

# CHRISTMAS PEACE

Week #2 of a 4-Week Advent Series

Dec. 9, 2020

Rev. Richard Rogers

**Rev. Richard Rogers:** Hi! I'm Richard Rogers, and I want to welcome you to Wednesday night at Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center. You know, we are still virtual – we might be virtual for a while – but I want you to know that your spiritual needs are important to us. That – as much as I'd like to see your little faces – I know that, for us right now, the most appropriate thing to do is to stay virtual, stay healthy, wear our masks, do what we need to do to keep ourselves healthy, happy and whole so we are ready for the best new year ever.

I have a couple of announcements for you. The first one is: Christmas Eve. We are doing two Candlelighting Services this year: Wednesday, December 23rd, 7 p.m.; the 24th 7 p.m., as well. Full Candlelighting Service. Outside. Great music. If you were here for the Thanksgiving Eve service, you know how beautiful it is outside. There'll be snow ... well, not snow. But it will be a beautiful outdoor celebration. So mark your calendar for December 23rd and December 24th, 7 p.m. Two services; I want to see you at one of them! So just mark your calendar now.

And then, of course, we're doing our Burning Bowl. That will be on December 31st. Also outside. Come and be a part of that! So the holiday services are LIVE outside in the courtyard. They're going to be fabulous!

Also, we have a new class called "Equality: Believing is Achieving" by Todd Kane. If you haven't taken one of the classes with Todd yet, he's fabulous! This one is Thursday night, December 10th. It's online. Go on our website – [UnityPhx.org](http://UnityPhx.org) – sign up for it and be a part of it.

And the last thing: We are doing another Drive-Through Holiday Celebration. Like we did for the kids on Halloween; this is for Christmas. December 12th from 4 to 5:30; we're going to have just festivities galore. Drive-through, social distancing. The kids will be in the car; you'll drive them through it. It's be a great, great time. They can wave at Santa as they go by. It will be fabulous, fabulous, fabulous!

Okay; that's all the announcements I have for you. Right now, I want you to just take a deep breath and we're going to light the next Advent Candle. And this candle is for PEACE. So we're going to be lighting the candle for peace. And I want you to feel that divine activity of peace within your soul. That this outer symbol of lighting the candle is really a representation of your own inner commitment to peace. [*Lights candle*]

And let's move into our time of meditation.

## MEDITATION:

That today our only purpose is to feel the peace of Christ. The peace that passes all understanding. The peace that is not tied to any event or any situation. That is truly connected to the power of God within us. The Christ peace. There is peace in my soul. That there's a peace in my soul that is greater than any event. That there's a peace in my soul that is not attached to any of the outer situations. Christ is born in me today as peace.

So take another deep breath. And I want you to lean all the way back, and I want you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to a profound sense of peace. Peace; be still. Peace; be still. There are so many activities during the holiday season. There's so many things we think we need to get done, and so many requirements and expectations. In the midst of all of that is the peace of God, knocking at the door of our soul simply saying, "*Peace; be still. Peace be unto you.*" Peace. Peace. Peace.

Wherever you've been upset or nervous or fearful, we choose peace. Wherever you've given up on life or given up on the possibility, today we choose peace. That we come back to peace over and over again as our soul's natural way of being in the world. Peace. Peace. Peace. Peace.

That as we heal – as we restore, as we come into the presence of God – peace is a natural consequence. Peace. Peace. Peace. That when you begin to feel the power of peace within, that we know that we bless our world. Our family, our friends, our neighbors, our work: we bless it with peace today. Peace; be still. Peace. Peace. Peace.

I dedicate this day to peace. I choose to live in the peace of God. To know a peace that passes all understanding. A peace that can find calm in any storm. A peace that is my natural connection with the Divine. Peace. Peace. Peace. So for all the names on our prayer list, for all the people that we are praying for, for all the people who are going through difficult times, we pray for peace. In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

## MESSAGE:

**Rev. Richard Rogers:** Okay; so we're going to talk about peace today. And I really want you to kind of do a little inventory of your holidays. So when you think about peace in your life – when you think about the holidays and peace; when you look back at the holidays that you've had in the past – would you say that peace is a natural consequence of the holidays?

