

Advent Lessons Through the Music of Earth, Wind and Fire

Week Two: Peace




In this second week of Advent, we explore the element of Earth and the gift of peace. Just as the ground beneath our feet provides stability and nurtures new growth, God's peace roots us deeply and brings forth transformation even in seasons of uncertainty. Through devotion and trust, we discover a peace that steadies our hearts and anchors our spirits.



ADVENT REFLECTIONS
THROUGH THE SUNDAY
MUSIC OF 11AM



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Opening Reflection

A Call to Devotion

The invitation rings clear: "Let me encourage you, start living your life in devotion." These words call us into a deeper way of being, one where our spiritual roots grow strong and our commitment to God becomes the foundation for everything else. Devotion is not merely a feeling or a fleeting moment of connection. It is a daily practice, a spiritual discipline that anchors us when life threatens to uproot our peace.

As we enter this season of waiting and preparation, we are invited to consider how devotion shapes our experience of peace. What does it mean to live devotionally during Advent? How might our commitment to God steady us when the ground beneath us feels uncertain?

Questions for Reflection

How does Earth teach us about peace? The soil holds seeds through winter's darkness, nurturing them until the time is right for growth. Earth absorbs what falls upon it, filters what passes through it, and brings forth life in its proper season. In the same way, God's peace works within us, transforming chaos into wholeness.

How does devotion steady us when life feels unstable? Like roots that dig deep into the ground, devotion anchors our spirits in God's unchanging presence. When circumstances shift and certainty fades, our devoted relationship with the Divine becomes the solid ground beneath our feet.

Today's Scripture Journey

Isaiah 11:1-11 (NRSVUE) and John 14:27 (NRSVUE)

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 11:1-11 (NRSVUE)



The Stump of Jesse

"A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots." Even what appears dead holds the promise of new life.



The Peaceable Kingdom

"The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid." God's peace transforms natural enemies into companions.



Peace Rooted in Justice

The coming One judges with righteousness and equity, bringing wholeness to the poor and meek. True peace cannot exist without justice.

This passage reveals that peace is not simply the absence of conflict. It is the active presence of God's justice, bringing harmony where there was once hostility. The image of the stump reminds us that God specializes in bringing life from places that looked finished, growth from what seemed beyond hope. The Earth element teaches us this truth: new life emerges from what once looked dead, and peace grows from the ground of God's righteousness.

Commentary on Isaiah 11:1-11



Historical Setting

The prophet Isaiah spoke these words during a time of deep political and spiritual instability in Judah. The nation faced threats from powerful empires, internal corruption weakened their social fabric, and the people lived with the constant fear of collapse. Leadership had failed them repeatedly. The monarchy that once seemed so strong now appeared fragile and compromised. In this context of anxiety and uncertainty, Isaiah dared to speak a word of hope.

01

The Stump Symbolizes Endings

When a tree is cut down to a stump, it appears finished. The monarchy of David's line seemed cut off, reduced to nothing more than a memory of former glory. Yet God works precisely in these places of apparent ending.

03

Peace Does Not Erase Conflict

Notice that the wolf does not cease to be a wolf, nor does the lamb become anything other than a lamb. Their natures remain, but their relationship is transformed. God's peace does not deny difference or difficulty.

02

The Shoot Symbolizes God's Unexpected Beginnings

From the stump, new life emerges. God's promise is not to restore what was, but to bring forth something new and transformative. This shoot represents the Messiah, the one who will embody God's justice and peace in unexpected ways.

04

Peace Transforms Conflict From the Ground Up

This transformation happens because of the character and Spirit of the coming One. Peace flows from righteousness, equity, and faithfulness. It grows organically, like a plant from good soil, changing relationships and structures from their very roots.

Earth Insight

Peace is planted. It does not appear instantly or magically. Like seeds in soil, peace requires time, the right conditions, and patient cultivation. It grows from the ground of devotion and justice, sending roots deep before it ever shows fruit above the surface. The Earth teaches us that transformation is often slow, hidden, and organic, but it is real and enduring.

