

Shepherd's Staff

January 2025

We gather to worship, we go to serve our Lord.

"You will be my witnesses...to the ends of the earth!"

Parkersburg Christian Reformed Church

Sunday Worship 9:30 a.m. ~ Church School 10:45 a.m



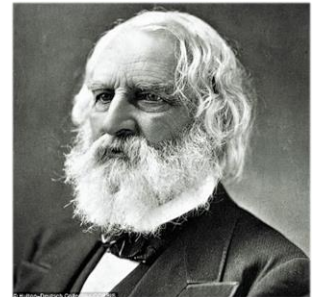
Happy New Year! But What Happened to Peace on Earth?

Source: <https://www.davetrenholm.com/sermons/774/peace-on-earth-goodwill-to-men/>

Happy New Year! We just finished 2024 and have quickly moved on to the year 2025. We've wished everyone a Merry Christmas and sent cards and sang carols stating, "Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men."

But after yet another violent beginning to the year in New Orleans with an individual driving his pickup into a crowd of people killing and injuring dozens, I wonder, "Where is the peace on earth and goodwill to men we all just talked and sang about?" The following article is from December 2017, and it's uncanny how it still, maybe even more so, rings true today. It is lengthy, but is so full of truth. - Angie

The story begins with a man name Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. Longfellow was a fairly famous American poet who lived in the mid-1800s and he wrote a poem that formed the basis for the Christmas carol, "I Heard the Bells on Christmas Day." You might be familiar with that one – I'm sure you heard it at least sometime this Christmas season.



The poem that it was based on was written on Christmas Day of 1863. The American Civil war had been raging for over two and a half years by this point. Over a million fathers, sons, and brothers would not be home for that Christmas – and many of those would never return.

But on that Christmas day in 1863, Henry Longfellow pondered the dismal state of the world in which he lived. He was no stranger to tragedy. His first wife, Mary, had died six months into her first pregnancy at the age of 22. His second wife, Frances, had died from severe burns after her dress caught fire. And now, as the Civil War raged around him, Henry would spend this Christmas nursing his oldest son, Charles, back to health after a confederate bullet nearly paralyzed him.

And as he listened to the church bells pealing forth their Christmas tidings on that Christmas morning, he struggled with the message of the angels as they proclaimed to the shepherds – peace on earth – goodwill to men.

Henry had read in his Bible how, some 2000 years ago, in the hills around Bethlehem, the angels appeared to the shepherds to announce the birth of the Saviour. In Luke 2:8, Henry had read:

Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid. Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" Luke 2:8-14 NKJV

But as Henry Longfellow looked at the world around him, he did not see peace on the earth. And so this is what he wrote:

*I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play
And mild and sweet
Their songs repeat
Of peace on earth good will to men*

*Then from each black, accursed mouth
The cannon thundered in the South,
And with the sound
The carols drowned
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*It was as if an earthquake rent
The hearth-stones of a continent,
And made forlorn
The households born
Of peace on earth, good-will to men!*

*And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong
And mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men*

And you can certainly see his point. As the cannons and the gunfire drown out the sounds of the Christmas carols, and as Henry looked around the ruins of war and the ruined lives of the people he loved, it did not seem like peace on earth – goodwill to men.

Even for us today, we're not in the midst of a civil war, but we don't have to look far to see that peace on earth seems to be a fairy tale. Just on Friday I read about an attack in the Congo on UN PeaceKeepers. 14 were killed and 53 others injured. ([Remember this article is from December 2017](#))

A quick Google search tells me that there are currently 60 ongoing wars the world right now. The data isn't in for 2017 yet, but in 2016, over 100,000 people were killed as a direct consequence of these armed conflicts. And that's just the battles between nations and people groups.

The stats also tell me there were over 11,000 terrorist attacks in 2016 – most of them in the middle east. Across the globe, there were 400,000 people murdered. That certainly doesn't sound to me like peace on earth. It sounds like violence. Evil. Despair. Sorrow. Pain.

And that's not just a problem for foreign countries. I would say there is a lack of peace even within our own homes. Over one million people in Canada were physically or sexually assaulted by their partners or spouse in the last five years. One in three teens in Canada over the age of 15 have experienced abuse. Nine percent of our senior citizen have been victims of violent crimes – roughly half of those violent crimes against seniors were committed by family members.