And, for most of us, we have to kind of admit that, for many times – many holidays – peace is really the antithesis of our holiday celebration. *[Laughs]* I remember growing up as a kid, right? And we had a big Christmas Eve party – my folks did – growing up. We always did, as far back as I can remember. Family, friends, neighbors. My folks would pack so many people into our little house that it felt like there were thousands. I mean, I don't how they put that many people in my folks' house on Christmas Eve, but Christmas Eve was at the Rogers'. And people would come. We would have Santa. The house would be decorated.

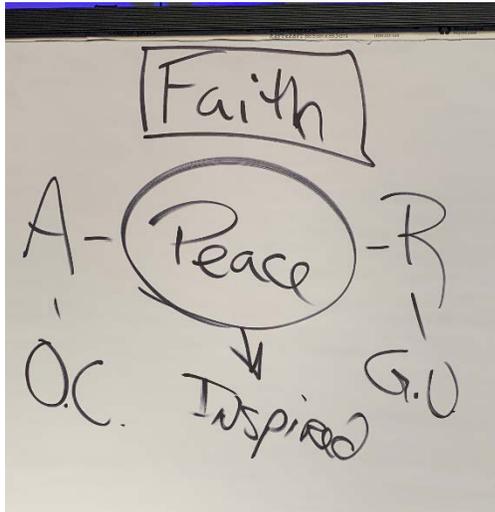
But I'm telling you: We went from zero to a hundred overnight. I mean, the house was never ready beforehand. The food was never ready beforehand. Everything was done from Christmas Eve morning through Christmas Eve – at seven o'clock, six o'clock, when people started arriving. And it was chaos and madness! *[Laughs]* I mean, it was hair ... Have you ever had that experience where you literally believe that your hair is on fire? That it was so chaotic!

So when I think about the holidays, my natural tendency is to move to chaos. Right? It's a high expectation of chaos. And so, mom and dad would be barking orders, and the kids would be cleaning. And we'd just be moving as fast as we could. My brother and I would go try and hide someplace. And they would come find us, and we'd get in trouble. And it was ... it was ... it was mayhem and madness! And yet, it's some of my fondest memories! Like, it was literally some of my fondest memories! But there was nothing close to peace, right?

So, for some of us, peace is not our holiday dominant feeling. But, from a spiritual point of view, it is absolutely one of the dominant ways that we awaken to the Spirit of God. That, as we awaken to the Spirit of God within us, there is a level of peace – as Scripture says – that passes all understanding. A level of peace that is absolutely crazy, fabulous, wonderful.

And, yet, so why is it that the way we experience a holiday is one way, but the spiritual process is called to be very different? So we're called to come into peace, but the way we celebrate the holiday is with mayhem *[laughter]* and madness! It's like, so we can either do the holidays out of our ego – out of our humanity, out of our craziness – or we can really step in to have a spiritual experience.

And I think this year – with all that’s going on in the world – this year really demands that we take it deeper. Right? This is not the year to do an ego-based holiday. This really is the year where we really have to practice our spiritual process, and really take it deeper. So I want to look at this.



As I said, the focus of today is Peace. *[Writes the word “peace” surrounded by a circle on the flipchart.]* So this is the sweet spot. This is the area we’re headed for. We want to have a holiday. We want to have a spiritual experience. We want to know God. And we want to live in a level of peace.

So I want to begin by looking at its opposite. So the opposite of peace really is anxiety, right? *[Writes an “A” for anxiety outside and to the left of the circle of peace.]* So when we’re not in peace, most of us are in anxiety. And what we know is that a huge percentage of our – the people in the United States – are on anti-anxiety medication. *[Laughs]* Right? Because, as a society, we are not running more anxious than peaceful and calm. So anxiety, for many of us, is now our dominant experience. Not just our dominant experience of

holidays; it’s our dominant experience of everything. So we tend to run to be anxious. So anxious: we can say we’re afraid, we’re anxious, we’re insecure. Like, all this is aspects just of being anxious.

Now, the other side – the other opposite of peace is when we resign. *[Writes an “R” for resignation outside and to the right of the circle of peace.]* Where we’re resigned. Where we’ve given up. Right? And what I want you to see is that that doesn’t create peace either. Right? So, in this place, we’ve just given up. Like, there’s no peace in that. We’ve just ... You know ... You know, I’ve shared with you that we’ve got two new puppies at home. You know, resignation is when you just roll on your back – when a puppy rolls on his back – and just says, “Eat me.” Right? And it’s that *[laughs]* time, you know, when little puppies ... when a dominant dog comes by our house, and our little puppies just both go on their backs and go, “They’re going to eat me; so just eat me.” Right?

