

**Lesson: Isaiah 40:1-11**  
**The Gospel: Mark 1:108**

**Second Sunday of Advent**  
**December 6, 2020**

**An Invitation to Peace**  
**Pastor Lowell Nelson**  
**American Lutheran Church of Sun City**

**Grace and peace be to you through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen**

**An Invitation to Peace.** Invitation is a beautiful word. Perhaps you've received an invitation in your life, perhaps a beautiful card or a letter asking you to come to something, a celebration, or asking you to participate in something. It is a beautiful part of the movement of God. The kingdom of God, it is by invitation.

God is a gentleman, I've heard that phrase, and always asks to be part of our life, so we reflect that when we ask others to join our life here at the church and here in the kingdom of God. This invitation for our stewardship Sunday, our Consecration Sunday coming up, has an internal focus but also describes how we relate to those outside. The internal focus is more Stephen ministers. We invite you to join us in this ministry, this ministry of developing skills and talents, to be able to listen effectively to people who are in need of a caring heart. I love it, it is not therapy, there are no solutions, we are not the answer people that give the answers to somebody asking. You are giving the absolute blessing for someone to be heard. Questions are raised for the benefit of the person speaking. It is a wonderful way to live life when you're attuned to the other and invite that person to share their life and their hurts, the grief of depression or the grief of mourning, or in health challenges that appear overwhelming or just the challenges of everyday life. We invite people to speak the truth in love.

We also do this in this wonderful ministry of making sure that our neighborhood groups are revitalized. My goodness, how difficult it has been when we can't gather safely yet, but there is hope of course with the vaccine coming. The idea that this large beautiful church is distributed into different neighborhoods and that the people are invited, friends are invited and people outside the church are invited for the food and fellowship and the joy of being together. Life, the joy of life together, is a sense of peace that we're united in the love of Christ in a beautiful way.

Next year there will be an invitation in the fourth quarter of 2021, if you can look that far ahead. It's been hard to plan of course with all the disruptions of life in this pandemic time, but as we look ahead there will be an invitation for our congregation to do something over the years of 22, 23 and 24, which is let's pay off the debt. Let's hit our 50th year of ministry here in 2025 debt free. This was accomplished at the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary where the mortgage was burned. I can see it already, the flames coming and the smoke going, giving praise to God for the gift of being invited to be part of something greater than ourselves. The invitation is that singly, just each one of us, it's

overwhelming, but when the invitation goes wide and the response is beautiful then we can do it together.

This word of peace, I wanted to make sure that I speak of this invitation to peace. The Psalm says it, "speak peace", and it has, to me, such a beautiful phrase in Scripture. "Your steadfast love have met together O Lord, righteousness and peace have kissed each other." What a wonderful statement, the intimacy of righteousness, God's righteousness, God's love for us, the righteousness of Jesus Christ and the sense of peace that comes in our heart from knowing the depth of God's love is what we're talking about. In the service, we have the confession of sin setting ourselves free, knowing in bondage that we offer only what we can as our plea to God and the absolute truth of God's love comes towards us. It's a key word *peace*. Shalom is a word you've heard, Salaam is a word in Arabic. It's a need for yes, absence of conflict, but it's a need to have something at the center of our life that everything else fits together when Christ is at the center.

I just ask you to contemplate during this Advent season, this message of peace is where Christ is at the center, then we can invite others into the life that we're experiencing. When Christ is at the center we can invite others into this faith community . Maybe this old pastor will learn this, with Christ at the center and our online community now spread across the world that we can invite people through this gift of technology into the center of a relationship with Christ and to be able to share this distributed in ways beyond my imagination. When Christ is at the center there is a sense of peace that passes all understanding but is at the heart of the matter.

My last encouragement is this. I love the Gospel text. It starts right at the beginning and in a way summarizes the entire book of Mark, the beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ the son of God. We are part of this story, we are in this delicate and precious time where we are invited to share the good news. I wanted you to have this last message point - when we invite, sometimes we think about maybe somebody else is better at inviting, but this phrase that was used for John. We've often heard it this way, John the Baptist, but here in the Scripture it says it actively "John the Baptizer". That emphasis is Lowell or, your name inserted here, the inviter. It's an active way of living. It is a way of respecting God's bringing forth life in our congregation, Christ at the center. We invite people to share and we invite others to join us and it is a momentum of life that no one can take away from us. I invite you to peace, the peace that passes all understanding. Jesus Christ at the center and invite others to join you in this movement of God. Amen.