



***Theme: Peace by Piece – Advent 2020***  
***“Straight Up Peace in a Broken-Down World”***

Sermon preached by Jeff Huber

December 5-6, 2020

**Weekly Memory Verse:**

***<sup>8</sup> I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying,  
for he speaks peace to his faithful people.***

■ *Psalm 85:8*

**Scripture Readings:**

Psalm 85:1-2, 8-13 and Mark 1:1-8 and Luke 3:10-14

**VIDEO      Sermon Bumper**

**SLIDE      “Straight Up Peace in a Broken-Down World”**

My name is Jeff Huber and I’m Lead Pastor at Summit Church and we are so glad you have joined us for this time of worship. This year many of us **got a break** if we are honest. Normally, we might have people over for **Thanksgiving or Christmas** and **what do you typically do** the day before people arrive? We clean! Sometimes, **we clean like crazy!** This season of Advent, the four weeks before we get to Christmas, is about **getting ready for the coming of Christ**. We realize that Jesus has **already come** when the baby was born in Bethlehem, so we are celebrating his arrival and at the

same time we **anticipate that one day Jesus will come again**. Jesus might come in the glorious **second coming** for it might be in the moment that we **die**. None of us knows when that is going to happen, so **Advent is about remembering** that we are supposed to be getting **ready** for that moment. I have been a pastor long enough to do numerous **funerals** for people who left their house in the morning not knowing they would never return in the afternoon or evening because they died that day, to know that **none of us know the day or time** that we will leave this earth and take our last breath. In that moment, we believe that **Christ will welcome** us home.

The only problem with not having people over these days is that now there is **no reason to clean** and so our houses probably don't look so great. I think if we are not careful, the same thing can happen in **our spiritual lives**, which is why we **need Advent** especially this year. One of the places we turn to help us get ready is the Scripture passages which speak to us about **John the Baptist**. He was sent by God as a **prophet to come before Jesus to prepare the way** for the people the time of Jesus. John was preaching and teaching to get people **ready for their King**, his cousin Jesus, who was going to arrive during his lifetime.

We read the stories about John the Baptist before Christmas because they are at the beginning of each of the Gospels. **Mark** begins his gospel with John's story and **Matthew, Luke and John** all include him as the forebearer of Jesus, announcing his coming as his **earthly ministry begins**. Followers of Jesus, long after John the Baptist died, turned to his words and his story to help prepare them for the **coming of Christ because that is John's role**. When I was a kid, I thought that the gospel of John was **written by John the Baptist**, but it's good to remember that they are two different people! The gospel of John was written by John the disciple, and not John the Baptist so let's get that clear as we get going today.

If you are not familiar with John's story, let's do a quick recap. We read at the beginning of Luke's gospel that John was born to **Zechariah and Elizabeth**. Zechariah was a **priest** in the temple in Jerusalem and Elizabeth was the **cousin of Mary**, the mother Jesus. Zechariah and Elizabeth were **older when they conceived** their son and Zechariah was told by the angel Gabriel to name his son **John**, which means, "**the Lord is gracious.**"

**VIDEO            Google Earth Map – Ein Karam to Qumran (Jeff narrate)**

We learn in Luke's gospel that John moved from the place where he was born to **live in the wilderness**. We remember that Jesus was born in **Bethlehem**, on the lower portion of this map, East and South of **Jerusalem**. John the Baptist was born in **Ein Karam**, which is a Western suburb of Jerusalem. Remember that the **Sea of Galilee** is up here in the north and the **Jordan River** flows out of that down towards the **Dead Sea** in the south.

As we **zoom** in on the map, you will notice that **Ein Karam** it is very **green** and lush and hilly. The largest city is **Jerusalem** and Bethlehem is down here into the right. The **wilderness is this dry** and arid area to the east of Jerusalem and south of Bethlehem. The area is a **desert which is beautiful** and rugged but is a barren wilderness. Wilderness does not have trees in Israel like the **Weimenuche** wilderness! The **Dead Sea** is just along the edge of this area of wilderness. **John grew up** somewhere in this area of the wilderness near the Dead Sea.