Scripture Reading: John 14:27 (NRSVUE)

Peace I Leave With You

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

John 14:27 (NRSVUE)

A Peace That Steadies

Jesus offers a peace that functions like solid ground beneath uncertain feet. This is not a peace dependent on circumstances aligning perfectly or problems disappearing. It is a peace rooted in His presence, steadying the spirit even when external conditions remain chaotic.

Not Performative or Fragile

The peace of the world requires constant maintenance and protection. It depends on controlling our environment, managing others' perceptions, and maintaining comfortable circumstances. Christ's peace requires none of this. It exists independent of external validation or temporary comfort.

An Anchor for the Spirit

When everything else trembles, when fear threatens to overwhelm, when the future looks uncertain, this peace holds. It anchors the heart to something deeper and more reliable than any earthly security. Like roots that grip the soil during a storm, this peace keeps us grounded in God's faithfulness.

Guiding Question for Reflection

How do we receive this grounding peace from Christ during chaotic seasons? What practices, postures, or perspectives open us to experience the peace that "passes all understanding"? How might we cultivate the soil of our hearts to allow this peace to take root deeply?

Commentary on John 14:27

The Context of Farewell

Jesus speaks these words during what scholars call the Farewell Discourse, recorded in John chapters 14 through 17. This extended teaching comes during the Last Supper, in the hours before His arrest and crucifixion. The disciples are anxious, uncertain, and deeply afraid of what is coming. They sense that something significant is about to change, though they do not fully understand what. Jesus knows He is leaving them, at least in physical form, and He offers them not answers to all their questions, but peace for their troubled hearts.

Notice what Jesus does not promise in this moment. He does not promise ease. He does not promise that their lives will become comfortable or safe. He does not promise that following Him will protect them from suffering, loss, or difficulty. Instead, He promises presence. He promises the gift of peace that comes from knowing they are not abandoned, even when He is no longer physically with them. He promises the Holy Spirit, the Advocate who will guide and comfort them.

Key Insights

- **Not the Absence of Struggle**

Christ's peace coexists with difficulty, challenge, and even suffering. It is not an escape from reality but a grounding presence within reality. This peace enables us to face what we must face without being destroyed by it.

- **A Grounding Presence**

This peace holds us when circumstances shift beneath us. Like the earth that remains solid even during a storm, Christ's peace provides stability when everything else feels uncertain. It anchors us in relationship with the Divine.

- **The World's Peace Versus Christ's Peace**

The world offers peace that depends on control, comfort, and favorable circumstances. Jesus offers peace rooted in relationship, trust, and the abiding Spirit. One is fragile and temporary. The other is resilient and eternal.

📖 **Element Connection: Earth**

Earth steadies the body by providing solid ground beneath our feet. We walk upon it, build upon it, plant into it, and trust it to hold us. In the same way, Christ's peace steadies the heart. It settles the spirit the way solid ground settles shaky feet. When anxiety rises like floodwaters, this peace becomes the higher ground to which we flee. When fear threatens to sweep us away, this peace becomes the rock to which we cling.

Reflection Question

What part of your life needs the grounding peace Jesus gives in this moment? Where do you feel most unsteady, most anxious, most in need of solid ground beneath you? How might you open yourself to receive the peace that Christ offers, the peace that does not depend on your circumstances changing but on His presence remaining constant?

Devotion and Peace

Living in Devotion

"Devotion... bless the children, deliver the babies." This call to devotion extends beyond personal piety. It encompasses care for the vulnerable, commitment to the next generation, and participation in God's work of deliverance and blessing. Devotion is both deeply personal and profoundly communal.

A Devoted Life Is Rooted

Devotion sends spiritual roots deep into the soil of God's love and faithfulness. These roots anchor us when storms come, when doubts arise, when external pressures threaten to uproot our peace. A devoted life is not easily shaken because it draws nourishment from a source deeper than circumstances.

Immovable Yet Growing

Devotion makes us immovable in our commitment to God, yet constantly growing in our understanding and practice of faith. Like a tree that stands firm while its branches reach ever outward and upward, devotion provides both stability and expansion. We are planted deep in God's purposes, growing toward God's light.

A Spiritual Posture

Devotion is not merely an emotion or a series of religious activities. It is a posture of the whole self toward God. It is the orientation of our hearts, the direction of our attention, the priority we give to our relationship with the Divine. This posture cultivates peace because it reminds us continually where our true security lies.