So even within a peaceful country like Canada – there's still not much peace to be had. In fact, I think many of us struggle to find peace even within our own hearts. How many people battle with anxiety? Or depression? Or addiction of some sort? Or stress? Or worry? Or whatever else. I mentioned earlier that in 2016 400,000 people were murdered – well, double that number – 800,000 people – committed suicide. What does that tell you about the state of our hearts?

We are a people desperately looking for peace – but we're not finding it. We pour trillions of dollars into our militaries in the name of peace. We spend billions on police and peace offices and courts and judges and lawyers – and all that stuff in search for peace. We buy books on meditation and yoga, we hire psychologists and therapists – and whatever else. We spare no expense in hopes that we can find that which eludes us most – real, lasting peace.

But yet, 2000 years ago, the angels gave us a promise of peace – a promise in the form of a little baby – born in a manger in the city David – a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

We read Isaiah 9:6 and focused on the hope that Jesus brings – and but also in that passage we find a promise of peace. Let me read it again for you.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity. The passionate commitment of the Lord of Heaven's Armies will make this happen! Isaiah 9:6-7

We are reminded that this promise was partially, but not yet fully, fulfilled through Jesus. Yes, the child was born – a son was given. We read in Luke 2 that Jesus Christ was born in Bethlehem – he was that little baby lying in a manger – just as the angels described to the shepherds. And that baby grew up, lived a perfect, sinless life, and yet was put to death like a criminal on a cross.

But because He was the Mighty God and Everlasting Father, he defeated sin and death and rose again from the grave. And now as the king of all kings and the Lord of all Lords, he is patiently waiting for men to repent and turn to him for the forgiveness of their sins and the promise of eternal life. But He will not wait forever. There is coming a time soon – where Jesus will return and establish his government and it's peace forever. He will rule with fairness and justice from the throne of his ancestor David for all eternity.

And that all sounds fantastic, but where does that leave us now? Do we have any hope for peace today? Was there peace to be had for Henry Wadsworth Longfellow back in 1863 as a widower twice over, nursing his wounded son in the midst of the Civil War? Is there peace for the families of those UN Peacekeepers that were killed on Friday in the Congo? Is there peace for the the families in Penhold & Red Deer who are torn apart by abuse and fighting? Is there peace for you and I in the midst of whatever we're going through? The answer is yes. There is peace. Jesus said to his disciples in John 16:33...



"I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world." John 16:33

You see, Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace and we can find peace in Him. This isn't just a promise for the future – this is a promise for the here and now. We can have peace in Jesus today.

How? Well, it's kind of a two-step process. Before we can have peace among the nations, before we can have peace in our families, before we can have peace in our own hearts – first, we must have peace with God.

The Bible describes how we, because of our sin, are enemies of God. We're separated from him. We were created to be in fellowship with and to live in the very presence of God – but our sin prevents that. And this separation from God – this lack of peace with God – is the root and the cause of all our lack of peace with everyone else. As long we have this separation from God – we're going to experience a separation from everyone else as well.

There's that pithy little bumper sticker saying that you might have heard: ***No God? No peace. Know God – know peace.***

And that's more true that we probably realize. Until we have peace with God, we simply will not be able to know peace in the other areas of our lives.

Thankfully, God has provided a way for us to have peace with Him – and that way is Jesus. Colossians 1:19 says...

For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault. Colossians 1:19-22

Now, that's a pretty incredible thought. We can be holy and blameless – we can stand before God without a single fault because Jesus paid our debt and exchanged our sinfulness for his perfect righteousness. That's amazing! It doesn't matter how much sin you've accumulated in your lifetime, Jesus paid for it all and we can stand before Him in total peace as if we'd never sinned at all.

Now of course, Paul is writing this to those who have already put their faith and trust in Jesus. Until we do that, we are still enemies of God. Not by God's choice of course, but by our own. If we refuse to put our faith in Jesus and give Him Lordship over our lives – then we remain in our sin as enemies of God – and we will not experience peace. Paul reminds us in his letter to the Romans of how it is our faith in Jesus that brings us peace with God. Romans 4:25 says...

He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God. Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Romans 4:25 – 5:1

So that's the first step of this two-step process — Through His death and resurrection, Jesus gives us peace with God when we put our faith in Him. Then, once we have peace **with God** – then Jesus gives us the peace **of God**.