Many scholars believe he grew up in the area we call **Qumran** which was where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. There was a **monastery** in this region run by a group called the Essenes, a sect in first century Judaism. The **Essenes were aesthetics** who put off worldly pleasures. Most of them did not marry and attempted to **remain pure**. They tried to be as **holy** as possible as a human being which meant withdrawing from the world and living in their own monastic community. The idea was to **get away** from the city and

people so you can focus on God and an **intimate life with the divine**.

We know a bit about this community because of **their own writings** and the writings of **Josephus**, a first century Jewish historian who describes them in detail. The monks who lived in this monastery would take in young boys whose parents had died. Remember, the **parents of John the Baptist were older** when he was born, and some speculate that he was taken to this monastery after his parents died because he was still a child. **Monasteries often acted as orphanages** in the first century. They would nurture them in the faith and train them up to be a part of their monastic community.

#### **VIDEO Qumran (Jeff will narrate – end with photo of Mikvah)**

Last year, our group visited this area of Qumran as part of our trip to the holy land. In this video footage you can see the **Dead Sea** and then **caves** in the background where the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered. This one is called the **library** cave where the most scrolls were found, hidden in jars of clay. These are some of the manuscripts. There is a **monastery**, and you can see the wilderness in the background which are these **rugged mountains** with more **caves**. You will see many of these baptistry's which were called a **mikvah** in the first century. It was a ritualistic bath for people would enter in down the steps and be ritually cleaned and then **exit out** the other end. This is not about cleaning their body but about **cleaning their soul**.

#### **GRAPHIC Mikvah**

We believe John the Baptist lived in this community and so he would've participated in these ritual baths that were done several times a day using rainwater which was collected in the lower areas of the baths. We know from the writings of the Essenes that were part of the Dead Sea Scrolls they believed the Messiah was coming, just like John the Baptist preached. Both saw themselves as fulfilling the words of Isaiah the prophet who talked about preparing the way for the Lord. The gospel of Mark begins with these words.

## **BIBLE**

**1 This is the Good News about Jesus the Messiah, the Son of God. It began <sup>2</sup> just as the prophet Isaiah had written:**

**“Look, I am sending my messenger ahead of you,  
and he will prepare your way.**

**<sup>3</sup> He is a voice shouting in the wilderness,  
‘Prepare the way for the Lord’s coming!  
Clear the road for him!’”**

The Essenes also **prayed the Psalms daily**, many of which were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, like this one from Psalm 85, which was a prayer of forgiveness.

## **GRAPHIC          Dead Sea Psalms Scroll**

**BIBLE (Stacey, can you use the image above as the background?)**

**<sup>1</sup> Lord, you poured out blessings on your land!  
You restored the fortunes of Israel.**

**<sup>2</sup> You forgave the guilt of your people—  
yes, you covered all their sins.**

**<sup>8</sup> I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying,  
for he speaks peace to his faithful people.  
But let them not return to their foolish ways.**

**<sup>9</sup> Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him,  
so our land will be filled with his glory.**

**<sup>10</sup> Unfailing love and truth have met together.  
Righteousness and peace have kissed!**

**<sup>11</sup> Truth springs up from the earth,**

**and righteousness smiles down from heaven.**

**<sup>12</sup> Yes, the Lord pours down his blessings.**

**Our land will yield its bountiful harvest.**

**<sup>13</sup> Righteousness goes as a herald before him,  
preparing the way for his steps.**

John the Baptist and the Essenes practiced **baptism for purification** and forgiveness. However, there were some **differences** that are very important to remember. The **Essenes** believed that you need to **separate yourselves** from sinful people and get away from the world to be sure. You needed to ritually bath over and over so that when the Messiah came you would be pleasing to God, so this small remnant of people would be pure enough to reunite with God.

It seems as if **John the Baptist separated himself from the Essenes** because he didn't think it worked this way. He thought **God cared about all those people out there**, even the ones who didn't do the ritual purification or follow all the rules just right. He thought **God cared about the people who felt alienated and broken and far away from God**. John didn't think God wanted everyone to move to a monastery, but that we need to **take the good news** and the message of repentance to the people. For John, and later for Jesus, God was the **God of the second chance**, and third chance, and forth chance. God was yearning for the lost people to come back and be **restored and forgiven** and made whole again.

