

**“A Christmas Carol Revisited
“Marley’s Ghost: Bad News before the Good News”**

Happy New Year!!! Advent begins the New Year in the Christian tradition. Yes it is out of step with the Western World, but Advent is a season of expectation and hope and promise. Advent invites us to wait and to prepare for the gift of the Christ Child who came long ago, but also to prepare and wait for the final victory, the promise of the reign of justice and righteousness to come. This year, our sermon series is “A Christmas Carol Revisited.” This Charles Dickens’ classic tale is a wonderful way to look at our faith past, present and future AND to ponder how we are challenged to keep Christmas, a real Christmas in our hearts and spirits. We begin the journey into the Advent season with the admonition that “no one knows the hour or day” when the kingdom will come. In one sense, it is bad news, but like Ebenezer Scrooge, we need to face the darkness and the bad news before we can experience, hear and receive the good news. This first Sunday in Advent, we are focusing on Marley’s ghost and the warning he brings to Scrooge. The first candle we will light is the candle of peace. May this week invite us to look deeply at our own lives and spirits as we prepare for Christ to come. ---Pastor Cindy

Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon: **“Marley’s Ghost: Bad News before the Good News”**

Prayer for the Week

Gracious God, your vision of peace and wholeness comes to us in sweeping revelations and in tiny signs of hope. Kindle our hearts that we may be a peaceful people. Keep us from growing weary of waiting, and give us the faith to trust in your promise of peace. We pray in the name of the coming Christ. Amen.

This week’s sermon may be viewed at <http://sundaystreams.com/go/firstwichita>

Study Guide

12/04/17 Isaiah 2: 1-2

The Advent readings are often filled with images from the prophets. Advent invites one to remember the promise of the prophets, the birth of Jesus AND those things that have not yet come to pass. Advent focuses on the time to come when justice, peace and righteousness shall reign fully on earth. Not only thousands of years ago did the words “in the days to come” sound poignant, today as well the longing for “the days to come” is real and deep. In the midst of our conflict, God offers the promise of peace, the promise that the day will come when all nations together will be united in the presence of God. *In the midst of conflicts how do you experience the peace of God? Today, pray a prayer of peace for yourself, your relationships and for the world.*

12/05/17 Isaiah 2: 2-3

Not only will all people stream to the mountain of God, they will do so that they might know God and walk in God’s ways. The promise is that God will speak and will speak of what is good and just and right. Part of the struggle is that people hear or believe that they understand what God wants and how God wants things done. Those disagreements make for conflict, violence and war. The prophet is not clear about the process it takes to be united, only that the promise is that the time is coming when it will occur. People are often distracted: by work, by uncertainty, and by life spinning out of control. During the Advent season we are often distracted by advertising and busyness like Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol*, they lose sight of what is important... Advent invites us to turn back to God, that “God may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths.” *How are you finding ways to turn away distractions and find the peace that Christ offers?*

12/06/17 Isaiah 2: 4-5

Here is the final promise of this passage: when the Messiah comes, when the Christ comes there will be peace. “They shall beat their swords into plowshares... nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.” For centuries the longing of the people of God has been for peace. How long will young people die in war, in acts of war and in acts of terror? The deep longing for peace, real peace that is not just an absence of war is not articulated enough. And it is not just war, but the minor jealousies and worries we carry in our hearts and spirits. Scrooge had no peace, only conflict within and without. *How do you live out the concept of peace? How do you see the promise of peace being made real in the world?*

11/07/17 Matthew 24: 36-41

This is the “bad news” of the Advent season. The traditional readings are filled with calls for repentance. Jesus words are also a “wake up call,” pay attention, no one knows the day or time that the world will end. While that is true as a “cosmic” statement, it is also true as a personal statement. How many of us have had someone we love taken from us suddenly? We think of the words we wished we had said or things we had done. Marley’s ghost appears to Scrooge with a warning to pay attention to the visits he will receive. No one knows the day or hour when the son of God will reappear, Marley’s ghost gives Scrooge a second change. *How do you perceive this difficult passage in light of the Advent season?*

12/08/17 Matthew 24: 42-44

“If the householder had known....” If we would only know then we would be prepared, right? Jesus notes, “no one knows so be ready, for Christ will come when we least expect it.” In *The Christmas Carol*, Scrooge certainly does not expect Marley’s ghost and is not really prepared for the others. The point is that the bad news Marley brings, will end up being good news for Scrooge. His life will be changed. The call of Christ for us all is that bad news becomes good news through the grace and love of Jesus. Advent for all its busyness can invite us to be open to the peace that only Christ can offer. *Today, find a way to experience the peace of Christ that passes all understanding.*