

INTRO

- When is the right time to put up Christmas decorations and the tree?

READ

Matt 4:24-25

Matt 5:9

REFLECT & RESPOND

At a time when Jesus' fame and popularity were growing, and, in a world similar to ours that was rife with violence, injustice and hardship, Jesus introduces the idea of God's peace as revolutionary action.

SHALOM: THE PEACE OF GOD

Peace is a common word that can mean different things to different people.

Qu: what are some ways you think about or envision peace?

God's peace/shalom is simply how things ought to be; where we experience harmony and flourishing in our material, social and personal world. Yet, Thomas Merton nails our dilemma when he said: *"We are not at peace with others because we are not at peace with ourselves, and we are not at peace with ourselves because we are not at peace with God."*

Like in Jesus time, we long for peace but often that just means we want the absence of violence, conflict and hardship. God's peace is more about presence than absence, and the source of that presence is a person: Jesus.

Qu: what do you think about the idea that God's peace is less about the absence of difficult circumstances, and more about the presence of Jesus? What implications might that have?

To meet our human need for peace, to bring shalom to the broken parts of our lives and world, Jesus offers us the peace of God by first

offering us peace *with* God. Once we make Jesus our peace, he then makes us his peacemakers.

PEACE AS REVOLUTIONARY ACTION

There are at least 3 ways peacemaking is revolutionary action:

- Peacemaking is the work of RESTORATION — the work of shalom, making things as they ought to be.
- Peacemaking is the work of RECONCILIATION — the work of breaking down barriers, overcoming hostility (Eph 2:14-16)
- Peacemaking is the work of ACTS OF LOVE — living generously and graciously towards others (Mt 5:43-48)

We do all this because this is what God has done for us and our world through Jesus. That's why Jesus introduces the idea that peace is not passive but active: the reconciling & restoring action with others, enemies and our world. Peacemaking doesn't ignore or avoid breakdowns in relationships. It wants reconciliation, it seeks to build bridges.

Qu: what aspects of peacemaking do you struggle with?

Qu: What are some practical ways you think we can be peacemakers?

RESPOND & PRAY

- Pray we would experience a renewed sense of peace with God and the peace of God.
- Pray for opportunities to be a peacemaker and the courage to engage difficult relationships or situations we may be experiencing with wisdom