



Journeying with the Prince of Peace

By Janet Anstead

Scriptures: Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7, Luke 1: 68-79 (Song of Zechariah), John 14: 25 – 27

Purpose:

- To broaden our understanding of Christ's peace.
- To examine how that peace may be reflected in our world, in our relationships with others and within ourselves.
- To understand God's will for us to walk in this peace.

Suggestions for the Leader:

- *This program incorporates scenarios, scripture, and other readings. Select and recruit readers for the scenarios and dialogues in advance, and give them copies of what they will read.*
- *Have participants pause for a few moments of reflection after each scenario. Provide them with paper and pen to make notations from the reflections.*
- *Invite participants to consider 'peace' from a global position, a community position, a church-community position, and within themselves.*
- *Consider ways in which the peace we find in Christ can be expressed in their communities and in their lives.*

You May Need:

- Bibles
- Paper and pens
- Recent newspapers – international section
- Copies of worship service and readings
- Readers
- Candles, nativity scene – perhaps one made in another country – an altar cloth of purple, a dove or other symbol of peace, a globe, a headline from the daily newspaper illustrating peace of our need for peace.
- Hymnals or song books



Setting the Stage (*Scriptural background*):

At this Christmas time, we celebrate the birth of the one Isaiah calls the Prince of Peace. Indeed, in many churches around the world, a candle of peace will be lit, during this season, as one of the Advent candles. Yet, how can we celebrate Peace? Our world does not know Peace. Look at the world around us – (read some of the headlines). And these headlines only reflect the present expressions of hatred and war. Our history is a long and tragic litany of race against race, nation against nation, individual against individual. So how can we, during this advent season, blissfully walk around speaking about the Prince of Peace?



When we use the term Prince of Peace and whenever we use the term 'peace' in connection with Jesus, we are echoing the beautiful Hebrew concept of *Shalom*. Isaiah used the word. Jesus may well have spoken *Shalom* or its Aramaic equivalent when he said to his disciples, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you". And when those same frightened disciples encountered the Risen Lord they were greeted with "*Shalom*" – "Peace be with you."

Shalom means more than the absence of strife or war. It means wholeness, completeness, tranquility, contentment, security, friendship, safety, and perfection. It is a term used as both a greeting and as a benediction. The English language has no adequate one-word translation. *Shalom* evokes our heartfelt desire to be lifted out of our individual brokenness and made complete in God's unifying love.

The Purpose of our Scripture Passages:

- *From Isaiah*, we hear the prophecy of the coming of the Prince of Peace – the Messiah. This Messiah will be a shining light in a dark world – a light for justice and righteousness.
- *From Zechariah's* joyful song, we hear again the prophecy of the messiah. Not as in the distant future, but here with us now. And with this birth the light foretold by Isaiah will shine to lead our feet unto the paths of peace.
- *From John*, we learn that though Jesus' earthly ministry will end, He continues to be with us, lighting our world, guiding our path. With that light and by the power of the Holy Spirit we can keep our focus on Christ's love and peace.

Scenario 1:

After the collapse of the apartheid system in South Africa there was great potential for a groundswell of anger, vindictiveness, and hatred to rise in the land. Instead, the people of South Africa created the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which both exposed the atrocities of the past and encouraged reconciliation between the victims and their oppressors. The Chairman of this Commission was Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who said,

Believers say that we might describe most of human history as a quest for that harmony, friendship and peace for which we appear to have been created. The Bible depicts it all as a God-directed campaign to recover that primordial harmony when the lion will again lie with the lamb and they will learn war no more because swords will have been beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Somewhere deep inside us we seem to know that we are destined for something better. Now and again we catch a glimpse of the better thing for which we are meant...

Read: Isaiah 9: 2, 6-7



Questions for Reflection

1. How did the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, in its intent, reflect Christ's shalom in this world?
2. When have you glimpsed those moments when you knew you were meant for something better?
3. How did the government of South Africa reflect the prophetic message of Isaiah?

Scenario 2:

In WWII, during April 1940, the Nazis invaded Denmark. During this otherwise bleak era of European history, the people of Denmark stand as a beacon of light. For when the Danish people started hearing rumors that their Nazi occupiers would be deporting all Jewish Danes to concentration camps, the Danish people, under cover of night and in fishing boats smuggled many of the Jews to the safety of Sweden. In this way all but 481 of Denmark's 8000 Jews were saved.