Discussion Questions

- **What does devotion look like during Advent?** How might this season of waiting and preparation deepen our devoted relationship with God? What practices or rhythms might help us cultivate devotion during these weeks?
- **How does devotion anchor your spirit?** Can you identify moments when your devotion to God provided stability during difficult times? How did that devotion manifest? What difference did it make?
- **Where does devotion interrupt anxiety?** In what areas of your life does anxiety most frequently appear? How might devoted attention to God's presence and promises interrupt those anxious patterns? What would it look like to choose devotion over worry in those moments?

Keep Your Head to the Sky



Grounded and Lifted

The call to "keep your head to the sky" captures a profound truth about the nature of peace in the life of faith. Peace is both grounded and lifted. It is not one or the other, but both simultaneously. Earth keeps your feet steady, providing the stability you need to stand firm. Sky keeps your eyes lifted, reminding you of horizons beyond your immediate circumstances. Together, they create a posture of faithful resilience.

This is not a call to ignore reality or to escape into spiritual fantasy. It is a call to maintain perspective, to remember that your current struggle is not the whole story, to trust that God's purposes extend beyond what you can see in this moment. It is a call to stand firm in your faith while remaining open to hope.



Earth: Stability

Your feet remain planted on solid ground. You do not deny the reality of your circumstances or pretend that difficulties do not exist. You stand where you are, in full awareness of what is.



Sky: Vision

Your eyes lift toward broader horizons. You refuse to let your current situation define the limits of possibility. You remember God's faithfulness, trust God's promises, and hope for God's future.



Faith: Posture

Faith becomes a posture of the whole person, grounded yet hopeful, realistic yet expectant. This posture enables you to face difficulty without being crushed by it, to acknowledge pain without being consumed by despair.

Peace Is Resistance

In a world that constantly generates fear and despair, peace becomes an act of resistance. To maintain peace in your heart when everything around you encourages anxiety is to resist the powers that profit from your fear. To keep your head to the sky when the world tells you to keep your eyes on your problems is to resist the narrative that circumstances are ultimate. Peace is not escape. Peace is resistance against fear and despair. It is a spiritual defiance that says, "You will not steal my joy. You will not rob me of hope. You will not convince me that God has abandoned this world or forgotten me." This kind of peace requires courage, devotion, and a deep trust in God's faithfulness.

Discussion Questions

Take time to reflect deeply on these questions, either individually or in community. Allow them to surface honest thoughts and feelings. There are no wrong answers, only opportunities for growth and understanding.

1 Where Does Peace Feel Like a Stump?

Where in your life does peace feel like a stump, something cut down or seemingly dead? What areas of your experience feel beyond hope of restoration? What relationships, dreams, or situations appear finished? Take time to name these honestly before God.

2 Where Might God Be Growing a New Shoot?

Looking at those same areas, where might God be growing a new shoot? What small signs of life, what unexpected possibilities, what tender green growth might you be overlooking? How might God be working in ways you did not expect or would not have chosen?

3 Peace Not as the World Gives

How have you experienced peace "not as the world gives"? When have you known a peace that did not make sense given your circumstances? What made that peace different from the temporary calm that comes from favorable conditions? How did you recognize it as Christ's peace?

4 Practices of Devotion

What practices keep you grounded in devotion? What spiritual disciplines, rhythms, or habits anchor your relationship with God? When life becomes chaotic, what helps you return to center? What might you need to add, change, or let go of in order to cultivate deeper devotion?

5 Peace and Justice

How might peace lead you into justice rather than silence? Isaiah's vision of peace includes equity for the poor and righteousness for the meek. How does Christ's peace compel us toward justice work? Where might God be calling you to participate in the work of peace that transforms conflict rather than ignoring it?

These questions are designed to move us from passive observation to active participation in God's work of peace. They invite us to examine our lives honestly, to notice where God is already at work, and to consider how we might partner with the Spirit in cultivating peace that transforms.

Communal Activity: Peace Visualization

Reimagining the Peaceable Kingdom

Isaiah 11:6,9 (NRSVUE) paints a vivid picture of God's peaceable kingdom: "The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them... They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." This vision challenges us to imagine peace not as fantasy, but as God's future taking root in the present.

