. I'll demonstrate for the kids with these toy cars here. When the cars shoot off the points of the arms they go out, creating a great distance between themselves.

We often think that distance will create peace. We might see a vacation brochure of a sandy beach far away from our home and our job. It looks so peaceful. We might think that if I can get away from it all I can have some peace.

This Christmas when all your family is gathered in one small space, you might be tempted to think that if you can just get away and get some space to breathe you will have peace.

We are tempted to think that physical distance in space can give us peace.

We might also think of distance in time can give us peace. Time away will give us peace. If I can put enough time between me and this problem, then I can have peace again.

So, we can think of the arms of the star pointing out, giving peace through distance.

But the arms of the star can also be viewed the other way. The arms are reaching out to bring us in. Rather than pointing away they point inward. They bring us together. I have got two trucks to demonstrate this as well. The arms of the star bring us together creating peace.

Our text tonight teaches us that contrary to what we think, the way to find peace is not more distance but being brought closer. It is those things that come between us and create divisions and separations between us which shatter our peace. More distance might temporarily relieve the pressure, but true peace comes not from being separated but from being brought perfectly together.

Ephesians 2:14 ¹⁴ For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation,

By removing those things that cause disunity, by making us perfectly united in Him, Christ has brought a peace which does not separate us but unite us.

Ephesians 2:15 ¹⁵ **having abolished in His flesh the enmity, *that is*, the law of commandments *contained in ordinances*, so as to create in Himself one new man *from the two*, *thus* making peace,**

The problem isn't being close together, the problem is the enmity, the hatred, the animosity. Jesus abolished that which separates us and perfectly unites us with himself and one another.

Ephesians 2:16 ¹⁶ **and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity.**

He abolished that enmity and hatred through his death on the cross. The thing that creates discord is our sin. By destroying our sin on the cross, he gives us peace with God and one another.

Imagine your whole family is gathered for Christmas. Everything is going well but then a fight breaks out. Let's use a simple example, two people are fighting over the last piece of pumpkin pie. How do you resolve the fight? Tell them both to stop acting so childish. This might work but now you've also created distance not only between the two but also between you and them. Split the piece of pie and they each get half. Might work but there might also be some dissatisfaction. Separate them and send them to different ends of the house? Or you can pay the price yourself. You can give them your pie. Now you have removed the point of division and brought unity.

This is what God did for us in Christ Jesus. Jesus paid the price to bring us together. The price he paid was a lot more than a piece of pie, but in his death, he removed that which creates division and gave us peace not by separating us but by bringing us together.

There is a beautiful verse a little earlier in Ephesians 2.

Ephesians 2:5-6 **[He] made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), ⁶ and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,**

In the Greek each of these verbs begins with the preposition "sun," which means with or together. That is reflected in the English with the repeated use of the word "together." In the Greek each of these verbs is a present tense. Thus, Paul is not talking about what we will have in heaven but rather what we have right now in Christ. He made us alive with Christ. He raised us up with Christ. He made us sit with Christ.

We were dead in sin but now together with Christ and one another we are alive in righteousness. We were weighed down with disunity and hatred, but now with Christ we have been lifted up and stand tall in his grace. We were powerless, but now with Christ we sit in the seat of power. We have the word of God which has power to give us peace and remove our sins.

Yesterday I was talking with the kids about the account of the angel appearing to the shepherd. At that time the glory of the Lord shone around them. It surrounded them, not just the angel but the shepherds also. Through Jesus Christ the shepherds and us are no longer excluded from that glory as the people were when that glory came down on top of Mount Sinai. Now with Christ we are included in that glory. We are brought together because he paid the price to remove that which separated us from God and one another.

In Luke chapter eight the disciples are filled with fear. They are afraid because they are in a boat, on the water, during a storm. Jesus is in the same boat, on the same water, during the same storm, but perfectly at peace, asleep on the bottom of the boat.

The disciples believe distance will give them peace. Distance in space, if we can make it to shore, we will have peace. Distance in time, if we can survive the storm, we will have peace.

They miss the obvious. They don't need distance to find peace. All they need for peace is right there on the bottom of their boat sleeping. With Jesus in the boat there was no danger of them capsizing. They could have sat down with a cup of coffee and enjoyed the wild ride on the wind tossed waves.

Our peace comes not from distance but from Jesus who paid the price to remove that which divides us from one another and from God. He gives us peace by bringing us together with Him. Amen