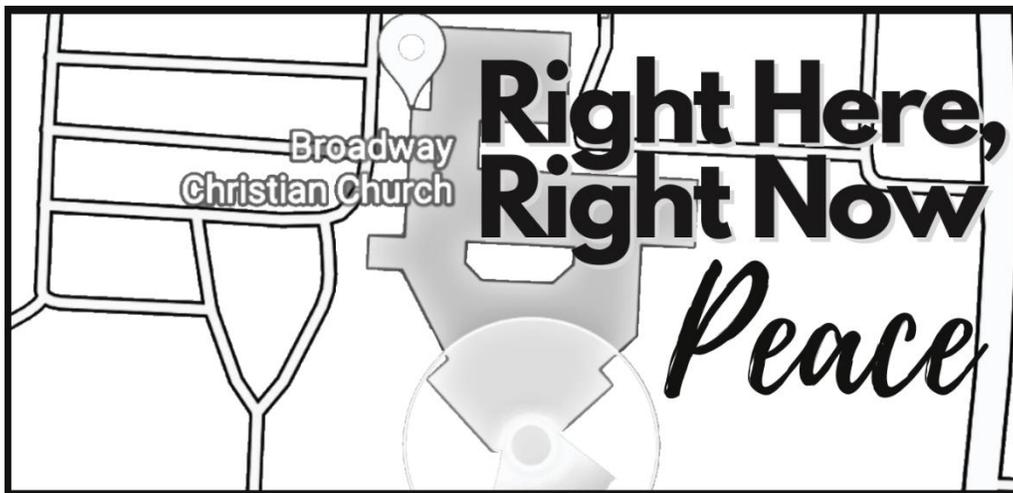




**Columbia, Missouri**  
**The Worship of God • December 5, 2021**  
**The Second Sunday of Advent**



**The Scripture**  
**Luke 1:68-79**

*“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has looked favorably on his people and redeemed them. He has raised up a mighty savior for us in the house of his servant David, as he spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old, that we would be saved from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us. Thus he has shown the mercy promised to our ancestors, and has remembered his holy covenant, the oath that he swore to our ancestor Abraham, to grant us that we, being rescued from the hands of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days. And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”*

**The Message**  
**“Right Here, Right Now: Peace”**  
**Mark Briley**

I was enjoying some cheese and crackers one night this week when I got home from the church, and would you believe it – I pulled a muscle in my chest trying to catch a piece of cheese that had slipped off my cracker and was speeding toward the kitchen floor. I have reached the age where I pull muscles eating cheese and crackers. I am *that* many years old. I’ll have you know I saved that cheese from death-by-dusty-floor and snagged it with my free hand even as I pulled the muscle. It was a sacrificial, crowd-goes-wild moment that I haven’t had since some of my church softball team days.

It got me thinking about that universal experience. We’ve all been there. What do you do when a piece of food you really intend to relish falls to the floor? I don’t care who you are, what you do professionally, where you come from, or who you cheer for, you have faced the dilemma of a piece of food that you really, really wanted to eat falling on the floor. Do you pick it up, dust it off, and eat it anyway or do you throw it away? Do you embrace the legend of the five-second rule, or do you invite the lucky dog over to benefit from your fumble? Add this caveat. *What if you are all by yourself?* Does that change what happens next?

As you ponder this poignant question about life, we pivot to talk about peace. It’s peace Sunday, after all, and we’re asking for peace to come, right here, right now. It’s a lot to ask, I know. It has long been the go-to pageant answer to the question, “*What do you most want to fight for in this life?*” “*World peace.*” And peace continues to allude us. We’re still waiting. Waiting is another universal experience. That’s the line we actually pull today from our series theme song, “*Right Here, Right Now*” by Jesus Jones: “*I was alive, and I waited, waited. I was alive and I waited for this.*”

What was Mike Edwards – front man of the band – talking about... *waiting?* He was 22-years-old when he wrote that song! What does he know about waiting!?!? It was like playing K-Ci and JoJo’s “*All my life, I prayed for someone like you,*” at our wedding – Carrie was 19. I was 20. What do we know about “*All my life...*”?