And so, this is that state: either we’re anxious, or we’ve just completely given up, roll on our back and are just prepared to die. Right? This is where we curl up in a little fetal position and, you know, hope that they eat somebody else before the bear eats us. Right? And so, these are the places where most of us live. Either we’ve given up on life, or we’re anxious.

Now, I want to look at behaviors, because these behaviors matter. So when it comes to anxious behavior, what I want you to see is that most of us are anxious behavior. And I’m just going to do the initials. The anxious behavior is over-controlling. *[Writes “O.C.” underneath the “A.”]* And for most of us, when we’re afraid – when we’re anxious, when we’re upset – we over-control. We manipulate, we over-control. We get in there and we work too much. We work too hard, because we don’t really think it’s going to work out. So we just over-do, over-do, over-do.

And I want you to look at the holidays to see – when you’re anxious about the holidays – how much are you over-controlling? How much are you overdoing? How much you’re overacting? How much you’re overeating? That all those “over” activities are all stem from anxiety ... because we’re not in peace!

Now, when we’re at peace, our behavior changes. Okay. When we resign, what’s the behavior? Well, we just give up. Right? *[Writes “G.U.” for give up underneath the “R.”]* So we just give up. And now, when we’re resigned, we may try something once. We may say, “Well, I did it once.”

And then we just give up. Right? That, over and over and over again, what I want you to see is that we have these two areas where most of us are living: either we're anxious and over-doing, or we've resigned. We've given up and we just stop trying. And both of those places are not the places of peace. Both of those places are just ego positions. And we could spend so much time ... "Well, it's gonna be a terrible holiday, so I don't even know why I bother. You know, I went and I got you this present, but you're not going to like it." Or the other one is: We overspend. We put all the stuff on our credit card. We overspend, we overspend and we overspend. Because we're anxious. We're afraid, so we're just going to over-control it.

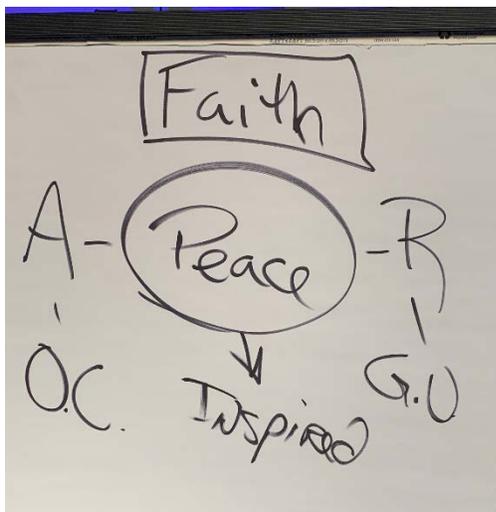
Now, I want to talk about the sweet spot. [Points to the word "peace."] Because we haven't even gotten to the sweet spot yet! So how do we get to peace?

How many of you have ever been to a Unity service? One of the things you will know if you've been to a Unity service anywhere in the world is: We tend to close with the "Peace Song." We've been singing about peace [laughs] for a hundred – over a hundred! – years! And yet, when we look at the world today, we're [laughs] not seeing peace! And, in fact, if you look at the world today, you're actually seeing more anxiousness, more fearfulness, more control. You're seeing more upset. You're seeing racial stuff. You're seeing gender stuff. You're seeing craziness. But we're not seeing the sweet spot!

So how do we get to peace? Well, we began last week by talking about faith. [Writes the word "faith" above the circle of peace.] And I want you to see the importance that faith has in getting us to peace. Because you can't get to peace without faith. Like, if I believe that my life is going to work out... If I believe that the situation's going to work out... If I believe that you're going to love me, what is my dominant feeling when I believe? My dominant feeling – every time I believe – is a level of peace.

Like, if I think I'm going to go hungry... If I think the bear is going to eat – the bear is charging me... I'm either going to run like crazy, or I'm going to roll up in a ball and let the bear eat me. Both of those are not helpful! Neither one of those are peace.