01

Rewrite Isaiah 11:6,9

Using contemporary language and imagery from your own context, rewrite this passage. What would the peaceable kingdom look like in your community? Who are the natural enemies that would need to dwell together? What conflicts would need to be transformed? Be specific and honest.

02

Draw or Describe Your Vision

Using words, images, or a combination of both, create a representation of your peaceable kingdom. You might draw a literal picture, write a detailed description, compose a poem, or create a collage. Use Earth imagery such as gardens, fields, restored landscapes, or growing things.

03

Share and Discuss

If you are in a group, take turns sharing what you created. What patterns emerge? What common hopes appear? What differences in vision arise? How do these visions challenge or encourage us?

Purpose of This Activity

The purpose of this exercise is to imagine peace not as fantasy but as God's future taking root in the present. We are not escaping into wishful thinking, but rather allowing Scripture to expand our imagination about what God might do. We are practicing hope, which is the spiritual discipline of envisioning God's preferred future and then living as if it is already breaking into our present. This kind of imagination is not frivolous. It is prophetic. It enables us to see beyond what is to what could be, and in seeing, to participate in bringing that future into being.

As you engage in this activity, pay attention to what emotions arise. Does imagining peace bring joy, longing, skepticism, hope? All of these responses are valid. Let them inform your prayers and your engagement with God's ongoing work of peace in the world.

Closing Word

God's Peace Is Transformation

As we conclude this week's reflection on peace, carry this truth with you: God's peace is not escapism. It is transformation. It does not remove us from the challenges and complexities of life. Instead, it roots us deeply enough, grounds us firmly enough, and steadies us completely enough to face those challenges with courage and hope.

Rooted

Like a strong tree with roots that reach deep into good soil, you are rooted in God's faithfulness. Your peace does not depend on circumstances aligning perfectly. It grows from your connection to the Source of all life and love.

Growing

Peace is not static. It grows you, matures you, and develops you into the person God created you to be. Through devotion and trust, you become increasingly capable of bearing fruit even in difficult seasons.

Steadied

When winds blow and storms rage, when uncertainty threatens and fear whispers, you are steadied by the peace that Christ gives. This peace prepares you for the work ahead, work that requires both groundedness and vision.

Benediction

May you leave here rooted like a strong tree, grounded in devotion, and held by the peace that lifts your head and steadies your heart.

May the peace of Christ, which passes all understanding, guard your hearts and minds. May the Earth beneath your feet remind you of God's faithful stability. May the sky above your head remind you of God's limitless possibilities. And may you walk forward into this Advent season with the confidence that comes from being deeply planted in God's unchanging love.

Go in peace. Keep your head to the sky. Live in devotion. Trust that God is bringing new shoots from old stumps, and that you are part of that miraculous work of transformation.

Amen.

Next Week Preview

Week Three: Joy



Element Theme

Fire - The transforming, purifying, and illuminating power that brings warmth, light, and joy. Fire dances, celebrates, and refuses to be contained.



Scripture Focus

Zephaniah 3:14-20 (NRSVUE) - "Sing aloud, O daughter Zion, shout, O Israel! Rejoice and exult with all your heart, O daughter Jerusalem!"



Song Connection

September - A celebration of joy, memory, and the moments that make us come alive. How does joy sustain us through seasons of waiting?

Looking Ahead

If peace is the ground beneath our feet, joy is the fire that warms our hearts and lights our way forward. Next week, we will explore how joy functions as spiritual resistance, how it emerges even in difficult circumstances, and how it prepares us for the coming of Christ. We will consider the difference between happiness and joy, and how God's joy becomes our strength.

As you move through this week, pay attention to moments of unexpected joy. Notice what brings warmth to your spirit, what makes you want to celebrate, what ignites hope in your heart. These small flames are hints of the great fire of joy that God desires to kindle within us.

- 📖 **Preparation for Next Week:** Read Zephaniah 3:14,20. Reflect on a time when you experienced deep joy despite difficult circumstances. What sustained that joy? How did it affect your perspective and your actions? Bring these reflections with you as we gather again to explore the element of Fire and the gift of Joy.