**VIDEO**                      **Google Earth - Map of Qumran**

**GRAPHIC**                    **Jordan River Baptism Site with Kay Neal**

The Essenes believed that the lost were lost and they were the special, cloistered people of God, hiding away from the world. So, **John left the monastery in Qumran** and moves east to the Jordan River where we believe he was baptizing and calling people to repentance. **Hundreds** came to hear

his message and to be **baptized** because they were **hungry to be forgiven** and believe they **had a future because God remembered them**. They were hungry to believe that there is hope for them even though they may have done horrible things. They long to know that God loves them and would take them back again. That's why **what John preached was the beginning of the good news that Jesus would bring**.

We might wonder why we should **care about the differences** between John the Baptist and the Essenes. I think it's important because the **same debate** happens today in the Christian community. There are people today who **insist that the church is really for the saints** who love God, give themselves to Jesus, and stay holy and pure. To get into the church, you have to **go through all the rituals of purification** first and then you can experience this holy place. In some churches, we **can't become a member** until we are interviewed by the leadership of the church and we get our act together and pass the test. Then there is the **opposite perspective** of the church, that we **exist for the sinners**, for the broken, and the brokenhearted.

I think of the woman who started going to a Methodist Church and she went to see the pastor because she was concerned. She wanted to know what kind of church they were running because she had been in worship the week before and she knew the man two rows behind her was having an **affair**. She also saw a woman go forward for communion who she knew was an **alcoholic**. She saw a man leaving worship and she has seen him in his workplace **cussing** like a sailor. She asked, "What kind of church are you running? **What kind of church is this?** It seems messed up."

The pastor simply responded, "I think this is a Jesus kind of church. **Can you think of any better place for those people to be on a weekend then here?** Don't the people having affairs, struggling with alcohol, and having so much anger they need to cuss need a place to come where they can give



their **burdens to God** and may be experiencing **change and transformation**? Maybe they all need to find a power to give them the strength to become something new. **Isn't that what the church is supposed to be?"**

She shook her head and walked out and **never came back**. This is still the debate today. **What is the church to be about?** The reason why this is important is because we have a big sign in our church building and it's all over our website that we want to be the presence of Jesus Christ the world. When we read the Gospels, **Jesus hung out** with, "prostitutes, tax collectors, and notorious sinners," on a regular basis. We need to be the place where we can **bring all of ourselves, all our broken places**, honestly before God because **none of us is perfect**. We all **fall short** of the glory of God. We all make mistakes. We all say things we wish we hadn't said and do things we wish we hadn't done. This is part of what it means to be human and is part of what it means to be the church.

Jesus allows a woman who was a **prostitute to wipe his feet** with her hair and her **tears**. She is breaking up a party at a religious person's house in the religious leader **Simon is totally freaked out**. Jesus wants to know if Simon even sees her. He asks, "**Simon, do you see her?!**" Something is happening in this **woman's heart** and the religiously sure church leader can't see it. Jesus tells the story of a **boy who goes and squanders** everything on unholy living and participates in horrible behavior. When he returns home, he is not scolded but instead his **father runs out to greet him**, embracing him before the son can say anything.

When the religious leaders came to **Jesus** and demanded why he ate with notorious sinners he said something very simple and profound. "**It's not the people who are healthy and well need a doctor, but those who are sick.**" Unfortunately, those religious leaders didn't realize that they had **their own sickness** they needed to deal with, and **they missed it**. There are



sicknesses which are clear on the outside but then there are just as many which are on the inside which **cannot be seen readily**. The Pharisees and religious leaders had sins which were deep inside, like **spiritual pride** and many other things which were **kept in the dark**. If we don't own this and understand this then we have **failed to be the church**.

**John the Baptist figured out that pleasing God** was not about going into a monastery and keeping everyone else far away so as not to be **contaminated**. Ministry was about **going to the people** in meeting them where they were, loving them and **calling them back to God** and God's kingdom.

Let me share with you something that I have discovered over the past few years as I have talked with people who have left the church or decided they don't want anything to do with God or Jesus. It's not really about whether they believe the Bible or not. It used to be about that, but for most people it now comes down to this because of how they see Christians behaving and acting in the world.

### **SLIDE                    Is the Good News really good?**

I don't hear people asking whether it's true or not, but rather if the good news of Jesus Christ is really good? It seems like the **good news is really bad news because it's about rules** and getting everything just right before you can be loved by God. This leads us to what John the Baptist was preaching. Here is how the Gospel of Mark goes on to describe the scene, and I love these words from the Message version of the Bible.