But if I absolutely believe that I'm safe in the presence of the bear, then my dominant emotion at that moment is peace! And I want you to see how often – because when we don't have faith; when we don't believe; when we don't start with faith – we never get to peace. We never get there! It's available to all of us, but you can't be peaceful and be a non-believer! You can't believe that God is working ... You know, if you don't believe that God is working in your life, you're never going to get to peace. But if you believe that there's a Power greater than your little personality – greater than your cuteness, greater than your charm – that is responding to you, then peace is the natural consequence.



Now, when peace is the natural consequence, there's still action. Right? But the action is inspired. [Draws an arrow pointing down from the circle of peace, and then beneath it, the word "Inspired."] We actually live a guided life, right?

So when I start with peace ... I mean, I start with faith. I get to peace, and then what I do is an inspired action. And what I want us to see is: That faith takes us deeper and deeper into our spiritual holiday.

So let's look for just a second at where you're feeling the most anxious. Where you've given up on life. And I want to challenge you today to put faith back in the middle of that situation. Wherever you're the most – and I used this word last week, and I'm going to use it again – wherever you're

the most “freaked out” right now about your health, about the holidays, about your income, about you’re going to do next, about whether Uncle Harry is going to drink too much at Christmas Eve or if Aunt Susie’s going to go off on anybody about whatever ... the latest political issue, whatever it is. Right? What I want to come back to is faith! That God in you is your Source. And if God in you is actively working in your life, it is absolutely appropriate for you to be at peace! And then, when you’re at peace, you’re actually guided! You move into inspired action that makes a difference.

Now let’s go to the Scripture. Last week we looked at the feminine side of the Christmas story. This week we’re going to look at the masculine side: we’re going to look at Joseph. And what we looked at last week was how the angel of the Lord came to Mary and gave her a vision for her life: a vision that was huge. Now we’re going to look at the angel of the Lord... How the angel of the Lord came to Joseph, and how Joseph responded to it. [Laughs]

Because what we’re going to see [laughs] is that Mary and Joseph did not respond in exactly the same way. Right? But we’re going to look at. So here’s Matthew 1:18-25.

*“This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about. His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they had come together, she was found to be pregnant with the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph, her husband, was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose his wife to public disgrace, he had his mind to divorce her quietly.”*

Okay? So Joseph finds out – I’m assuming through Mary – that Mary is with child. [Laughs] Right? And then... I can’t even imagine this conversation, but you know, as a guy, you kind of play with this idea. How it would roll with your fiancé – your cute little maiden that you just love so much: the little neighborhood girl that you grew up next to – comes to you one day and says, *“I know we’re engaged, but there’s a situation here.”* [Laughs] *“We have been blessed,”* she might start. [Laughs] You know? *“We’ve found favor with God, the angel said to me. We have found favor with God. I am with child.”* [Laughs]

Alright? Now, I don’t know how many guys – with the male ego – could really get their arms around this whole concept. I don’t know how many guys... If their girlfriend, their fiancé, came to them and said, *“I’m with child; don’t worry. It’s nobody you know!”* [Laughs] *“I’m with child with the big guy. I’m having God’s baby.”* Right? So I don’t know how many guys could actually [laughs] get their arms around that and actually believe that’s true.

But Joseph is such a stand-up guy! Like, he is such a good guy that – out of his goodness – I don’t think he believed her, right? But out of his goodness, he wasn’t going to embarrass her. Right? He wasn’t... He didn’t want to have her... Like, she could have been stoned! This was vulnerable! Like, this is such a scary story; she literally could have been stoned by her village – by his people – for being pregnant before they slept together. Right? And him being such a stand-up guy, he just says, *“Okay. After the child is born, I’ll be a stand-up guy, and I’ll just quietly divorce her.”* Right? Like, that’s noble, right? I’m not saying it’s right, but you can understand. Right? And this is 2,000 years ago! This was a completely different time. Right?

