

## THE GIFT OF PEACE

Luke 1:26-38

This morning we are opening the 4<sup>th</sup> gift of Advent. If you recall, the first gift was hope, the second gift was the way and the third gift was joy. You might say that today's gift of peace is that gift we look for after all the gifts have been opened. Have you ever experienced the hope of receiving a certain gift from under the Christmas tree and after all the gifts have been opened you wonder where it is or why it isn't there?

As we find ourselves at the end of the season of Advent, let me share a story that begins at the time of David when he was dreaming of building a house for Yahweh. "The Walls of the Temple" brings up to the present day, questioning where we think God dwells now or where God is.

Once upon a time when David had been king for quite a while, when things were quiet in his domain and there were no battles to fight, he started dreaming every night. He dreamed that he would be taken to heaven and shown all the glories of that other world. He learned that that world was a mirror image of what this world below was supposed to be. And he saw a temple in heaven, in the heavenly Jerusalem, that he secretly decided to copy and build on earth to the glory of God. And so, every night he memorized another piece of the building, the architecture, and its surrounding environs.

And then he started building it in his city, Jerusalem. He gathered all the people of the nation together, and he told them of the dream and what they would all build together. They held a national lottery, and each of the

four groups drew lots for what portion of the temple they would construct. The priests chose first and got the south wall and the area where the Ark was kept behind its great curtain that hid it from the eyes of others. Next the princes chose, and they received the north wall and the pillars and staircases. The merchants were next, and they got the east wall the provision of oil for the lamps. Last, the poor got what was left, the west wall and the curtains of the temple. And work began.

Some of the groups went right to work. The priests collected money from the taxes of the people and their wealth and hired others to work on their wall. The princes gathered their excess jewelry and money and hired the best workers to build their wall. The merchants made deals, bargained and bartered, purchased their oil and the walls went up. The poor however, lagged way behind in their building because in addition to having to work on the other walls, they built their own wall themselves. But they did it with love and devotion, after they had worked all day or all week, and slowly it rose alongside the others. And finally the great temple was finished. It was dedicated to the Lord, and all gathered together to worship God in this magnificent place that they knew mirrored the one in the heavenly city of Jerusalem.

The poor were especially proud. Decades later, men would stand beside their children and grandchildren and point out a row of bricks, a segment of the wall, the whisper that they themselves had laid those bricks and that when they were children they had mixed the straw and mud and helped to build it. Mothers would stand beside the great curtain and show their daughters the finely detailed and tight stitching of yards and yards of

cloth that they had painstakingly sewed during the long hours of the night while others slept. They would tell them how they had made the cloth from flax and wool, cotton and silk threads, and how they had helped dye the cloth. It was the poor's temple as much if not more than all the others.

Centuries later the temple was destroyed, burned and ground down to a pile of stones. Only the western wall remained. It is said that God couldn't bear for that wall to be destroyed and sent the angels to spread their wings over it, shadowing it with their strength and protection. That was the wall most precious to God because it had been build by the hands and sweat, the devotion and suffering, of the poor themselves.

Today, this Wailing Wall is one of the holiest places in Jerusalem, and people come to pray there, longing for the dwelling place of God, looking for that gift they hoped would be under the Christmas tree ... for PEACE to be restored to the city. Those who finish praying do not turn their backs on the wall, but like the medieval reader of the Scriptures, bow and back away from it, often with tears in their eyes, hoping for a day when there will be a place of PEACE, a dwelling place for God on earth, not just in a rebuilt temple but in the hearts of all human beings. People say it is called the Wailing Wall not just because of the tears of the people who long for God's coming but because often in the early morning air the wall is wet with dew. They say that the dew is the tears of the angels who mourn the destruction of God's dwelling place among his children.

As Christians, we believe that God has restored the temple and that it is more beautiful than anything human hands could have fashioned, for now the Body of Christ is found in the bodies and faces of all those fashioned by God's hands. We should remember that all this happened because, once long ago, when God asked a favor, a young woman welcomed God into her womb, her heart, and the earth on behalf of her people Israel and all people for all times. Because of Mary's faith or trust in God's promises given to her people, we have the stuff of dreams to rely on, the flesh and blood of God, the dwelling place of God among us still. Now it is our turn to willingly say yes to God, to experience that PEACE that Mary found when she said yes to God! "... let it be with us according to your word." Amen.