

Sermon: *Peace's Light is Shining*
Text: *Isaiah 9:1 – 7*
Date: *December 6, 2009 AM*
Place: *Jesup First UMC*

Back in the early 80s, a godly, Christian couple started looking for the safest and most peaceful place on earth to retire, a place free of war and conflict. And finally, after much research and travel, they chose their paradise. And a few weeks later, they sent out Christmas cards from their new home ... on the Falkland Islands. Four months later, a conflict broke out between Argentina and England and their hopes for a peaceful retirement were shattered.

Harrison Ford is one of the most successful actors of our time. He has made a lot of movies and a lot of money for himself and for Hollywood. But one day, he was asked about his financial success and he said: *"You only want what you don't have."* The reporter said: *"Well, what don't you have?"* And he said: *"Peace."*

Perhaps the most common longing of humanity around the world is peace. We long for peace of mind, for peaceful relationships, for peaceful communities, and for a peaceful nation and world. But somehow peace often eludes us.

Israel knew what that was like. As they traveled through the wilderness toward the Promised Land, they had their share of conflict. And then, they battled the Philistines, the Canaanites, the Moabites, the Hittites and a lot of other "ites" for a homeland of their own. And just when peace seemed possible, along came the Egyptians and the Assyrians and the Babylonians. They wanted peace – in their hearts, in

their homes, and in their nation – but peace often eluded them.

But God had a messenger named Isaiah who spoke to them on behalf of God during their darkest hour. He said: *“The people walking in darkness have seen a great light, upon those living in the land of darkness has light shined ... for unto us a child is born; unto us a son is given and the government will rest upon his shoulders and he shall be called ... the Prince of Peace.”*

Sometimes I wonder about peace ... especially when I watch the news. There’s so much turmoil in the world. As a nation, we’re fighting two wars – one in Iraq and one in Afghanistan. And who knows what’s going to happen in Iran and Pakistan or Russia and China. Then, there’s conflict and violence on our streets and domestic violence and child abuse in our homes. And then, there’s this gnawing feeling, a sense of inner dis-ease, that causes us to lose sleep and worry. And yet, we say: *“Peace, Peace.”* It reminds me of Paul’s message: *“The Day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying ‘Peace, Peace,’ destruction will come upon them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman.”* And yet, the light of peace is shining this morning.

First, peace’s light shines through the forgiveness of sins. A Sunday School teacher said: *“Boys and girls, can anyone tell me what you’ve got to do before you can be forgiven of your sins?”* And the room fell silent. Then, suddenly, Little Susie raised her

hand and said: "*I know. I know.*" The teacher said: "*Yes, Susie.*" And Susie said: "*Sin!?*"

Well, brothers and sisters, we do enough of that, don't we? Paul told the church at Rome: "*All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" We sin and with sin, comes guilt and shame and a sense of alienation from God. There's a feeling that something isn't right, but through forgiveness, we receive peace. Ephesians 2 says: "*But now you have been united with Christ Jesus. Once you were far away from God, but now you have been brought near to Him through the blood of Christ. For Christ Himself has brought peace to you.*" On that night long ago, Jesus took the cup and said: "*Drink from this all of you. This is my blood of the new covenant poured out for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins.*"

The light of peace is shining today.

Second, peace's light shines through peacemakers. Have you ever noticed how many troublemakers there are in the world? They're everywhere ... except in Jesup, of course. I once knew a man who caused trouble everywhere he went. He was elected to the City Council and he caused problems. He was elected to the Hospital Authority and there was a fight. He was elected to the Church Council and the church split. I know we don't have anybody like this, but some people just aren't happy unless they can stir up a little trouble.

But thank God, there are some who seek peace and work for peace. Over and over, throughout the New Testament, we are commanded to "*live in peace.*"

When God's Spirit is at work, there is peace, for in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: "*Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God.*"

Yes, friends, the light of peace is shining today.

Third, peace's light shines through a united church. Now, wouldn't it be great – in this world of conflict and confrontation – if there was one place that was different ... if there was a place where hospitality was more important than hostility and sharing was more important than struggling?

Well, friends, I believe Jesus wants the church to be that place. He told His disciples: "*By this will everyone know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" A peaceful atmosphere draws people to the church. When the church is united in mission and ministry, it presents a witness to the community that says, "*There is a place for broken hearts,*" "*There is a place for broken families,*" "*There is a place for war-torn nations.*"

Yes, the church is that place. And when unity is a priority, the light of peace shines forth from the church.

So, what's happening in your life today? Are you struggling? Is there chaos and confusion in your heart, in your home, in your neighborhood? As we draw near to Christmas, we can celebrate the fact that God's peace is shining. Oh that we might put ourselves into a place where it can shine in us and through us to a hurting world.

Henry was happy with life and excited about the newly elected president, Abraham Lincoln. Then, in

July 1861, his wife's dress caught fire and when he tried to put out the fire with his hands, he was severely burned on his face and hands. That Christmas he wrote in his journal: "*How inexpressibly sad are the holidays.*" A year later, in the heat of the Civil War, he wrote: "*Merry Christmas say the children, but it is no more for me.*" Then, his son ran away and joined the Union Army and was badly wounded in battle. Then, in December 1864, Henry sat down and wrote his thoughts about Christmas:

I heard the bells on Christmas Day; their old familiar carols play
and wild and sweet the words repeat of peace on earth, good will to me.

Then, as if reminded of the pain and suffering of his life, he wrote a more somber verse:

And in despair I bowed my head; "There is no peace on earth," I said, for
hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth, good will to men.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow could have been writing about our day, for truly peace eludes us, but friends, Christmas is a reminder that peace's light is shining and deep inside Henry knew this and so he concludes his song:

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep: "God is not dead, nor does He
sleep." The wrong shall fail; the right prevail with peace on earth, good
will to men.

So ...

Shine, Jesus shine fill this land with the Father's glory.
Blaze, Spirit blaze set our hearts on fire.
Flow, River flow flood the nations with grace and mercy
Send forth your word, Lord and let there be light.