

**Sunday, December 9<sup>th</sup>, 2018, Advent 2**

**Readings: Malachi 3:1-4, Luke 1:68-79, Philippians 1:3-11, Luke 3:1-6**

### **Actively Waiting, Waiting Peaceably**

#### **Introduction**

During Advent we pass through several stages, lighting the candles for hope, peace, joy and love. Equally, these dimensions of the Gospel, also explain the Christian life, Christian virtues, Christian ethics. Christians are called *to be* people of hope, people of peace, people of joy and people of love. Last week, we focused upon the virtue, the ethic of hope and hopefulness. We concluded a number of things, the most significant of which, was that as people of hope, we must always live as if the moment is *full*, not empty. What I meant by that, was that we are to live with our mind's eye sensitive to the possibilities, cognizant of opportunities for the kingdom.

Today we turn to peace. Rather than using the noun peace, I think it is better to refer to the adverb, a doing thing: to be, to live *peaceably*. What does it mean to live peaceably? Let's begin with some observations about the clip from the film *Amadeus*, where Antonio Salieri, the Hapsburg Royal Family's court composer, looks back upon his one great resentment: the genius, the undeserved brilliance of Mozart. Torn asunder by the assessment of his own musical inadequacy in comparison with Mozart, Salieri wages war on two fronts: war on Mozart and war on God. The angry question directed to Mozart is how can such an ordinary little man like you, be such a musical genius? The angry question directed to God is, why did you permit this? What you saw in our scene, were the remains, the remnants, of a man who spends his final days in a lunatic asylum, tormented by the injustice of it all. What you saw in our scene was the connectedness between an internal undoing where personal peace is impossible, and an external, relational undoing, where the possibility of peace with Mozart was never achieved. Our scene then explains to us that there is an inherent connection, yes, between the inner spiritual life and the outward, relational life. To be peaceable, to build peace with others, requires an interior disposition, an inner capacity, which Salieri did not have. In like form, to have an inner disposition, a spiritual state of peace, requires that we take steps to act peaceably; again, something that Salieri did not do.

#### **Scripture**

This connection between the inward life or spiritual disposition and the outward life, the public relational enterprise, lies at the heart of the Biblical way of understanding peace and peaceable-ness. In both Malachi and the second reading from Luke, where John the Baptist appears, there is a call to repentance. We often understand repentance as a religious thing – and so it is – but it is equally a psychological thing, a point of change within the human mind, heart and soul, which marks the drive to live differently. Both Malachi and John in their different contexts, years apart, attempt to awaken people to the need to dig deep into their being, to tap their intellectual and spiritual resources so as to change the social, economic and political structures of their times to peaceable purposes. So, for Biblical thinking, there is coherence: the internal condition, the spiritual state of individuals shapes the society and institutions (“civil society”) in which we live. But equally, the society which we have, influences the individuals that we become. The inward shapes the outward and the outward influences the inward. *This is the gift of Biblical ethical thought: the connectedness between our most inward life and its outward public expression: both marked by peace and peaceable-ness*

#### **Modernity: The Crisis of the Contemporary**

But this is not how we think today. In place of connectedness and coherence, we face disjointedness, a failure to “join the dots” as they say between the inward and outward lives. It is not that we moderns have no inner life, no spiritual dimension, for we do. The rise of ‘the politics of identity’ – where people increasingly align themselves with a particular set or group, is all about the attempt at self-knowledge, the attempt to understand who I am. “I am a conservative Christian, a liberal secularist, a Caucasian working-class man, a feminist woman, a gay man, an immigrant, an asylum seeker, and so on. The challenge however is this: how to move beyond the inward identity of *one*, to the collective identity of all. How in a nutshell: to build peace, how to become peace-able? The connectedness of Biblical ethical thought helps us enormously, but the challenge remains with us, how to achieve it. That is what Yehudi Menuhin intuitively points us to: “Peace may sound simple - one beautiful word - but it requires everything we have, every quality, every strength, every dream, every high ideal.”