

**First Presbyterian Church Wausau, WI**  
**Bringer of Peace – December 6, 2015 – Advent 2C**  
**Malachi 3:1-4 and Luke 1:57-80**  
**Rev. Rachel A. Wann**

The message of the second week of Advent is Peace. We generally don't think about peace unless we are feeling its absence. When times are rough, we think back on the good old days, when troubles seemed few and far between. Yet now, peace tends to be a rather elusive concept for many of us. News stories of war and terrorism in the world or yet another mass shooting somewhere in our country. Peace in our world? Seems rather far off.

So we turn to our personal lives, longing for stability and peace in the one place we think we have some semblance of control. Yet many of us struggle with upheaval even within the family. Parents or spouses who are struggling with ongoing illness. Bills that need to be paid, but money is tight. Adult children coming home with their own brokenness, looking to mom and dad to fix it. We are bombarded with stressors from all sides, and are hard pressed to find enough time in the day to get everything done, let alone try to find a few minutes to relax. Peace in our homes? Maybe not as much as we'd like.

And finally we consider ourselves. Are we at peace within ourselves, or do we struggle? Our drive for success and our feelings of inadequacy batter our sense of self-worth. We struggle with temptation and guilt. Like the Apostle Paul once wrote, we know what is right, yet we sometimes we are drawn to do the opposite. Feelings of anger, anxiety, frustration wear us down as much as our relentless drive to be productive. Many of us struggle to find peace within our very selves, and oftentimes we come up short.

We long for peace. We long for a world in which troubles are non-existent or easy to remedy. When our stability is threatened, we crave a return to equilibrium. This need within us for balance and restoration of wholeness is a basic part of who we are. We look for something or someone who can restore that sense of balance in our lives and in our world. We long for one who can bring peace out of chaos. One who not only knows and understands the world in which we live, but one who knows and understands us. We are in need of a Savior, the very savior prophesied by the priest Zechariah, at the birth of his son John.

Next Sunday, the children will be presenting a program about John the Baptist and how his role was to prepare people to receive the savior that God was sending into the world. John was to be God's final prophet. The voices of the prophets had been silent for well over four hundred years. Prophets had had a huge role in Israel's history. We sometimes think of prophets as fortune tellers – people who can tell the future. But that is not quite accurate. They don't foretell the future as much as they forth-tell what is going on in the present. Biblical prophets are able to see with great clarity what is going on around them in the present – and generally

it was that Israel was falling away from God. The prophet would then speak a word from God that would provoke the people to make a change.

Prophets were able to connect God's word to what was going on in the world. Sometimes they would offer a word of rebuke – for people to change their ways, or else. Sometimes they offered a word concerning the political, economic, social, or religious climate of the time – usually having to do with the need for reform. Often the prophets offered a word of hope and encouragement. Ultimately the words of any prophet were words of God's redemption.

The people of Israel believed that the time of the prophets was long over. In fact, Malachi was considered to be the last prophet of Israel. Malachi is the final book of the Old Testament and the message of Malachi is dated around 100 years after the Babylonian exile. Our Old Testament lesson this morning is from the book of Malachi.

Like many of the prophetic books of the Bible, the message of Malachi has to do with reform. God's word through Malachi is that God is sending a messenger to the people. In order to prepare for the coming messenger of God, Malachi saw a definite need around him for reform. God's messenger would come with a dual purpose of judgment, cleansing the sins of the people with soap and refining them with fire. Yet this is done not as punishment, but rather with a redemptive purpose, to purify them that they might be ready to receive the Lord when he comes. John the Baptist would bring a similar message of repentance.

Like Malachi, John, was a prophet and his role was to prepare the way for the coming of God's Messiah. He would grow up to prepare the way for God's coming Messiah, alerting the people that God was at work in the world bringing redemption. John would proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. One was coming from God. One who would bring salvation and offer redemption. But in order to receive him, the people would need to do some reforming in their lives.

Jesus came into a world that so needed a message of forgiveness and hope. A message that is just as relevant and necessary for our world today.

From the refugee camps outside of Syria, to the terrorist cells around the world, and the slums of our major cities. God's message of forgiveness and redemption is needed. In the oncology units of hospitals, the domestic violence shelters, the overcrowded prison system, and in the abandoned buildings where homeless folks gather to keep warm. God's message of peace, forgiveness and redemption is needed.

In our own fragmented relationships, our struggles with temptation, our family crises, our worries about the future, and our concerns about health and welfare - God's message of peace, forgiveness and redemption is needed.

And so in the hectic frenzy we find ourselves in these last few weeks before Christmas, we listen to the message of the prophets, preparing ourselves to receive God's message of peace to all people.