

Text: Micah 5:2-5a (NIV84)

“But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times.” Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, you have filled us with the new light of the Word who became flesh and lived among us. Let the light of our faith shine in all that we do; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Alleluia. (Psalm 98:3b)

Sermon Text:

Peace is probably one of the more, if not the most elusive, words we have. Even talking about it leaves us a little speechless as we describe it. Most people will resort to discussing what peace isn't rather than what it is. It's not violence or war. It's not hatred or discord. It's the absence of anxiety or trouble.

The Hebrew language is a little different. The word for peace is Shalom (שָׁלוֹם). Shalom is not defined by what it lacks. Instead, Shalom carries the idea of completeness, safety, soundness. Everything in its place and a place for everything Shalom is perfect stability even in the face of all the “is nots” that we usually would use define the term. So a brick wall perfectly laid with no piece missing is shalom. A happy marriage where husband and wife love and honor one another is shalom. A country well protected and living in unity free to live in happiness is shalom.

But I suppose regardless of our definition, the question must still be asked, “How does one acquire this peace, this Shalom?” Micah provides the answer in his familiar Christmas prophecy. As he does, he gives us exactly what we are desperately looking for today as well.

Micah lives in a time of great political upheaval. In fact, if we keep reading in verse five, immediately after the word peace, comes the phrase “*when the Assyrian invades our land*”. Israel was a hotly contested territory along the fertile crescent. It's why Assyria will destroy the northern kingdom and why Babylon will eventually attack and deport the people of the south. Their own kings didn't help much, more worried about themselves and the power they could possess than the people or the promise which God had given. No doubt, believers would feel abandoned in such a climate, even like sheep harassed and helpless in a harsh and unforgiving place.

So God speaks through Micah, “*Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God.*” This worldly trouble is only temporary. It will not last forever. God will provide a shepherd for them, the Shepherd for them.

Of course, the Shepherd is one of the favorite pictures of the people of God. We think of the picture of the lonely shepherd watching the flock, guiding the flock from one pastureland to another. Through the gates of their pens to feed and back into them that they might rest securely.

But even more comforting is the job of Shepherd as protector. Psalm 23 speaks of the rod and the staff, the tools of the shepherd so often used to drive away the wild animals which sought to make a easy meal of the sheep, unaware of the danger which surrounded them as they grazed freely in their

pasturelands. The shepherd would stare down the wolves and any other enemies, placing himself between flock and foe in the process.

What a beautiful picture of our Savior Jesus. Into a world that is upside down because of turmoil, into a world that leaves its inhabitants feeling harassed and helpless, Jesus comes. Born into our troubles just like us, our great good Shepherd comes to help His people. He comes to guide us in His Word and to comfort us with His sacraments providing more than a how to book as we battle to stay alive in world full of foes and troubles. He comes to stand between us and them. Armed with the strength of God and the majesty of His name, He comes in perfection to do it all for us. He combats the wolves of our sin, the lion of Satan, and the sting of death. His stage is none other than the cross where He redeems His people and provides forgiveness from our sins and where we are forgiven, there God provides new life, in His strength He provides the strength to live anew each day for Him as we stand in the majesty of His name spelled out for us in His living and enduring Word and salvation purchased in His perfect life lived for us. Paid for in full as His precious blood is spilled on our behalf that in His resurrection our victory would be secured.

Consider then the way that Jesus speaks in the New Testament. In John 14:27 He reassures His disciples, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. (John 14:27)"* Paul will also say, *"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1)."* And again, *"For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. (Ephesians 2:14-18)"*

Of course, this knowledge is more than mere facts to be memorized. Micah tells us that because of the work our Shepherd does, His people *will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. And he will be their peace.* Security is another illusive word in our world today. No doubt with the Assyrian army roaming the countryside Israel felt anything but secure. In our day, a lack of security, whether because of the panic of pandemic or the fear of worldly foes, unrest, and rampant violence has left humanity raw and distraught. God reminds us His people need not fear. We are secure not because of the powers that be or the armies which protect our borders but because of the hope which is ours secured not because of human effort but by the strength of our God.

Such security cannot be lost with waning health anymore than it is powered by politics. It comes from one more ancient than time and wiser than worldly wisdom. He knows the outcomes before we are aware of the conflicts themselves and has already planned everything out for the good of His people. *"Our times are in His hands (Psalm 31:15)"*, exactly as the psalmist says. Nothing will ever wrestle them away. How could they? He has already conquered every enemy and every foe which could ever take them us.

The prayer of the Day along with our verse of the Day say it so very well, *"Almighty God, you have filled us with the new light of the Word who became flesh and lived among us. Let the light of our faith shine in all that we do; through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen."* So cry it out for all to hear, *"Alleluia. All the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God. Alleluia. (Psalm 98:3b)"*

Peace, that's a word that seems to have evaporated in the troubles of our world today. It's a word that our world yearns for but seldom sees. Of course, that shouldn't be overly surprising. After all peace is not something our world can provide. Today in that well known prophecy of the Micah, God quiets our anxiety and grants us completeness, safety, soundness. For you see, **JESUS IS OUR PEACE! HE WILL SHEPHERD HIS FLOCK. WE WILL LIVE SECURELY. Shalom! Amen!**