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Luke 1:67-79 – Christ, The Way of Peace

Preached at Trinity CRC

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<sup>67</sup> His father Zechariah was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied:

<sup>68</sup> “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,  
because he has come to his people and redeemed them.

<sup>69</sup> He has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
in the house of his servant David

<sup>70</sup> (as he said through his holy prophets of long ago),

<sup>71</sup> salvation from our enemies  
and from the hand of all who hate us—

<sup>72</sup> to show mercy to our ancestors  
and to remember his holy covenant,

<sup>73</sup> the oath he swore to our father Abraham:

<sup>74</sup> to rescue us from the hand of our enemies,  
and to enable us to serve him without fear

<sup>75</sup> in holiness and righteousness before him all our days.

<sup>76</sup> And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High;  
for you will go on before the Lord to prepare the way for him,

<sup>77</sup> to give his people the knowledge of salvation  
through the forgiveness of their sins,

<sup>78</sup> because of the tender mercy of our God,  
by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven

<sup>79</sup> to shine on those living in darkness  
and in the shadow of death,

to guide our feet into the path of peace.”

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God**)

For a few years of my university studies I went to Western Michigan University.

And if you don't know, they get pretty heavy dumpings of snow on that side of the state—

They call it the lake effect.

One evening I was walking across campus from the rec center back to the dorms in a pretty heavy snow storm...

The wind gusts were especially strong so snow was blowing all over the place.  
As I trekked across campus through the cold, wind, and snow I saw a man who looked lost.

His cheeks were bright red from the cold...

His hair was a mess from the wind because he wasn't wearing a toque...

And his nose had snot running out of it—

As it does when we spend too much time outside in the cold.

He was looking pretty distraught and out of sorts.

When I got closer up, I saw that he had a cane.

This man was blind and was looking for the library.

He was a student on campus who knew his way around...

But the snowdrift covered up his usual path to the library.

He was hoping to find shelter and refuge in the warm building...

But he lost his way.

I wonder if this is how we feel sometimes in life when it comes to the path of peace...

Standing there snotty nosed, bright red cheeks, lost and looking distraught...

Not knowing the way to go...

Unable to find the way of peace.

In our call to confession earlier this morning...

The prophet Isaiah talks about God's people not knowing the path...

They too lost their way.

He says, "The way of peace you do not know..."

"You turned the way of peace into a crooked road..."

"No one who walks along them will know peace."

With the blind student who was thwarted by the snow, we can't blame him for losing his way.

I'm sure he didn't decide one day to become blind.

But for God's people, there is clearly a responsibility that falls on their shoulders:

Isaiah says, "Your sins have separated you from your God."

“Your sins have hidden has face from you.” (Isa 59:2)

There once was a clear, straight path that led the people into God’s presence—

It was the way of peace well known to God’s children—

The road that led to the author of peace.

But this path was made crooked through sin...

The way to God was covered over by a heavy blanket, not of snow, but of disobedience.

During the time that Zechariah speaks these words from our passage...

God’s people are desperately longing for peace.

They have been living under the control of foreign rulers for hundreds of years...

And they want relief from their physical enemies...

They want to be set free from the people who are oppressing them.

The words of the prophets have dried up...

It’s been some 400 years since Malachi, the last prophet...

So it seems like God is letting his people live with the consequences of their sin...

They’ve turned away from the path of peace...

And now their lives are better described with words like: despair, distress, agony, anxiety, war, and fear.

Actually, those words are pretty apt descriptors of life today.

We live in a world where peace is hard to come by—

Even in the peaceful city of Edmonton.

At the end of this past week there was a story that came out from southeast Edmonton...

Where 2 children were found dead in a storage room of an apartment...

A neighbor was interviewed and you could tell he was distraught:

“It makes me sick to my stomach...I gotta move out of here...I gotta be honest...this is not...I can’t...you see this stuff in movies...I can’t do this.”

It's in our lives too...

We are well-acquainted with these words that describe the opposite of peace.

Who in here has felt anxious, or lived with anxiety, just in this past week?

We're anxious about our families...

Loved ones are sick...

Or we suffer with a chronic health issue.

Some relationships are broken;

Parents worry about the choices their children make;

Young adults worry about the choices they have to make:

“How do I balance studying with volleyball, hanging out with friends, spending time with my family, and getting to youth group?”

Many of us are anxious over finances...

Especially during this time of the year when the credit card gets so much use.

We're anxious or stressed about our work:

“How long will they be able to keep me around with the economy the way it is?”

“How long will I be without work with the economy the way it is?”

The way of peace we do not know.

We're like the blind student standing lost in the snow...

Hair's a mess, nose is snotty, cheeks are bright red and we look distressed...

We're having trouble finding the way of peace.

Some of this lack of peace we bring upon ourselves:

Some of the messes we get ourselves into are a direct result of our own doing.

We're harsh with our words to our friends or family...and unwilling to apologize...

So of course there's going to be strain in the relationship.

Or we go out and drink too much, get sick, miss work...

Of course it's our fault when we lose our job.

But most of the time—

When talking about losing the way of peace—

We are reaping fruits of the fall.

We are suffering from our original separation from God.

Once we introduced sin, brokenness and death into the world...

Everything was impacted:

Family and friendship, school and government, play and art, work and worship...