We talk about having peace like a river. And certainly a major part of that is simply knowing that we are at peace with God. But in addition to being “at peace with God”, we can also “have the peace of God.” This is a peace that that simply doesn’t make sense outside of a relationship with God. If you’re not at peace with God, you’ll never know the peace of God. In Philippians 4:6 we read:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7

This is a unique peace – a peace that comes from knowing who God is and trusting him completely. When you can understand and accept that the all-powerful, all-knowing Creator of the Universe who is completely sovereign over all his Creation – and that that Creator is madly in love with you and he cares about every detail of your life – when you get that....

You don’t have to worry about anything. You can just pray about everything – tell God what you need and thank Him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

Now that certainly doesn’t mean that life’s troubles will go away. We are still going to experience hurt and pain and suffering. I don’t want to gloss over the hurts and suffering that we all go through – because they are very real and very difficult to go through. But there is a peace we can have when we recognize who God is – how good he is – and how much he loves us. We read John 16:33 earlier. Jesus said:

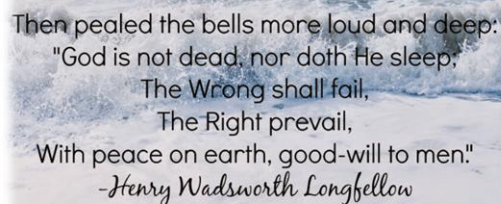
“Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” John 16:33

Jesus has conquered sin and death. While we may have to endure many hardships for a time, we have the confidence that it will not last forever. We read in Revelation 21 about the day that is coming soon when Jesus “will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

This is the hope we have. And having this hope gives us incredible peace – even in the face of sickness, sorrow, suffering – or even death. Our hope in Jesus enables us to have a peace that passes all understanding.

And I think that’s the hope that Henry Longfellow found. Even though he had lost two wives, nearly lost a son, and was surrounded by the pain and suffering of war – I think he recognized that there was hope – there was a peace that could only be found in God.

There is actually one more verse to that poem that I read earlier. As he sat there in despair, concluding that there is no peace on earth – Hate is strong and mocks the song of peace on earth – goodwill to men. As he considered all this, it was as if God spoke to him through the church bells that were ringing out Christmas tidings. He concludes the poem with this verse:



Then pealed the bells more loud and deep:
"God is not dead, nor doth He sleep;
The Wrong shall fail,
The Right prevail,
With peace on earth, good-will to men."
-Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

And that’s such a great reminder for us today. Despite the wars we see on tv, despite the violence we read about in the news, despite the brokenness we see in families all around us, despite our own personal struggles with pain and suffering – God isn’t dead. He’s not asleep. And he has set in motion a plan – centred around a little baby boy – born in a manger – the Prince of Peace – who has already defeated sin and death and will one day soon return to establish peace for all time.

The wrong shall fail. The Right prevail with peace on earth, good-will to men.

New year's blessings to all in 2025!



- 1/2 Mel Riebkes
- 1/6 Lila Reints
- 1/11 Dennis Mennen
- 1/16 Gerald Haan
- 1/17 Lauren Husz
- 1/28 Mary Boersma



1/13 Larry & Mary Johnson



Reminder: If you have anything you'd like included in the Shepherd's Staff, please try to have it to Wendy Armstrong by the 20th of the month. The goal is to have the newsletter in your mailboxes on the last Sunday of the month.



<https://www.vecteezy.com/free-photos/winter-church>>Winter Church Stock photos by Vecteezy

