

Sermon 2010 Advent 2
Text: Isaiah 11:1-10
Theme: "Peace is not Peaceful"
December 5, 2010

Remember the Hallmark commercial a couple years ago where that dog and the cat and the mouse are all sitting peacefully together and looking at the Christmas tree? We like to think of peace, love and joy during the Christmas time of year. Peace, love and joy are a big deal. People love all the fake happiness this time of the year brings. Truces are often made in the middle of wars during Christmas. Even non-Christians have parties and family gatherings. My Jehovah's Witness relatives would never celebrate Christmas. But they have an End-of-the-Year Party on December 25th. Strangely they all gather for a special meal with special desserts and exchange end-of-the-year gifts. It sure looked like Christmas. So what's my problem? Why do I never feel all warm and mushy over Christmas? Danya says it is because I am Ebenezer Scrooge. She might be right, I always did root for Ebenezer, but I say it is because so much of the stuff that goes on during this season is unmitigated fakery.

As the altar guild around here knows, I hate fake. I know I have to live with a certain amount of fake stuff, but I don't like it. But I don't have to put up with fake joy or fake love or fake peace. So people can screw on their happy eggnog smile all they want. They can ooo and ahh over that garish tie and they can pretend they like the people sitting across from them at the company holiday party but the reality is that this month will come and go like it always does and we will be left cold and empty and usually broke in January. So have a Merry Christmas.

See real peace is not come by peacefully and real joy demands sacrifice and real love is purchased not with gold or silver but with holy, innocent blood. During the 2008 presidential race, John McCain was asked by *Time* magazine to share his "personal journey of faith." In response he told a story from his experiences in a North Vietnamese prison camp during the Vietnam War. He tells how he would often be tied with ropes that pulled his head down between his knees. Often he was left that way the entire night.

Then one particular night a guard came to him, and without saying a word loosened the ropes. In the morning, before anyone knew, he returned and tightened the ropes again. No one else was aware of what had happened, but McCain was deeply grateful for his night of relief.

The two men never exchanged a word, but on Christmas Day, the same guard came to him in the courtyard of the camp. Again, he said nothing, nor did he look McCain in the eye, but with his foot he drew a cross in the dirt. The two men looked down at that cross, a wordless conversation that said everything.

The prophet Isaiah says that one day the wolf will dwell with the lamb. In his prophecy he describes a wonderful utopian world that one day we will enter. But we are not there yet – not by a long shot. Today we live in a broken, tearful world and we have only tiny glimpses of the days of which Isaiah speaks. We look forward to the day when our Lord will return and take us into paradise with him, but until that day, we can only make the best of what we have and where we are. I don't have to be fake about it. I don't have to pretend that everything is fabulous and wonderful. It's not. But it is going to be okay. Jesus died on that cross and paid for my sin. Jesus comes to me through the

bread and the wine to strengthen me for the journey and Jesus will return for me and for you.

The reality of Jesus' coming into the world surpasses Hallmark peace. Who cares about dogs and cats and mice sleeping by a Christmas tree? We are prisoners of war and fake happiness does not help a POW. But the sure and certain knowledge that our release has been purchased and our deliverer is on his way for us helps! And the consolation and encouragement from our fellow prisoners helps! We don't need cutesy stories. We need body and blood and the sure and certain promise of salvation.

So you will have to forgive me at Christmas. I am not one to pretend that I am happy if I am not. Nor do I pretend that everything is great if it is not. I have a hard time enjoying all the cutesy stuff that is supposed to MAKE us FEEL happy, but that does not mean that I do not have true joy and love and peace. I have all of that.

I have the true joy of knowing that my Lord is on his way. He has defeated the enemy and he is on his way to reclaim his people from captivity. Times here might be good or bad on any given day, but together, we are headed for paradise.

I have the true love that he showed me when he gave his very life to pay for mine. Love is not a silly sentiment for him. Love is saying I will take your punishment upon myself. I will step in front of the bullet for you. I will pay the consequence so you don't have too.

I have true peace, not peace for a moment or even for a day but eternal peace because I know how the story ends and this Christmas of 2010 might be enjoyable or horrible but, either way, it cannot touch my peace – not at all. My peace transcends this or any season. My peace is from knowing that Christ holds me in the palm of his hand – no matter what. My peace comes from being surrounded by the Church. My peace is the peace that passes all understanding and keeps our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.