

Blue Christmas Meditation

Peace for Troubled Times

John 14:26-27

December 8, 2024

Rev. Scott Anderson

I'm finding that I am having to say goodbye a lot this year. I've been to California twice to deliver eulogies for two of my closest and dearest friends. My best friend of over 40 years was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer last December and died five weeks later. A ninety-year-old woman who was more of a mother to me than my own mom died in early August. I've officiated at a dozen memorial services for members of this congregation this year, people I deeply cared about, and I will have to say a final goodbye to all of you at the end of this month.

Saying goodbye and letting go is hard. And it seems that we face goodbyes at every turn in life. Those of you who have kids and grandkids who will be graduating from high school and preparing to enter college next year know that they will face the inevitable separation from friends, teachers, mentors, and families. Some parents are saying goodbye to their eldest child. Others are watching the last one leave the nest. And maybe you have had to say goodbye to others in your life who are now separated by death.

And so it goes; it seems that we are forever saying goodbye—goodbye to childhood, goodbye to high school, goodbye to friends, goodbye to jobs, goodbye to relationships—goodbye, goodbye, and goodbye. One would think that saying goodbye would get easier over time because we seem to do it so often, especially when you reach my age. But it doesn't. Each separation is a loss that we mourn, whether it is temporary or permanent. Having to say goodbye reminds us just how fragile life can be. At times such as these, we might wonder whether anything will remain the same, whether there is anyone to whom we can hold on and never let go.

And so, we gather on this second Sunday in Advent to hold sacred what is often overlooked in the busyness of the holiday season. We are here to acknowledge the weight of grief, loss, and loneliness that many carry, especially during this time of year. The lights, the music, and the celebrations around us can sometimes feel like a stark contrast to the emotions we hold inside. And yet, here we are, together, many of us, perhaps, seeking comfort, peace, and hope.

In our scripture text from John, Jesus speaks to his disciples in a moment of great uncertainty. He knows that soon he will leave them, and they will face a world that feels overwhelming and full of sorrow. And so, he offers these words: "But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

The peace Jesus offers is not the kind that erases our pain or wipes away our tears in an instant. It's not a peace that denies the reality of loss or pretends that everything is fine. Instead, it is a peace that sits with us in our sorrow. It's a peace that acknowledges the brokenness of this world while gently whispering to us that brokenness does not have the final word.

This peace comes from the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter, who walks alongside us even when the path feels dark and uncertain. The Spirit reminds us of Jesus' words of love, hope, and assurance—words that tell us we are not alone, even when it feels like we are.

This divine peace is different from anything the world can offer because it doesn't depend on circumstance. It is a gift freely given to sustain us, even in the midst of our hardest days.

In this season of Advent and Christmas, I invite you to lean into that peace. Whatever grief you or your loved ones are carrying, you don't have to force yourself to feel "jolly" or "merry." You don't have to pretend the pain isn't real. Instead, allow yourself to simply be—to rest in the presence of the One who knows your heart and holds your sorrow with tender care.

Perhaps you feel the absence of someone you love, whose chair is empty at the table this year. Or maybe you carry the weight of uncertainty about the future, the ache of a broken relationship, the fear of a debilitating illness, the growing diminishment of aging, or the silent struggle of feeling unseen. Whatever your story, know that this is a safe place to bring it all before God. Here, you are met with a love that does not diminish in the face of grief but shines all the brighter through it.

The promise of Jesus' peace does not erase the struggles we face, but it gives us the strength to endure. It reminds us that we are not alone, that God is Emmanuel—God with us—in every moment, in every tear, and in every quiet breath. This peace invites us to hope, even when hope feels distant. It assures us that, even in the darkest night, the light of Christ still shines.

As we gather for prayer later in this service, remember that the peace of Christ is here for each of us. It is a peace that holds us together when we feel like we might fall apart. It is a peace that steadies us, a peace that sustains us, and a peace that gently leads us forward, one step at a time.

"Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give you." May we hold these words close to our hearts today and in the days to come during this holiday season.

Amen.