

It's A Most Peaceful Time of the Year!

A sermon based on Micah 5:2-5

This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. Amen.

Christmas, it's the most wonderful time of the year! Don't you agree? I'm sure you've heard that, quite a few times in the past month or so. If nothing else, you likely know the song, boasting how there's really nothing quite like Christmas. I mean, just listen to some of the reasons: kids jingle belling, everyone telling you to be of good cheer, the holiday greetings, the friends come to call, parties for hosting, marshmallows for toasting, caroling out in the snow, much mistletoeing, hearts will be glowing, loved ones are near, I think you get the picture. Add all the stuff in that you like about Christmas, and what do you get? The most wonderful time of the year!

Except it's not...not for everyone. Maybe you were really hoping to get out and be with family this holiday season and just couldn't make it work. Maybe the presents under the tree were a little lighter this year – the lower PFD, no Christmas bonus, too many other expenses, and you're bummed you really couldn't get everything you wanted to for the kids or your spouse or anyone else.

Maybe the worries of your job being on thin ice, the uncertainty of where your health is or where it's headed, the stress of relationships that just aren't repairing like you'd like them to, even during this season of cheer and supposed good will, maybe just stress in general that's got you worn out...maybe some of that's weighing you down.

Or, what about when loved ones aren't near? The empty seats around the table where Grandma and Grandpa used to sit. The empty hole in your heart because it's your spouse or another loved one who's not here, maybe it was his/her favorite season. We have a sister in Christ who's dealing with that freshly right now. Or maybe it's the womb that's empty with a child that never was that you've wanted so dearly.

For me, it's my Grandpa, who's been dealing with/battling cancer for over a year, and it just came back in his lungs, he had to start chemo over again, and family who saw him at my cousin's wedding last month and more recently gave me a dose of reality when they said he looks tired, weak, not sure of how long God's going to give him here, is this going to be his last Christmas, am I going to see him again before heaven?

Is it anything for you?

And the hard part is, everyone's telling you to be of good cheer, as if one day, with all its presents and ham/turkey and cookies and decorations and music and movies and parties and all the warm and fuzzies could magically erase all the hurt, the pain, the loss, the worries, the uncertainties. And you feel bad...terrible, because it doesn't for you. Is this really the most wonderful time of the year?

I'm sorry to be such a downer, but aren't those the sad realities of sin in the world? How even the most wonderful time can be brought to its knees by the unfortunate consequences of sin? I'm happy if it hasn't gotten to you. I'm right there with you if it has.

A pastor recently shared the moving story of how his wife, pregnant with twins, a boy and a girl, had her appendix rupture, by the grace of God survived that only to find out a few weeks later that the toxins had gotten to her boy, and he didn't make it. The pastor cried for 34 days straight. You can't blame him. But you know what he said, "You can either get bitter...or you can get better."

The hurt, the pain, the sadness, the worry, the anger...if you have any of that right now...how can you go from being embittered by that to getting better? Friends, if you're feeling burdened right now, if you're feeling bitter, your Christmas needs something. Your Christmas needs good news. Here it is: "**He will be their peace.**"

You see, we don't need this to be the most wonderful time of the year....but we do need peace. And friends, today is a most peaceful time of the year because of the one born in Bethlehem Ephrathah, though it was small among the clans of Judah, but out of it came one who's ruler over Israel, ruler over you, ruler over me, ruler over all creation....the one who's in charge...the one who's in control over everything...he gives you peace.

Let's take a look at this prophecy from Micah and see what that peace entails...what he's done for you.

"Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth." You might feel alone, lonely, left behind, like you've been abandoned, maybe even by God...that he's missing, that he doesn't care. Friends, Jesus is born. The one who was in labor has already given birth. Immanuel is here. 'God with us' is here. He hasn't abandoned you. God is here with you...God is here for you. You are not alone.

It gets better: ***"He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD."*** He's not just here for you. He's here to shepherd you...to lead you, to provide for you...to love you. With this part of Micah's prophecy, I can't help but think to Psalm 23, ***"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."***

Though you might have so many reasons to be down and disappointed and discouraged, maybe even depressed this season, you have a Shepherd in Jesus who does all this – leaves you not wanting, leads you in this life, restores you, comforts you, follows you with his love, gives you a place where ***"they (you and I) will live securely."***

And all of that is possible because of what this child, our Shepherd, our strong and majestic King, our Lord, did for us. He's brought peace to men, to us, through his perfect life, his death on the cross (where he was abandoned by God, left to suffer hell to pay for our sins), through his resurrection, the sign the battle is over, sin defeated, peace between us and God restored. His favor now rests on you. Glory to God in the highest for that.

But, here in Micah, Jesus hasn't just brought us peace; he himself is our peace. He embodies the peace we need and the peace we now have because he's with us. He's the one through whom we have a relationship of complete unity and perfect harmony with our heavenly Father. His daily intercession with the Father gives us peace of conscience. His shepherd's love and guardian care allow us to live in peace even in this vale of tears.

Because of Jesus, this is a most peaceful time of the year. Yeah, it might not be all that wonderful for you this year. The tears might even come. But you still have peace with God. And that Peace, Jesus, he's going to keep draw you closer to him.

That's what makes it better. Jesus and his peace are what makes you better...a better husband/wife...a better friend...a better brother or sister in Christ...a better encourager. And better, not just for this season. Jesus doesn't leave once Christmas is over, and the radio stops playing the Christmas music tomorrow and after the gifts and decorations are all put away. For you, with Jesus, any time of year is a most peaceful time...and that's wonderful!

If you're hurting at Christmastime, fall into God's arms and know he will keep you. The child who sleeps in heavenly peace has brought you heaven's peace. He is your peace. And today and every day, whatever it is, "May Jesus empty you of any anxiety or worry or stress or fear or pain or sadness or whatever weighs you down...may Jesus empty you of that and fill you with his peace. Amen!"