

Peace: The Gifted Vigilance

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Aliens visit Earth. They come in peace—and surprisingly, they speak perfect English! Naturally, the world’s leaders gather to meet them.

When it’s the Pope’s turn, he asks, “Do you know about our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ?” The alien smiles and says, “You mean JC? Sure we do! He’s the greatest! He visits every year to make sure we’re doing okay.” The Pope is shocked. “Every year?! It’s been over two thousand years, and we’re still waiting for his second coming!”

The alien pauses, puzzled, then says, “Huh... maybe he likes our chocolate better than yours?” The Pope, confused, asks, “Chocolates? What does that have to do with anything?” The alien shrugs and says, “When he first came to our planet, we gave him a huge box of chocolates. Why, what did you guys do?”

Humor aside, that story carries a sting of truth, doesn’t it? It pokes fun at how humanity has handled the gift of peace. Our world claims to want peace, prays for peace, even signs treaties in the name of peace—but we’re not very good at keeping it. If Christ were to look around today, would he find that we had cherished the peace he offered, or tossed it aside in our rush to argue, divide, and fight?

Today, on this Second Sunday of Advent, we light the candle of Peace; not a peace of stillness alone, but the kind Scripture calls *shalom*: a peace filled with justice, compassion, and right relationship. It is the peace that Christ both gives and invites us to guard vigilantly.

Psalms 72 begins, “*Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king’s son*” (v. 1). It’s a prayer for a ruler who governs not with domination, but with divine justice. The psalm pictures a world where “*peace may abound, until the moon is no more*” (v. 7).

This peace is not the result of military strength or social control. It comes from righteous leadership: defending the poor, rescuing the oppressed, and judging with fairness. Peace here is the fruit of justice, not the absence of war.

In the ancient world, kings often promised peace through power; through secure borders, ready armies, and crushed rebels. The Roman Empire famously called this the *Pax Romana*, “the peace of Rome.” But beneath that peace was violence: conquered peoples, crucified dissenters, and enslaved nations. It was a peace maintained by fear, not by love.

And later, in history’s irony, the world developed what some call *Pax Americana*—peace through dominance, treaties, and economy. Again, there is the illusion of peace, but not its fullness. True *shalom* cannot exist where inequality or violence remain unhealed. It can only flourish where righteousness, or right relationship, takes root.

So Psalm 72 paints an alternative kingdom: one built not on conquest but compassion, not on coercion but care. “*In his days may righteousness flourish,*” the psalmist prays, “*and peace abound.*” Peace requires righteousness to flourish—it requires vigilance.

In Romans 15, Paul speaks to divided believers—Jew and Gentile, insiders and outsiders—inviting them to live in harmony with one another. He points them toward the hope and peace that come from God alone, saying, “*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*” (v. 13).

Notice, again, peace is a gift. It is not a self-made achievement. It is poured into us “*by the power of the Holy Spirit.*” That’s what Advent reminds us of: peace begins as something God gives.

But that doesn’t mean it’s automatic. Paul tells believers to “*welcome one another, therefore, just as Christ has welcomed you*” (v. 7). That takes effort. It takes watchfulness. It takes patience—not a passive peace that sits back, but an active, attentive one that resists resentment and cultivates kindness.

This is where the title “Peace: The Gifted Vigilance” speaks beautifully. Peace is a gift—something we receive from God’s grace. But it also requires vigilance—a daily attentiveness to guard that peace in our homes, our relationships, our church, and our world.

We don't choose between gift and effort. We hold both. Divine peace is always gifted, but its endurance depends on human vigilance. Otherwise, even God's most precious gifts can slip through careless hands.

Perhaps one of the hardest truths of Scripture is realizing how often people settle for counterfeit peace.

Jeremiah lamented that leaders “*treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace.*” (Jeremiah 6:14). How contemporary that sounds!

We live in a time when we confuse calm with peace, silence with reconciliation, and tolerance with love. We strive for social stability but avoid personal transformation. We keep things “nice” rather than honest. Yet the peace God desires is never surface-deep; it reaches into the broken structures and strained relationships of life and calls them to wholeness.

That's where vigilance comes in. Real peace must be guarded by truth-telling. It must be nurtured by justice and repentance. It is not the comfort of avoidance; it is the courage of compassion.

That's what makes *Pax Romana* and *Pax Americana* so hollow in comparison. They maintain order through dominance, not discernment. Through surveillance, not service. But the peace Christ brings is fundamentally different: it is born in a manger, offered through forgiveness, and witnessed in the cross. That peace does not demand silence under empire; it invites harmony under grace.

So what does vigilance look like for us?

- It looks like catching bitterness before it hardens into resentment.
- It looks like noticing when we've tuned out the needs of our neighbors and then tuning back in.
- It looks like paying attention to what voices we amplify: fear or faith, cynicism or compassion.

Peace vigilance is not dramatic, but deliberate. It happens in quiet apologies, small acts of grace, and the courage to keep showing up for one another even when we disagree.

For our small congregation, vigilance might mean continuing to care for those who can't get to church, or checking on neighbors who live alone, or praying persistently when hope feels thin. In every case, vigilance is an act of love that guards the fragile gift of peace God has planted among us.

Peace needs gardeners, not guards; caretakers, not conquerors. And Advent calls us to be those gardeners—those who water the seeds of Christ's peace with prayer, with presence, and with trust.

Advent is our annual reminder that Christ does not leave us alone with our broken attempts at peace. Christ comes again—not from the stars like in that alien story, but from the heart of God—to gift us peace once more.

We may not be very good at keeping it, but Emmanuel keeps coming anyway. That is the astonishing grace of Advent: God entrusts peace again and again to human hands, believing we can learn to hold it more carefully this time.

And perhaps that's the challenge for this week: not simply to pray for peace, but to pray within peace—to live alertly, ready to mend what's torn, ready to forgive what's broken, ready to build bridges across divides. For the Christ we await is already at work among us, quietly restoring the world through our vigilance and love.

So this Advent, may we become watchers for the dawn of peace.

May we stay awake—not in anxiety, but in holy attentiveness—to the ways God's peace breaks in around us.

And when we find it, may we nurture it with our words and actions, our prayers and patience.

Peace is a gift.

But peace is also a calling.

Let's receive it with gratitude—and guard it with grace. Amen.