

I have to start this devotional with a confession. I'm not...great...at embodying peace during the Advent season. Part of this is due to the cyclical nature of my work. For as long as I've been a grown-up with a real job, December has always meant the end of the semester—final papers, mountains of grading, and getting grades in by a due date that is always just a few days before Christmas. Add to that all the preparations necessary for putting together a holiday for a large, busy family (who thought four kids was going to be a good idea?), and I often feel more frantic than peaceful when Week 4 of Advent rolls around.

I listen to a devotional podcast each morning, and on Wednesday during my commute the host began with a chirpy greeting: "Guess what, y'all?! Christmas is only ONE WEEK away!" Suddenly, as I sat at the stop light, I swear I could feel the hives begin to rise on my neck, my face getting hot as my mind raced through all the lists of things I had yet to do before I was "ready for Christmas." Then the host went on, "And my sister, if that thought causes you stress instead of peace and joy, YOU'RE DOING CHRISTMAS WRONG!"

Dear church family, I may have thought a bad word at that moment.

And yet, of course, that relentlessly cheerful woman of God was absolutely right.

When Pastor Ellen gave us our homework last week, I knew PEACE was a perfect word to dig into. Peace can mean so very many things, but it's often understood best as the opposite of something negative: Peace in place of war. Peace after raging storms. Peace overcoming anxiety.

Whether internal or external, peace is always a reprieve, a rest from something that endangers us or troubles our soul. There are so many things in this world that work to steal our peace; God knows this. In John 16:33 Jesus says, "I have told you these things so that you can have peace because of me. In this world you will have trouble. But be encouraged! I have won the battle over the world."

I think sometimes we consider Christ's offer of peace the same way we think about grandma's repeated offer of dessert after we've already said no: "I know what's good for me. I'm FINE. Thank you, but NO." Unlike a second helping of cake, though, Christ's peace really will make things better. Jesus knows we'll encounter trouble--things that will steal our peace--but through his birth, death, and resurrection, he's won the battle. He's won our peace. Now we just need to say yes to it.

Prayer:

Dear heavenly Father, thank you for the Christmas gift of your peace. You have won all the battles that matter; now allow us to rest in the peace you've won for us. Help us to let go of anxiety and conflict and allow your Spirit to fill our hearts. Prepare us in quietness for your coming.