

## The One of Peace

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Richmond Heights, Ohio

The Fourth Sunday of Advent  
December 20, 2009

Micah 5:2-5a; Hebrews 10:1-10; Luke 1:39-56

“And they shall live secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth; and he shall be the one of peace.” -- Micah 5:5

My mother had an expression she would sometimes use to warn my sisters that what they were wearing was inappropriate. She'd say, “You'll get a reputation wearing that,” and in our little town in southern Indiana, the last thing a girl wanted was a reputation. Girls who had reputations didn't have good ones, so it was better for a girl to be invisible than for her to have a visible reputation.

Some things have changed in the forty or so years since my mother was warning my sisters to protect their reputations, but the importance of reputations hasn't. Reputations for most of us still matter, and although a lot of us say we don't care what other people think, in fact we live our lives very much aware of and concerned for the good opinions of others. Other people's opinions of us do matter because we're social as well as individual creatures, and we all have social identities as well as individual identities, and our reputations are nothing more than our social identities. And it is with our social identities, rather than our individual identities, that the world largely interacts.

Now I realize, of course, that many of us don't think much about our reputations because we don't often remember that we have a reputation, good or bad. A reputation is something we think other people – more important people – have. Bill Clinton has a reputation; Donald Trump has a reputation; Oprah Winfrey has a reputation; Tiger Woods has a reputation. But you and I – we're just us. We aren't grand enough to have a reputation. We just have who we are. Or so we think.

But a reputation isn't one of life's options; it comes with the product. Because we are born into a world of other people, and spend the rest of our lives interacting with those people, we have a reputation whether we want one or not. Our reputation is like our fingerprint – we've all got one. In fact, that's pretty much what our reputation is; it's our social fingerprint. It's the impression we leave every time we touch the world into which God and our parents have brought us. It's an inescapable part of us, more visible to others than to ourselves. Our reputation isn't simply what others think of us; it's what others think of us based on how we interact with them and the world around us – how we speak to them, what time we spend with them, how and whether we listen to them, how we care for them and for the earth, how we talk about people present and absent – those are the things that form our reputation. In the vast majority of cases, people mirror back to us the behavior we display toward them, and people who complain that the world is a miserable place are often looking into the mirror the world is holding up to them and they don't like what they see.

The text for this morning's sermon is about a reputation, specifically, the reputation of the one the prophet Micah foresaw as the great deliverer of Israel and all people, a deliverer sent from God to save the chosen people and all people from the troubles that were destroying them. Some of those troubles were inflicted from the outside, but many of those troubles were self-inflicted, and the one promised by God would deliver the people from both.

Here's what Micah says about that deliverer: "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; and he shall be the one of peace."

"The one of peace." If you've ever had a nickname, you know that you got it for a reason, and the figure Micah is describing here will be called the one of peace for a reason. Not because the people wanted peace. Not because the leader talked about peace. Not because the leader promised peace.

No, the one of peace was exactly what his name said he was – of peace. His life was a life of peace, and through that life he was able to bring peace to those around him. It was his life that was the vehicle that brought peace – not his words about peace, not his prayers to God for peace, not his exhortations to the people to put more peace in their lives; but his everyday, ordinary lifestyle of peace. That's what gave the one of peace his reputation, and that's what brought peace to those so desperate for it.

Centuries after Micah predicted the birth of this deliverer in Bethlehem, a baby was born there who grew up and acquired a reputation – a reputation as a healer and teacher, but especially as one who brought through his healing, teaching, and living that which people wanted even more than those things – he brought peace.

Jesus didn't become, in Isaiah's words, the prince of peace merely because he preached peace; lots of people have done that and lots of people do it still. He became the prince of peace because he lived peace in every single thing he did. He brought peace in the choices he made about his family. He brought peace in the choices he made about money and things. He brought peace in the choices he made about conflict. He brought peace in the choices he made about his friends and associates. He brought peace in the choices he made about his religion.

Jesus brought peace because he lived peace. He brought peace because he was the one of peace. All those little day-to-day actions that we think don't matter – Jesus taught us by the way he lived that they do. The one of peace taught us that how we live as individuals and how we live in groups determines whether we bring peace or strife, prosperity or suffering, healing or pain.

Those of peace don't merely want peace; they make peace. They touch the world gently and kindly, with understanding and wisdom and grace, and the fingerprint they leave behind marks them and the world for eternity.

So what mark are you leaving on the world? What's the reputation you've spent a lifetime building along with your business or your family or your career? Will you be one of the rare ones of the earth who actually brought peace in your time, or will you be like the millions and billions who wanted peace and waited for someone else to bring it?

The book group recently read Greg Mortenson's book, *Three Cups of Tea*, and while it's true that Mortenson was driven by the consuming passion to bring peace through education, it's not true that the rest of us can't do that. Yes we can. Yes, each and every one of us can devote ourselves to the cause of peace with the same single-minded passion Mortenson devoted to building schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Nothing's stopping us except ourselves. God has put the divine spark of love in each and every one of us, and that's all it takes to warm a cold and frightened and angry world.

In this Christmas season, don't worship the One of Peace; *be* the one of peace. Don't put the baby Jesus safely in the manger long ago and far away; open the doors and windows of your heart and let, as Phillips Brooks says in his carol, "the dear Christ enter in."

In this season celebrating the One of Peace, celebrate the season, for sure; rejoice in the message, certainly; promote the things he stood for, without a doubt. But above all, *be* the season and *be* the reason to celebrate. For Jesus' sake. Amen.