

Can You Hear the Angels? (Advent 4: Peace)

Micah 5:2-5a

² *But you, O Bethlehem of Ephrathah,
who are one of the little clans of Judah,
from you shall come forth for me
one who is to rule in Israel,
whose origin is from of old,
from ancient days.*

³ *Therefore he shall give them up until the time
when she who is in labour has brought forth;
then the rest of his kindred shall return
to the people of Israel.*

⁴ *And he shall stand and feed his flock in the strength of the Lord,
in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God.
And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great
to the ends of the earth;*

⁵ *and he shall be the one of peace.*

Luke 1:46b-55

⁴⁶ *And Mary said,*

'My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ *and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour,*

⁴⁸ *for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant.*

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ *for the Mighty One has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.*

⁵⁰ *His mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.*

⁵¹ *He has shown strength with his arm;
he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.*

⁵² *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,
and lifted up the lowly;*

⁵³ *he has filled the hungry with good things,
and sent the rich away empty.*

⁵⁴ *He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,*

⁵⁵ *according to the promise he made to our ancestors,
to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.'*

Introducing the Theme: Love (Advent 4)

- **Each week of Advent in the lead up to Xmas we have pondered each theme of advent and ask the following question**
- **Can You Hear the Angels? Messages We Need To Hear Today**
- **Angels literally means message bearers and in this Advent Xmas season may I invite us to take up three points of view from which we will ask ourselves**
 - **Look Up! What're the messages of peace we need to hear this Advent Xmas season**
 - **Look In! How are the messages of peace landing for you this Advent Xmas season**

- **Look Out! Which messages of peace are worth sharing this Advent Xmas season**
- **To set the scene I invite you to reflect with the images of peace culminating with Hiroshima Peace Cathedral stain glass windows of Jesus life**
- **Interspersed with the 20 lessons from the book I mentioned in Advent 1 by Tim Snyder *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the 20th Century***

Book: *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the 20th Century* (Tim Snyder)

1. Do not obey in advance. **Most of the power of authoritarianism is freely given. In times like these, individuals think ahead about what a more repressive government will want, and then offer themselves without being asked. A citizen who adapts in this way is teaching power what it can do.**
2. Defend institutions. **It is institutions that help us to preserve decency. They need our help as well. Do not speak of "our institutions" unless you make them yours by acting on their behalf. Institutions do not protect themselves. So choose an institution you care about and take its side.**
3. Beware the one-party state. **The parties that remade states and suppressed rivals were not omnipotent from the start. They exploited a historic moment to make political life impossible for their opponents. So support the multi-party system and defend the rules of democratic elections.**
4. Take responsibility for the face of the world. **The symbols of today enable the reality of tomorrow. Notice the swastikas and other signs of hate. Do not look away, and do not get used to them. Remove them yourself and set an example for others to do so.**
5. Remember professional ethics. **When political leaders set a negative example, professional commitments to just practice become important. It is hard to subvert a rule-of-law state without lawyers, or to hold show trials without judges. Authoritarians need obedient civil servants, and concentration camp directors seek businessmen interested in cheap labour.**
6. Be wary of paramilitaries. **When the men with guns who have always claimed to be against the system start wearing uniforms and marching around with torches and pictures of a Leader, the end is nigh. When the pro-leader paramilitary and the official police and military intermingle, the end has come.**
7. Be reflective if you must be armed. **If you carry a weapon in public service, God bless you and keep you. But know that evils of the past involved policemen and soldiers finding themselves, one day, doing irregular things. Be ready to say no.**
8. Stand out. **Someone has to. It is easy to follow along. It can feel strange to do or say something different. But without that unease, there is no freedom. Remember Rosa Parks. The moment you set an example, the spell of the status quo is broken, and others will follow.**
9. Be kind to our language. **Avoid pronouncing the phrases everyone else does. Think up your own way of speaking, even if only to convey that thing you think everyone is saying. Make an effort to separate yourself from the internet. Read books.**
10. Believe in truth. **To abandon facts is to abandon freedom. If nothing is true, then no one can criticize power because there is no basis upon which to do so. If nothing is true, then all is spectacle. The biggest wallet pays for the most blinding lights.**
11. Investigate. **Figure things out for yourself. Spend more time with long articles. Subsidize investigative journalism by subscribing to print media. Realize that some of what is on the internet is there to harm you. Learn about sites that investigate propaganda campaigns (some of which come from abroad). Take responsibility for what you communicate to others.**
12. Make eye contact and small talk. **This is not just polite. It is part of being a citizen and a responsible member of society. It is also a way to stay in touch with your surroundings, break down social barriers, and understand whom you should and should not trust. If we enter a culture of denunciation, you will want to know the psychological landscape of your daily life.**
13. Practice corporeal politics. **Power wants your body softening in your chair and your emotions dissipating on the screen. Get outside. Put your body in unfamiliar places with unfamiliar people. Make new friends and march with them.**
14. Establish a private life. **Nastier rulers will use what they know about you to push you around. Scrub your computer of malware. Remember that email is skywriting. Consider using alternative forms of the Internet, or simply using it less. Have personal exchanges in person. For the same reason, resolve any legal trouble.**