Hazel Nilson was born in 1908 near Wrigley Field in Chicago – a forever Cub’s fan. The Cubs won the World Series the year she was born. She then waited 108 years for her Cubs to win another World Series, which they did in 2016. She lived through two world



wars, the Great Depression, the early days of the automobile, the moon landing, and the technological advances of the 21st century and she said, “*I literally waited my entire life for **this** moment.*” In case you’re wondering about Hazel... I was... Hazel took a boat ride on her 111<sup>th</sup> birthday, joined the resurrection shortly after and all of it just prior to the entrance of COVID in the States.<sup>1</sup>

Waiting – no matter how long, feels long in the waiting.

When Mike Edwards, 22-years-old, wrote this line about waiting in the song, he was watching television coverage of the Berlin Wall coming down and the crowds of people celebrating. He said, “*I never thought I’d see such a thing in my lifetime, and I started writing.*”

Edwards was inspired by Prince’s song, “*Sign o’ the Times*” which lamented the concerns of the era from the Aids epidemic to urban poverty and drug addiction. In fact, the original song Edwards wrote was titled, “*Nelson*” – Prince’s last name, and sampled a riff from his song. He was that moved by the song and what it represented. The band’s producer had them change the name of the song and nix the riff after having some copyright issues with another song he had produced for another band. He said it wasn’t worth the red tape. So *Right Here, Right Now* became the song we know – used by fighter pilots in the Gulf War, used in American presidential campaigns, and used by my buddy as his pump-up song to rush out on the football field in the early 90’s.

The band first played the song live in Romania just after the fall of the oppressive regime in that country. With bullet holes in all the buildings the band passed on their way to play, they saw signs of the war everywhere. People there had said to them, “*We couldn’t trust the pillow we slept on*” because of the terror they were living every day. But the country was emerging out of a tunnel, and Edwards said, “*That is exactly what I was singing about.*”<sup>2</sup> “*I was alive, and I waited; waited. I was alive and I waited for this.*”

Zachariah is singing that line with us today. Do you know his story? Zachariah was a priest, a man of faith, and husband to Elizabeth. He worked his job to the best of his ability, served on the church board, and probably enjoyed tailgating before local games with his neighbors. He was solid, steady, and doing his part in the world as a good citizen. He had his struggles like the rest of us. Zachariah and Elizabeth couldn’t conceive a child. They had made peace with that. But... an angel shows up unannounced – they don’t tend to ask when you’re available ahead of time. The angel

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<sup>1</sup> [https://gerontology.fandom.com/wiki/Hazel\\_Nilson](https://gerontology.fandom.com/wiki/Hazel_Nilson)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.songfacts.com/facts/jesus-jones/right-here-right-now>

tells him in their late years, “*Your baby boy is on the way.*” Zach gives the angel the side-eye and asks, “*Right here? Right now? Do you expect me to believe this?*”

They had done all the research. All the tests. All the trials. Biology says, “*No.*” The angel responds to all of the objections saying, “*Sounds like you need some focused time to think about it*” and Zach goes mute... for *months*. What do you do when life is shut down, forcing you to use other senses, to listen more than speak, to rely on other’s voices more than your own? Can you actually find peace in the waiting? Zach was alive and he *waited, waited*. But now he can’t say anything.

This is inevitably the human experience. You wait and wait, work and work, and finally something comes to pass, just in time for something else to fall apart. Or you’re building a relationship with care and intention and honor, and then a speed bump derails every previous effort. Or you think, “*When I get that settled, or when I get to that level, or when we finish that project, or when I have that stuff... then... all will be okay, right, fixed, whole.*”

It is as if we must have all those factors resolved before peace can be ours. What happens? We give all our time and energy to that chase and miss what it means to find peace in the right here, right now. Let me ask it this way. How much time do you give to the 3 C’s: complaining, comparing, and coveting? Especially in this season as we’re looking to achieve the perfect Christmas – the perfect family gatherings, the perfect gifts and décor. Need a little more... of this, of that. Having more of something does not make me something more. We want it all, and we want it now. But... in the complaining, comparing, and coveting, we miss the life of peace we can know right now.

