

Last week, we remembered that Advent is a call to remember what real hope is as we wait for the birth of Jesus. Advent reminds us that no matter what snowstorms are blowing in our lives, we have a hope in Jesus that endures.

Today we dwell for a time on waiting with peace. God's peace is described in our next text as a sunrise that dispels our darkness. I'm reading from the Gospel of Luke in the first chapter, beginning with verse 67, in The Message paraphrase. [\[Read Luke 1:67-79, MSG\]](#)

What does it mean for us to wait for Christmas with peace? Certainly, we hope for peace in war-torn countries like Ukraine, just as Zechariah spoke, "Deliverance from our enemies and every hateful hand."¹ The violence occurring there every day breaks our hearts and the heart of God.

Certainly, we hope for peace with God, what Zechariah describes as God's "offer of salvation to his people, the forgiveness of sins."² That basic right standing with God is the basis for every good work we might hope to do in this life and our hope for an eternity with God in God's restored Kingdom.

But waiting with peace also means that we are all called, not only to set aside our war-like attitudes and actions with God and others, be to actively seek to be peacemakers; what Zechariah describes as walking "one foot at a time, down the path of peace."³

Dr. Suess was surprisingly wise, and often embedded forceful prophetic messages in his children's stories. I've actually used *The Lorax* story book to teach about the role of God's prophets in the Old Testament. Did Dr. Suess ever write about peace? He did, and

¹ Luke 1:71. The Message (2002).

² Luke 1:77. Ibid

³ Luke 1:79. Ibid.

it's hidden right under our very noses in the beloved Christmas classic, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*. Here's a plot summary for you in case it's been a while.

The Grinch lives alone in a cave with his dog Max, high up on a mountain top, far away from where all the Whos live in Whoville. The problem is simple. The Grinch hates Christmas, everything about it, but especially the noise and the singing. Have you ever met someone who despised Christmas so much that they were determined to ruin it for everyone else? The Grinch is the antithesis of a peacemaker, spreading dissent and pain wherever he goes.

Was the Grinch's heart really "two sizes too small?" I don't think the size of the Grinch's heart was his problem. I think he was lacking peace in his heart. In *The Anatomy of Peace*,⁴ The Arbinger Institute describes the difficulties we humans have with peace, whether it's in a family or work relationship or even in international diplomacy. Their thesis is that before we can be peacemakers, we first have to choose to have a heart at peace rather than a heart at war.

Clearly, the Grinch's heart was at war, so much so that he went to ridiculous extremes to ransack Whoville of all the festive decorations and presents while masquerading as Santa Claus. In the words of Doctor Seuss, "But whatever the reason, his heart or his shoes, he stood there on Christmas Eve hating the Whos. Staring down from his cave, with a sour, Grinchy frown, at the warm lighted windows below in their town." Beneath his Grinchy frown was a heart full of hate, a heart at war. What does a heart at war look like for us?

Paul gave us a few clues in the earlier reading from Ephesians. A heart at war lets anger fester and fuel dreams and plans for revenge. A heart at war justifies stealing from someone else in order to satisfy our own wants and needs. A heart at war reveals itself in

⁴ The Arbinger Institute. *The Anatomy of Peace: Resolving the Heart of Conflict* (2015).

the foul language that it issues from our mouth, words that injure others instead of helping them. A heart at war is one that makes no room for God's Holy Spirit, crowding the Spirit out through persistent backbiting and profane living. And lastly, a heart at war is eager to prosecute perceived wrongs, turning a blind eye to the forgiving grace God offers each of us.

One of the not-so-secret secrets of *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* is that each of us has the capacity to wear that same Grinchy frown, choosing to make ourselves and others miserable rather than living in the Peace of Christ. Why do we do that, and how can we leave that behind us, becoming the peacemakers God wants us to be?

Our first step in wiping off those Grinchy frowns from our faces is to recognize that we choose to put them there in the first place. The Arbinger Institute points out that “[n]o one, whatever their actions, can deprive us of the ability to choose our own way of being. Difficult people are nevertheless people, and it always remains in our power to see them that way.”⁵ What the authors are referring to is our tendency to treat others as objects rather than people, and to exaggerate their faults in order to validate ourselves—something they call “horribilizing!” Looking down on others, it's easy to think of them as problems rather than people.

Let's do a quick heart check. Do you have a heart at war today? Remember, I'm not asking you if you know someone else who does! We're each responsible for our own hearts, and the first step to making peace is finding it in our own hearts. Who, or what is it that we're at war with? Have you taken the time to sit with them and listen to their story, to their heart? As long as you feed your heart at war, practicing your hate through that litany of unhealthy ways of living Paul listed, there simply won't be any room for the Peace of Christ and your long wait for Christmas day is going to be a disappointment.

⁵ Ibid

The Arbinger Institute suggests we routinely ask ourselves some questions that might help us develop more empathy for others, especially those we're at war with: What are this person's or people's challenges, trials, burdens, and pains?; How am I, or some group of which I am a part, adding to these challenges, trials, burdens, and pains?; In what other ways have I or my group neglected or mistreated this person or group; What biases am I harboring that obscure the truth about others and myself and interfere with potential solutions?; and what am I feeling I should do for this person or group? How could I help? When you take the time and open your heart to form an authentic relationship with someone, it's hard to remain at war with them. Other people are not our problems. Other people are simply other people, and nobody really deserves our grinchy frowns.

What changed the Grinch was not a debate with the Whos on the merits of Christmas. It wasn't a twitter storm or Facebook flame war. It was the way that the Whos demonstrated that they had hearts of peace. It was when the Grinch saw them steadfastly cling to their hearts of peace, in the face of his horrible efforts to ruin their Christmas, that he finally became curious and began to wonder if "[m]aybe Christmas, perhaps means a little bit more."

Who is it that's watching you this Christmas, watching to see if you have a heart at peace or a heart at war, wondering if there might be more to Christmas than the tinsel and candy canes and presents under the tree? How you foster your own heart of peace might very well be how another person takes a step closer to receiving the peace that comes from living in the light of Christ.

Please take some time now to ask God to give you a heart of peace.



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