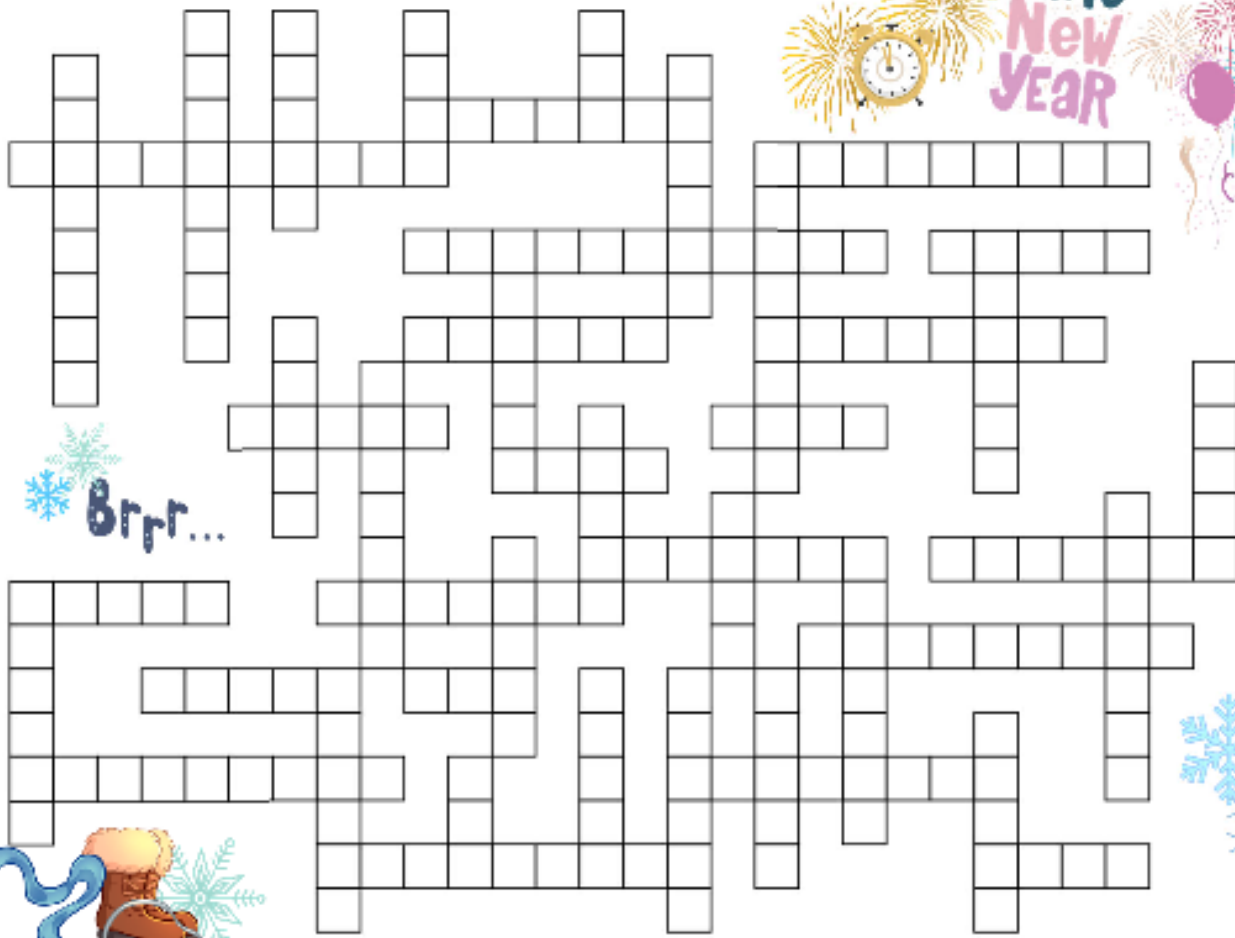
The Church in Winter (Sonnet)

By: Dominic Windram

The church in winter is sanctuary
For those who are often bereft of hope.
It lies behind strange, black skeletal trees
And snow-laden ground. At the very close
Of day, its soft lights gently glow. It seems,
Although we suffer daily, we can be
Redeemed. It's not merely the stuff of dreams.
Prayers can work wonders. Indeed, it feels
Good to know that when winter hits us hard,
There are such places of warmth and love,
That hold us flawed beings in deep regard.
O We know true blessings come from above!
And like seeds, under snow, slowly stirring,
Our hearts and minds will always dream of spring.

January Word Fill In

Write the words in the correct place on the grid based on the number of letters. Dashes included in answers.



3 letters

hat
ski
ice

4 letters

rink
plow
sled
hope
plan

5 letters

snowy
party
renew
first
boots
goals
scarf
clock
chill
parka
gusty
cheer

6 letters

shiver
frigid
health
hockey
fleece
heater
commit

7 letters

woolens
January
sweater

MLK Day

blanket
promise
icicles

8 letters

confetti
snowball
blizzard
slippery
calendar

9 letters

beginning
celebrate
snowboard
insulated

10 letters

wintertime

11 letters

resolutions