We can guess, in part, this is why the angel, the messenger, gave Zachariah some time to process all that he was living through. We don’t really know how easily, or how quickly, he accepted this MUTE status. I’m sure he fought it for a while. I’m sure Elizabeth was confused and maybe even laughed about it with her girlfriends when they said, “*I bet the quiet is nice. I sure wish my husband would lose his voice.*”

But you know it was painful, hard, frustrating. You know most of us overreact as quickly as possible. It’s our natural gut response. We don’t always know what another is going through, which is why it’s best to lean in compassionately before leading with judgment. Jesus always loved first.

I learned of a young girl who took her own life this week just a few days shy of her ninth birthday. Heart wrenching obituary written by her family. At the end of telling Haley’s story, they wrote, “*In lieu of thoughts and prayers, her family asks that you be kind to the living and generous with what you have, be it your love, hope, or wealth. Do*

*better unto others as you would have done to you, and reach to those in need, lift them up, raise them higher, and love, love, love thy neighbor.”*

I pray peace for that family which, in many ways, will allude them in this lifetime. What these realities remind us, however, is that everyone is struggling in some way – from those in our own homes to those we encounter along the way. Can we see them as people God loves just as much as us? This means we don't see them as issues or labels or categorized by some characteristic or group. They are not one thing or the other – they are a dynamic being, beautifully complex, multi-faceted and cherished. I hope you believe that about yourself. You are not *only* your medical chart, your political party, your skin color, or gender, or fashion sense. You are not who everyone else says you are. You are who God says you are – beloved. And peace starts to settle in our spirits when we settle into that truth above everything else. It's not a perfect existence. Your ear hair will still grow, and you'll pull muscles trying to catch cheese. But a flawed story that is alive is more powerful than a perfect story. *I was alive and I waited for this.*

Zachariah is mute, yes, but he's alive and he's now waiting to become a father – something he never imagined for himself. Zach had a lot of time to think... and he got clear about some things in his life in this pregnant season. So, when he speaks again, he's speaking into a world he sees differently than before. When you stop talking enough to truly take in what's happening around you... listening for God to guide you... your economy of words is on point.

His first word after months of waiting? *“Blessed.”* I wonder if that would be my word, or yours, after such an experience? I think it must come with acceptance of some things out of your control. It's hard to find peace when what we really want is control.

Zachariah lost any pretense of control. Yeah. Gone. But he says, *“Blessed.”* His first words of prophecy after all this time simply starts with praise of God. *“God will set us free,”* he says. *“God is putting salvation at the center of our lives, right here and now.”* And what is salvation if not freedom; what is freedom if not a gift of knowing peace in the middle of what most days feels like chaos?

Professor and Theologian Scot McKnight has been studying the concept of salvation for decades – this gift Zachariah says God is placing in the center of our lives. McKnight said the salvation people are seeking today is not *“a theory of salvation that makes me a loner with God.”* *“Seekers read Amos, and they know otherwise,”* he says. *“They read the Gospels and they know otherwise.”* Salvation is more than personal, it is corporate (or for everyone). *“Salvation is spiritual and social, justification and justice, church-y and politic-y, trauma-sensitive and gender-sensitive, orthodox and innovative.”* McKnight calls these seekers wrestling with the meaning of salvation and coming out

of a blown up, pandemic'd world, reconstructors. *“Reconstructors are fine,”* he says, *“with salvation if it is deep enough to take root in the whole of life, if it is wide enough to embrace all that God is redeeming, and high enough to be genuine religion and spirituality, and low enough to matter when they get in the car to fetch the kids at school.”*<sup>3</sup>

Salvation – freedom in God – comes in awe-inspiring mystery and majesty and also just as present in the silent moments when we recognize we're alive and we've been waiting for this freedom all our lives. To know salvation? To be free? Is to be at peace even in the struggle.