*“But after he had considered this, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, ‘Joseph, son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home with you as your wife, because what she is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. And she will give birth to a son, and he will be given the name Jesus, because he will save the people from their sin.’ All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said to the prophet: ‘The virgin will conceive and birth a son, and he will be called Emmanuel, which means God in us.’ When he woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him to do; he took Mary home as his wife. But they did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son, and he named him Jesus.”*

Okay, so here's this story. But before I go back, I want you to see that – from a spiritual point of view – some of us believe that if we believe a spiritual life, there's not going to be any more drama in our life. Right? What I want you to see in this story is: There was a level of drama, right? What God asked them to do was to respond to that drama from a spiritual point of view. Not to respond out of their ego. Not to respond out of their anxieties or their fears. But respond out of faith!

And this is the critical moment! Because at this moment, the angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and Joseph has to decide: am I going to respond from peace? Do I have faith in the Spirit of the Lord? That the angel really spoke to me? Or am I going to act from my ego and act out of anxiety? Right?

And every one of us could accept or believe that a man – out of his male ego – would respond out of anxiety. Right? That's not a big step! I mean, we see people all the time responding to life from their ego! Responding to life out of their insecurities. Responding to life out of their anxiety. It's not a big step!

But what happened is: He responded out of faith. And because he responded out of faith, he was at peace. Right? He was at peace!

Now, 2,000 years ago, he still walked his wife home with him, and they became husband and wife. And it was an absolute act of faith to do that! To be that! To be that brave! To be that faithful! To live that inspired action!

Like, I promise you that God will be with you, but I'm going to call you out that there's going to be times when you have to take an action that your ego doesn't want to take. Where you have to be willing to walk in faith in an inspired action, and actually be at peace in the middle of upset. To be at peace because you know – in your heart of hearts – that the Spirit of God has spoken to you. That the angel of the Lord has whispered in your ear, and that you have to take this action.

Now, you can take this action out of anxiety – out of fear – and do the whole situation out of your ego. Or you can stop and trust that God in you is speaking directly to your soul. And that there's actually a level of peace that is available to you. And that you can move into inspired action for what's next.

See, living a spiritual life sometimes is tough. It calls us to move beyond what is normal or regular or average. And it calls us into a higher level of behavior to inspired action. That we can literally be at peace in the presence of what many would consider upset.

Today I want you to look at the places in your life where you've been the most fearful or the places where you've given up. I want you to come back to faith. And I want you to really call forth the next level of faith in your life: to a level of peace that passes all understanding. And really get clear about what Spirit – what action is God calling you to take. Not what action does your ego want you to take... And not what action fear wants you to take... Or not what action your insecurities want you to take... Or not what action your buddies think you should take, or your girlfriends think you should take... But what action does Spirit want you to take? And I want you to take that action! I want you to know a holiday where you're acting from that place! To feel the power of God within you to take new actions on a greater possibility.

Will you pray with me?

And I want you to feel the Spirit of God whispering in your ear, just like the Spirit of God whispered to Mary. Just like the Spirit of God came to Joseph in a dream. That there is a voice of God in your soul. The activity of God in you is speaking a greater possibility. And what I want you to do is: I want you to hear it; and I want you to hold it in peace. And then I want you to be willing to move into inspired actions about your future. About your life, about your family, about your community, about your world. That we listen with faith; that we hear with faith; that we act from faith. And the activity of faith is peace. The outcome

is peace. So, God, we give thanks for faith: the faith that leads us to a deeper peace, a deeper understanding, a deeper power than we've ever known before. Let us live this Christmas as an act of deep faith, and to know the peace that passes all understanding. And so it is. Amen.

### **COLLECTION**

Alright; this is the time of giving of our gifts and our tithes. I want to thank you all for your generous support of the ministry. And, really, your support right now – as we finish this year – is critically important to this ministry. So your gift – your offering – literally makes a difference, no matter how big or how small your support of this ministry. It truly makes a difference right now. So whether you write a check and put it in the mail, or you give electronically, your financial support to this ministry makes a huge difference right now. So I want to thank you right now. I want to thank you for your holiday gift; for your end-of-the-year gift; for your Christmas gift. Because it truly makes a difference!

So our offering blessing is: *“Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give, and all that I receive.”* Together: *“Divine love, through me, blesses and multiplies all that I have, all that I give and all that I receive.”* In the name and through the power of the Living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

### **CLOSING**

Okay; God bless you, friend! I see you having a great week! This is your week of peace, but you have to know faith to truly know peace. God bless you, friend; have a great week!

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