Nothing was untouched by sin.

So now, for instance, our bodies don't work like they should:

We grow cancer cells and our organs fail;

Our memories lapse;

Our little ones get respiratory viruses;

Some of us are on daily medications for the rest of our lives just to stay alive.

Obviously the world is broken.

Something has gone terribly wrong.

Did we choose this for ourselves?

Did we one day decide that we wanted to live lives without peace?

Did we say, "Hey I think I want to live in a world of chaos?"

Well no...

But in a sense, yes.

Because this is our chosen condition...

This is the world of sin and brokenness that we live in...

And it's a mess that we created...

This is what happened and what keeps happening as we turn away from God...

As we turn away from and lose sight of the straight path of peace.

And this is what makes God's mercy so great:

Even though we chose to separate ourselves from him...

Even though humanity chose the crooked road of disobedience that leads to pain and death...

And even though we've lost the path that leads to God...

He chooses to take us back to himself.

Zechariah says, "the Lord has come to his people and redeemed them."

"God has raised up a mighty savior for us from David's line."

The people didn't have to take out their snow shovels and try to dig out the path to find God.

They didn't need someone to take them by the hand and lead them to the Lord—

Lead them to a place of peace and rest—

Because God was coming to them.

The second person of the Trinity...God the Son...

Became one of us.

We could never reach up to heaven—

We were too lost and too broken—

We were actually running in the opposite direction...

Running away from God.

So heaven came down to us in the person of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ came into this world to bring us back into relationship with God...

He came to find us and bring us peace.

But there's a very real tension that we experience with this idea of peace.

On the one hand we've already received the promise...

The Lord has made good on rescuing us.

Jesus Christ has already paid the debt for our sin.

We are no longer living with the guilt and weight of our wrong-doings.

If we pass away suddenly—

Or if a loved one passes away suddenly—

We have peace if they knew Christ as their savior...

We know that the Lord receives them into his arms because of Christ's work on the cross.

This is a peace that passes all understanding.

On the other hand we're still waiting for the complete fulfillment of the promise.

We know the promise is good...we've tasted the sweetness of the promise...

But we don't see it in its fullness yet.

We know that there's still more to come...

Because we still see the affects of sin in this world:

We still live in the brokenness;

We still get sick;

Loved ones still pass away and leave us here to grieve;

We still live with anxiety;

People are still lonely;

Peace is still elusive;

But we know that the Lord is working to redeem everything he's created...

He's still rescuing all those he's called.

And we know this because we see traces of it among us:

The Lord sends us people to walk alongside of us when we're lonely or hurting.

He sends family or friends to help watch the kids when life gets to be too much.

God is raising up doctors and researchers to make medicine that helps relieve our anxiety and helps manage our depression...

He gives us skilled counselors to help us process our grief and our hurts...

Therapists and groups to help deliver us from the chains of addiction.

He's raising up people to serve him in Swaziland at orphanages where he's moving in the hearts of orphaned children...

He's raising up people to serve him in Uganda where he's caring for his children with special needs.

He's equipping local charities in Edmonton to provide for the needs of those living on the streets...

And he's moving in our hearts to trust him more and more.

In times of chaos, stress, fear, and despair....

It's easy to ask, "Lord, where are you?"

"Lord, I thought you loved me. I thought you were making everything right."

Be confident of this people of God:

He's not stuck up in heaven...reaching out his hand willing us to come to him.

The Lord is right here.

He came down to us.

The Spirit of Christ is with us...

Breaking into this world and bringing about redemption.

It might not come as fast as we'd like...

But when we're in the thick of the chaos and pain...

Know that he's right there by your side...

He's walking with you through it all.

Leading you to find rest and peace in him.

There are really 2 things that I want you to take away from this sermon:

Knowing the peace, and passing the peace.

Know in your heart that the Lord is the way to peace.

This isn't usually a one-and-done...

"I know so now I can carry on as usual."

Life is pretty brutal and it's easy to forget...

This is our tendency...to forget that the Lord came down to us...and that he walks with us...that he wants to be our God...that he wants to lead us into his paths.

There is a very real enemy who wants us to forget...

Who wants us to despair when the storms of life come.

So we need to be constantly living in the reminder of God's presence and God's peace.

And we do it here.

This is why we come every week:

To be reminded of God's goodness.

To hear the story of salvation for us told over and over again.

But a week is really too long in between.

We forget before then.

We need daily reminders of God's peace.

This is why we're called to devote ourselves to the apostles' teaching.

And what they taught was nothing other than the gospel of peace.

How God loved us so much that he paid a huge price to get us back.

This is THE story of Scripture...God's love for us.

Read these words everyday...and allow yourselves to bask in the peace of God's love for you.

So first, know the peace.

Then, pass the peace.

I was privileged to have this young blind man grab onto my arm as we walked to the library together...

I was privileged to lead him to this place he was looking to find...

A place of warmth and rest...

There are plenty of people out there who don't know the path...

They don't know the peace that comes from a restored relationship with God.

They might spend their whole lives wandering down crooked roads...

They're searching for something...

They know something's wrong...but they don't know the way.

But the Spirit of Christ is residing in us...

We get to be carriers of his peace.

We get to show people and tell people about the way back to God.

How God loved them so much that he gave his only Son for them.