*I was alive and I waited for this.* Zachariah looks at his miracle child – named John (of whom we later add, *“The Baptist”*), and he says, *“And you, my child, John...will be a voice that ushers in the freedom – the salvation – so that people can drop the act and find peace in what is real.”*

Did he know how John would live that out? Did he know John would be an outdoorsy guy with questionable fashion sense and a terrible diet? Did he know that John and Jesus would play pick-up football with the cousins at grandma's and Zachariah in his old age would still be out there chasing them around? Zach will be Jesus' Uncle, right? Jesus would sing of the crossroads to come singing, *“I miss my Uncle Zach, ya'll.”* This was all ahead of them... and maybe Zachariah wouldn't see it all come to pass. Even if he did, so much of it would develop out of his control. But here he is... in his own right here, right now... at peace because he wasn't trying to control or manipulate every moment and everyone in his reach anymore.

*What* do you need to release? *Who* do you need to release? It may not be a forever-release, but a for-now release. You won't find peace if you're trying to manipulate every decision or control every person around you – no matter how hard you try or how much you feel it's yours to do.

Some things go unresolved. Peace can still come. Those don't have to be mutually exclusive realities. We live in the midst of tension. The Apostle Paul wrote, *“As far as it's up to you, be at peace with everyone.”* What that tells me first and foremost is, *“It's not **all** up to me.”* Peace doesn't fully reside on my shoulders. You cannot resolve it for everyone which is a hard thing for a peacemaker to accept. I like to make peace, and I like to keep peace. But I can only do what is mine to do. Zachariah has done that. And in so doing, he can speak it authentically: *Peace. Freedom. Salvation.*

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<sup>3</sup> <https://scotmcknight.substack.com/p/beyond-deconstruction-a-summary?fbclid=IwAR23pz6A2auaRqvjK0KMWv5-HbnPdNpgleLTpk1RZlh2OmsC8eA75kJd7Ps>

Where's the peace in your life? It doesn't have to wait for someday. You can have it right here and now. Maybe it starts with self-acceptance. You are God's good creation. You're an amazing, dynamic being that is beyond category. Can you just *receive* that? And here's the thing – finding peace with yourself – self-acceptance – doesn't mean you give up on self-improvement. We've all got growing to do. And if someone tells you otherwise – that they've got it all figured out – you can release that right where it is because they're the ones missing out on new discoveries about God, about you, about the world; about themselves.

The Church of Jesus Christ is intended to be a growing church – and that's more than numbers. As Rachel Held Evans used to say, "*The church is not a group of people who believe all the same things; the church is a group of people caught up in the same story, with Jesus at the center.*"

Zachariah was just a part of the puzzle – part of a story with Jesus soon-to-be at the center. There's peace found in *that* being enough. Can we be part of the flourishing forward now – a growing Church of growing Disciples hungry for an encounter, eager to learn from and appreciate one another, passionate to serve where love leads? Maybe we're becoming such before our very eyes. Maybe we'll be the ones soon singing – whether we're 12, 22, 80 or 108: "*I was alive and I waited, waited. I was alive and I waited for **this.***"

## **Song of Focus** **"Paths of Peace"**

WORDS AND MUSIC: ED VARNUM

1. Whether darkness of night or morning bright,  
we are blessed. You are with us.  
Whether fulness of life or struggles in strife,  
there is rest, for you guide us.  
On our bended knees, we ask, Lord please,  
guide us, Lord, to paths of peace.
2. With conflict all 'round, we seek higher ground.  
In life's tests, you empower us.  
Through every loss, facing each cross,  
with comfort you shower us!  
On our bended knees, we ask, Lord please,  
guide us, Lord, to paths of peace.