Read: Luke 1: 68-79 (Song of Zechariah)

Questions for Reflection:

1. How did the actions of the Danish people reflect *shalom*?
2. What elements of Zechariah's song are reflected in the experience of the Danish Jews?
3. Why did not, or do not, more people respond this way in the face of genocide and injustice?

Scenario 3:

In 1964, Jean Vanier, a philosopher and theologian, founded L'Arche (the Ark) an international network of faith-based communities creating homes and day programs with people with developmental disabilities. These are co-operative self-help residences for people who cannot live on their own. L'Arche's goal is for these people to live full lives. Vanier's life and writings teach us to embrace those whom society calls weak and in so doing discover great compassion, trust and understanding. He writes,

...The sense of belonging that is necessary for the opening of our hearts is born when we walk together, needing each other, accompanying one another whether we are weak or strong, capable or not. ... We are simply human beings, enfolded in weakness and in hope, called together to change our world one heart at a time.

Read: John 14: 25 – 27

Questions for Reflection:

1. Scenario 1 and 2 present acts of groups of people, yet Vanier calls us to individual action. What are the opportunities and challenges of each kind of action – Group and Individual?
2. Where in your own life have you felt Christ's peace?
3. How does the Advent/Christmas season help you to be more open to Christ's peace? How does it hinder you? What habits and practices can help you remain attentive to the shalom-centered life all year long?



Worship

Invocation:

Gracious God,
We gather today to seek your peace within our community and through our faith in you. Grant us grace to walk in paths of peace for your sake and for the sake of the whole world. May we step in confidence and hope, trusting in your love and knowing that there is no place we can go in pursuit of peace where you have not already made the road. O Come, O come, Emmanuel, God with Us, Child of Bethlehem, Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace. Amen



Call to Worship:

By the tender mercy of God,
The dawn from on high will break upon us,
Give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death,
And guide our feet into the way of peace.

Read: Luke 10: 1-6

Scripture Meditation:

Reader 1: We cry "Peace, peace," but there is no peace.

Reader 2: Emmanuel – God with us - guide our feet in the path of peace.
Let your *shalom* rule our world.

Reader 3: Emmanuel – God with us - guide our feet in the path of peace.
Let your *shalom* rule our lives

Reader 1: Glory to God in the highest heaven,
and on earth peace among those whom God favors.

Reader 2: Lift us again into that paradise
of harmony, friendship and wholeness
where the lion will lie down with the lamb.



Reader 3: Lift us beyond our individual lives,
Lift us beyond our insecurities and doubts.

Reader 1: Peace be with you.

Reader 2: Guide us in the path of peace.
So that we will learn war no more
and beat our swords into plowshares
and our spears into pruning hooks.

Reader 3: Guide us in the path of peace.
So that we may leave behind our brokenness and know completeness
through you.

All Readers: Emmanuel – God among us! Guide us in the path of peace.
The path of forgiveness
The path of wholeness.
The path of unity for all creation.

Song: O God of Every Nation # 680 Chalice Hymnal

Offering Statement

The amazing gift of one who fully embodied God's intention for humanity
by bringing the promise of shalom to this world prompts us to make a
grateful response.

In Christ we have known a love that will not let us go.

Through this offering let us share Christ's love in our community and to the
ends of the earth.

Offering and Offering Prayer:

Eternal God of redemption,

You bless your creation and it springs forth with beauty.

You judge your people with righteousness and new life abounds.

You give your people the gift of your peace and hope fills our hearts.

We bring you now the fruit of our labors.

Bless the work of our hands,

So that whatever we do reflects the radiance of your love.

Fill us with your Holy Spirit; guide our feet down paths of peace

So that what we say and do proclaims to all people the hope we have in Christ.

Benediction:

May Christ be near to defend you,
Within to refresh you,
Around to preserve you,
Beneath to support you,
Before to guide you
And above to bless you.
In the nearness of Christ,
May you know what it is to be whole
And dwell in peace. Amen



Janet Anstead is a seminarian and student pastor at the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregations in West Lorne and Ridgetown, Ontario. She lives in Mapleton, Ontario with her son and is a member of Mapleton Christian Church.



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Chalice Worship p. 392 – adapted.

Chalice Worship p. 403 – adapted.

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