15. Contribute to good causes. **Be active in organizations, political or not, that express your own view of life. Pick a charity or two and set up autopay.**
16. Learn from peers in other countries. **Keep up your friendships abroad, or make new friends abroad. The present difficulties in the United States are an element of a larger trend. And no country is going to find a solution by itself. Make sure you and your family have passports.**
17. Listen for dangerous words. **Be alert to the use of the words *extremism* and *terrorism*. Be alive to the fatal notions of *emergency* and *exception*. Be angry about the treacherous use of patriotic vocabulary.**
18. Be calm when the unthinkable arrives. **Modern tyranny is terror management. When the terrorist attack comes, remember that authoritarians exploit such events in order to consolidate power. Do not fall for it.**
19. Be a patriot. **Set a good example of what America means for the generations to come.**
20. Be as courageous as you can. **If none of us is prepared to die for freedom, then all of us will die under tyranny.**

Introduction

- **As humans we can struggle to imagine the small print of things before they become big print and overwhelm us**
- **Carton: Evil and Paperwork (26 October 2024 *New Scientist*)**



- **Today in Advent 4 looking at peace: Can you have peace without violence?**
- **Who would have thought that peace involved so much complicated work?**
- **Illustration: Mouse Metropolis (14 December 2024 *New Scientist*)**
 Biologist Bumpass Calhoun conducted an experiment with mice living in a utopian environment. He placed four rodent couples in a mouse paradise where each had their own apartment, food on tap and a roof top water supply. With no predators or disease the colony got off to a flying start growing rapidly in number. However this initial burst of prosperity was replaced with a collapse in normal behaviour. Growing numbers spent most of their time grooming themselves, eating and shunning social interactions becoming capable of only the simplest behaviours. Firstly they developed *pathological togetherness* gathering around just a few feeders and leaving others full. Then as the population began to crash the colony degenerated into rodent hell full of males that where hyper-aggressive or listless lacking reproductive drive alongside females that display almost no maternal care! Soon the colony degenerated to extinction.

- **Now I know that John troubled us a few weeks ago with his notion MUC is a kind of utopian religious zoo safe from the secular killing zone and rock 'n' religion**
- **I hope that we will talk more about MUC the Zoo as a safe place for our like which has some good but ultimately maybe not during 2025 – but today is a day on peace**
- **Peace is a big idea and tricky social construction fraught with many trip wires and unexpected consequences ready to confront us! So it is in Hebraic-Christian view**