### **BIBLE**

**<sup>7-8</sup> As [John] preached he said, "The real action comes next: The star in this drama, to whom I'm a mere stagehand, will change your life. I'm baptizing you here in the river, turning your old life in for a kingdom**

**life. His baptism—a holy baptism by the Holy Spirit—will change you from the inside out.”**

John and Jesus both assumed that people who were struggling and hurting needed an **opportunity for change and a fresh start**. The word that is used in this text and in many others in the New Testament is:

**SLIDE                    Metanoia = “to change your mind and think differently”**

The big idea is that when we begin to change our minds and **think about things differently, it changes our hearts, and it changes our lives**. We see the world differently and we feel a sense of remorse. We realize how we might have **hurt others and hurt God** and even **hurt ourselves**, so we think differently, and we begin to feel differently, and then we begin to live differently, going in a new direction, literally turning around. **When we engage our head, our hearts, and our hands and do things differently than we have experienced metanoia.**

Sometimes, we say, **“I’m sorry,”** and we do it rather **flippantly** so we can just move on. I did something this week that **annoyed my wife**, which I know is shocking to many of you! Here is a pattern that many of us do, when we become aware that we have annoyed or hurt someone. They let us know about it and then we respond with, **“I am sorry that annoyed you.”** It’s a **non-apology, apology**, right? Usually what follows is a time of **silence** until someone finally admits what they did was hurtful, and they genuinely **apologize from the heart**.

That is not **metanoia** or repentance, to simply say we are sorry, even if we mean it. Instead, it is going through a process in our head or we say, **“I realize what I did was wrong I feel badly about that. I’m going to try not to do it again and change my behavior.”** To really appreciate what repentance is, we must also acknowledge that **we are all broken**. The Bible calls this sin, and I remind you that **sin is simply separation** from God and separation from

others and separation from ourselves because of the choices that we make. The fact is we are **all human** and we all fall short. This is our human condition. Sin is about missing the mark and it simply **describes the relationship** between us and God, us and others, and internally within ourselves.

## **GRAPHIC            Sin - Hamartia - Missing the Mark**

I have taught you before that this is an archery term in the Greek and the idea is that I wish I had hit in one spot but I missed that spot and so there is separation between what I really want to do and where I ended up. The idea is that there is a dream and hope God has for us in terms of how we live our lives following him, loving God, loving others, and loving ourselves.

I was talking recently with a **business owner** in our church to told me that he was trying to create a culture in which they could just **offer a smile in these moments of pandemic** and how it would impact their customers and the people they work with. We talked about how one of the great challenges and that is that **first we must be willing to smile at ourselves. We can't give what we don't have.** When we are not able to smile at ourselves, to love ourselves and **see ourselves the way God does**, we have missed the mark and we can't offer that to others.

So, we repent and **turn around and going a new direction**, towards God and **towards others** and **towards ourselves**. This was the message of John the Baptist and as he is preaching and teaching about this, and talking about how Christ will come and fulfill all his teaching, he is asked the question by the crowd about **what this looks like**. We read this in **Luke 3** as he tells us about the ministry of John the Baptist and the crowds who have gathered around him.

## **BIBLE**

<sup>10</sup> **The crowds asked, “What should we do?”**

<sup>11</sup> **John replied, “If you have two shirts, give one to the poor. If you have food, share it with those who are hungry.”**

<sup>12</sup> **Even corrupt tax collectors came to be baptized and asked, “Teacher, what should we do?”**

<sup>13</sup> **He replied, “Collect no more taxes than the government requires.”**

<sup>14</sup> **“What should we do?” asked some soldiers.**

**John replied, “Don’t extort money or make false accusations. And be content with your pay.”**

John gets very practical, and notice this all happens after they **enter the waters of baptism** and it’s a reminder of why it is we are called to care for the **poor**, the **hungry**, and **live in right relationship with God** and others. It is literally what **brings peace, wholeness, shalom**. It is how we stay connected to God and know that **God is with us through everything**.

This year our Summit Students youth group adopted **Sunshine Gardens senior community**. That means we made a commitment to serve them on a regular basis. Unfortunately, COVID has prevented us from crafting with them and bonding with them as usual. Our youth director Morgan Holick called their program director, and she **broke down in tears** because of the **isolation** that many of the residents are experiencing. As they talked, they came up with a great way to bless those residents this Christmas even though we can’t be there in person: Christmas pajama donations! Our families in the youth ministry will be buying pajamas for residents to let them know they are not forgotten. They are also encouraged to **include a Christmas card or letter** letting your resident know how much we care!

