

“Peace” A Communion Meditation
Offered by Rev. W. Dale Osborne
December 4, 2011 The Second Sunday of Advent

Two candles are lit on the Advent wreath this morning. The candle of Hope from the first Sunday of Advent is now accompanied by the light of the candle of Peace. Hope and Peace, side by side, encouraging one another in a wheel of greenery and beautiful red berries. We, the bearers of the signs of Christ in our hearts, help to raise the wreath up literally and figuratively as we carry on the faithful traditions of Binkley Baptist Church – and more importantly faithful lives as followers of one who has been called The Prince of Peace.

This past week our ever changing population at Binkley suffered the death of one of our church’s charter members as Nettie Bradley Wilburn departed peacefully from this earthly realm. Children, do you know what I mean when I call someone a charter member of our church? A charter member is someone who has been a part of shaping our church since we first got started in September of 1958. A charter member is someone who holds a very special practical and historical place in the life of a church. Nettie, as a charter member of Binkley, thought it was vitally important that the church hold itself accountable to the teachings and ministries of Jesus. She also took the time to help our church remember its history and its traditions. Peace was an important part of the fiber of Nettie’s being. She lived the Peace of Christ out in many ways, including her service in the Peace Corps in Haiti and St. Vincent. It is important that a church remember and hold fast to the Peace that Jesus offered his followers. It is equally important that we share the Peace of Christ with one another, not only during our service of worship but throughout the week as well. I thank God for Nettie who took that task very seriously.

Since today is the Advent Sunday of Peace, I thought it would be appropriate in this meditation to remark on three places or situations where Peace may be found and even given. To set the tone for my first example of Peace I want to read a couple of verses from our Isaiah passage. Verse 1 from chapter 40 states, “Comfort, O comfort my people, says your God.” And later in the passage when Isaiah prophesies metaphorically about how God will approach people he writes, “God will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep.” This passage turned my mind to the Peace and comfort humans often feel in the presence of God’s gentle creatures. Most real for me within this imagery of Peace is the comforting Peace I feel when either one of my family’s gentle hounds rest their head in my lap or turn their gaze my way in hopeful anticipation. The warmth of their fur and the gentle beating of their heart lowers my internal blood pressure and brings a feeling of Peace that shepherds me from anxiety to rest in my spirit. I imagine that many of you have experienced this same feeling of Peace when you allow yourself to be comforted by your cat or your dog. God’s gentle creatures offer all of us an opportunity for Peace in the midst of life’s chaos and confusion. Who knows, Mary and Joseph may have been comforted by the peaceful nature of the cows and other creatures who shared the stable at the time of Jesus’ birth. They had travelled a long way to register for proper taxation in Bethlehem. Mary was near to the point of childbirth as they made the tiring journey. If you have ever been on a long journey with your spouse or loved one, you know that sometimes the journey can be less than peaceful. No room was available to them at the local inn, but perhaps it was more of a reward than an inconvenience to be able to settle in with the donkeys and calves in a peaceful stable with their beds made of straw. Animals can be bearers and sharers of God’s Peace. May we always treat them well.

The second location for Peace in this meditation may seem a bit odd to you but I believe it can be a truly serene and peaceful setting. Peace can be found in a cemetery or memorial garden. The rows of names on tombstones or burial plaques remind us that the earthly remains of our loved ones from many generations are safely blended with the soil over time. A cemetery is a place of vast memories and enormous history. When you read the name aloud or across silent lips you honor not only the departed soul but also the living members of their family. Just outside this sanctuary is a very peaceful memorial garden that has been tended by Binkley members over the past generation. Ashes from nearly fifty Binkley family members are scattered or buried in that garden space. Hands of loved ones that tenderly cared for that area or tenderly shaped our church's history are now resting amidst the soil of our memorial garden. Recently, the names of our departed have been placed on plaques which adorn the brick wall nearest the garden. I thank God that Warren Nord suggested that we add names to the wall before he died. In this way, anyone who walks along the sidewalk near our garden, may stop ever so briefly or for a long and peaceful hour to read the names of our dearly departed. There is Peace in stopping along the path. There is Peace in remembering. There is Peace in pondering the lives and loves of those who have gone on to glory before us.

The final place of Peace I want to remark on is brought to mind by the Gospel reading shared this day. Mark writes, "This is the beginning of the Good News of Jesus Christ, the child of God." Jesus was described by prophets as the Prince of Peace. Jesus thought it prudent to leave his followers with a sign of Peace. Jesus said, "My Peace I give to you." Jesus gathered with his followers at a table and shared the bread of life and the cup of salvation. We are all invited to share God's love at table together. Whenever you offer yourself to another human being in service and in love, you are making the way straight so that God's Peace may be magnified. I pray that you may find Peace at a simple table of blessing. I pray that you may find Peace in a breath of fresh air. I pray that you may find Peace in the reflection of God that is apparent in the eyes of your neighbor. I pray that you may find Peace in this Advent season when Christians remember that Jesus is coming again and again and again. I pray that you may find Peace, experience Peace and share Peace without end. This is the beginning of the Good news of Jesus Christ, the child of God. The table created by the Prince of Peace awaits you. Hope and Peace sit side by side on this Holy day. Amen.