Peace in the Scriptures

- **In Micah we know that peace was seen through the lens of theocratic nationhood that involved wars, ruling, imperial aspirations and imperial occupation!**
- **Micah looks to a time when these mixed metaphors will be behind them in the hope that God is going to provide one who will bring peace – the One**
- **In Luke we hear Mary describing how these hopes arrive in the baby Jesus – who will bring peace by turning the tables on those who traditionally wielded violence**
- **The Hebraic- Christian tradition affirms that peace with God is the beginning of peace for all – the way of love: love God love neighbour**
- **What is the peace that Jesus brings?**
 - **It is theological peace with God now and into the future**
 - **It is an ethical peace where the way of love is love God and love Neighbour**
 - **It is a political peace where violence of the powerful is overturned**
 - **It is a hopeful peace where violence turns to resurrection**
- **Which still begs the question: Can you have peace without violence?**
- **It is hard to make sense of Jesus the Christ, the One, without working your way through the violence narratives of the Hebraic-Christian tradition**
- **Peace in the Hebraic-Christian tradition is not the absence of war but what comes after or even through the war**
- **the baby Jesus ran headlong into imperial power and was crushed**
- **Advent is a season to work out and hear what that message means for us today**

Evolutionary Theology

- **Humans have been trying to make sense of violence from the beginning of their evolutionary survival and development**

- **Illustration: Survival of the Wittiest (14 December 2024 *New Scientist*)**

The linguist Progovac suggests for a range of linguistic and evolutionary reasons the first words spoken combination of words may have been to insult one another!

Why? At some point humans went through a process of self-domestication. Where being less aggressive was an evolutionary benefit. People who befriended rather than fought allowed more cooperation amongst and between human groups. The survival of the friendliest!

Of course this did not stop competition for social rank. Progovac suggests that language in the form of witty insults replaced physical fighting as a weapon in this competition. Language is used to form coalitions and gain status. We know that men

use language more creatively when in the presence of attractive women or male competitors. We know that women are receptive to humour initiated by men but that men are not as receptive to humour initiated by women. Survival of the huffiest!

Witty insults are often used to reinforce social bonds rather than attack rivals. Insults are like *play fighting* – where trust grows and allows banter that avoids offence. We know that we are more caring of people that we trust. Survival of the wittiest!

- **So can you have peace without violence?**
- **In the baby Jesus – where violence is an occupational hazard of being human – God shows the way from violence to peace**
- **violence is not the end of the story but through the baby Jesus there is a new beginning to the story**
- **message of the angels in Advent is that the crushing is not the end of peace but the gift of new kind of peace that does not rely on violence to keep it**
- **whatever one makes of the violence in the life and death of Jesus the theological concept of atonement – that peace with God is humanity's first obligation**
- **this concept of atonement - not being at war with God – is the Hebraic-Christian tradition trying to make sense of the violence – which aims to offer peace with God**
- **a peace offered in and through a violent political execution of Jesus that somehow offers the peace of God to all of us and all of the world**
- **we can get uncomfortable at some of the language and concepts but I would suggest that the best atonement approaches offer a number of denials**
 - **violence is not desired or essential to the God of Jesus**
 - **violence is not desired or essential to follow the God of Jesus**
 - **peace is more than the absence of violence but what comes after the violence**

Conclusion

- **yet we live in a world where we still use violence, rely on violence, are terrorised by violence despite all the paperwork!**
- **Video: I'm Just Here For The Riot (30 For 30 #1)**

After the game seven 2011 Stanley Cup finals loss to the Boston Bruins sparked a massive riot in downtown Vancouver. Police cars were overturned and burned, windows shattered, stores were looted, and waves of young people were caught in the mayhem.
- **Video: I'm Just Here For The Riot (30 For 30 #2)**

Of course all of it was caught on people's phones posted by the participants of the riot!
- **Video: I'm Just Here For The Riot (30 For 30 #3)**

Vancouver and British Columbia already had a long and unfortunate history of public events (Sea Festival, Kelowna Regatta, Penticton Peach Festival) that were permanently shelved due to mass drunken disruptions. There was also the infamous 1994 Cup riot and the attempt to riot during the Olympics. This time it was different...
- **What are the angels saying – what is the message we need to hear this Advent?**

- **Sure there is violence but the God of Jesus allows us to be celebrate not the violence or even its benefits but as followers of Jesus we have peace with God**
- **As followers of a Prince of Peace that is not crushed by the riot we worship this God of Jesus who turns up with us after the riot to clean up**
- **One day we may be the rioters but the next day as followers of Jesus who offers peace with God we're invited to join the clean-up – a message of peace for all to hear**