We do these sorts of things because **when we are forgiven and experience God’s grace, we turn around during the season like Christmas**

**and we recognize that it's not our birthday. Metanoia** this time of year for most of us in America means **not getting consumed by the god of consumption** but seeing how we might serve and bless and care for others. I tell you each year that it's Jesus' birthday and we should act like that as followers of Jesus during the Christmas season. When this happens to us, and **we change our minds, it changes our hearts, and it changes our behavior.**

#### **SLIDE                      Straight up Peace in a Broken-Down World**

The Christmas pajamas are a simple way to remind ourselves that we are offered straight up peace in a broken-down world by Jesus, which was **first proclaimed by John**. Another way we do that in this community of faith is that we that we give beyond the walls of our church. We have selected two ministries to receive our **Christmas Offering** who were **selected for Easter**, but we couldn't do because the COVID pandemic hit at the same time. Next week you'll hear about the **local** ministry we will be supporting, **Habitat for Humanity of La Plata County**. This week I want to share with you a ministry happening in Kenya that we have been a part of for many years:

#### **VIDEO                      International Treasure House Ministries**

**Advent** is about remembering the words of John the Baptist and the promises of Jesus of Nazareth, that we have the ability to turn around and follow God as we **wait upon the coming of Jesus**. The **peace that Jesus brings** is one that we are meant, **not to keep to ourselves**, but to **share** with the world. It happens in profound ways with **ministries down the street and around the world**. It also happens in **simple ways** with the people that God places in our lives.

I was talking recently with someone in our congregation who was worked up about the **presidential election** and all the things happening in our country because **they have family with whom they are in conflict** about the results of the election. I get pragmatic when it comes to these things like

this, and this person was older, so I asked them a simple question. **“How many years to think you have left in this life?”**

**Nothing gives us perspective more than recognizing our own mortality!** They guessed they had maybe 10 or 15 years if they are lucky. I asked another simple question. **“How do you want to spend the last 10 or 15 years of your life when it comes to your family and loved ones? Do you want to be in conflict? Is it really worth it?”**

They confessed, and **it was a confession**, that it wasn't really worth it. They also recognized that it might actually **make their life shorter** if they kept obsessing over everything, especially because it **wouldn't do any good!** We talked about ways they could **go to God and pray** and offer forgiveness and hopefully **receive forgiveness** so they could **think differently**, have a heart that was able to **love differently**, and then live **life differently**. This is **metanoia**. This is **repentance**, recognizing we have **missed the mark** and then turning around and **going a new direction**.

Sometimes our **sin** is simply **internal anguish and bitterness and anger** that we **turn upon ourselves**, and as a result we **build ourselves a prison** with a **life sentence**. We long to **share that prison with others** and so we make **everyone miserable around us** if we are not careful. Jesus came to free us and to offer forgiveness and grace and mercy.

## **SLIDE                      Communion**

Which brings us to the meal that we celebrate this weekend together. If you haven't done so, I hope you will grab something that can be your bread and something that can be your cup. Have that in front of you as we remember not only the birth of Jesus this season but his sacrifice on the cross and the meal in which he remembered that he came to bring us peace in the midst of a broken world. When Jesus gathered at the table with his disciples on that night before he was betrayed and put to death, he took the

bread, and he broke it and told them to remember that his life was offered as a gift to each of them. It was a gift that was meant to be profound so that when we look at the cross that washes over us and causes us to repent, change our thinking, change our hearts, and change our lives. The cross is meant to be so compelling that it turns us towards Jesus because it is the ultimate good news that we are forgiven and set free.

Jesus then took the cup and blesses it and he told them to take and drink because it was a symbol of his life which was poured out for each of us on the cross. The birth of Jesus, the baptism of Jesus, the teachings of Jesus, the life of Jesus, the death of Jesus, and the resurrection of Jesus, are all things we remember during the season of Advent because we remember his promise that one day he will come again. I invite you to hold out your hands over the elements as we pray together the prayer of the Holy Spirit, which John promised would come with the Messiah, our Lord Jesus Christ.

**SLIDE      Communion Prayer**