

Prayer of Preparation: **O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel that mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.**

REFRAIN: REJOICE! REJOICE! EMMANUEL SHALL COME TO YOU, O ISRAEL.

Jesus sends his disciples out on a mission: to make more disciples. He says something that most of us will immediately recognize from years of Bible study: **"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest..."**

We've all heard this verse and taken it to heart. We talk to our family and friends about Jesus, we invite people to church, and more importantly, we invite people into a life of discipleship because that's what Jesus asks us to do.

Then, Jesus goes on to say that he's sending us out as lamb in the midst of wolves. I like this verse because it truly explains the work environment of disciples. Instead of soft pedaling the work set out for them, Jesus tells the disciples the truth – I'm sending you out into the world and you may well be devoured by the people around you. For those of us who have human resource departments, making disciples would be considered an unsafe work environment and the state labor board would be involved.

But here's the part that we often miss. The disciples are supposed to bring *peace* with them wherever they go. The disciples are sent out without much to their name. They didn't have money to stay in hotels, or guest rooms, so they would be dependent on the hospitality of the people they meet. This meant that they would stay in people's homes and they were to bring God's peace, found in Jesus, to the homes they visited.

Imagine bringing peace wherever we go. I know a whole lot of people whose only goal is to bring chaos with them and sprinkle it around like glitter. I usually stay away from those folks.

Luke's gospel tells us that when the angels pronounced Jesus's birth to the shepherds, they said: **"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!"**

Peace on earth. The angels pronounced that we Jesus's birth we would have peace on earth. How does that happen? It begins with us. Well it began with the shepherds. The lowest of the low were the first to find out that peace is here. I imagine that there's a reason the shepherds were the first to know, and I believe it had something to do with Ezekiel 34 where God is described as the true shepherd.

Here's the thing about who brings peace: it's us. Scripture has a rich retelling of who shepherds are and what it means to be a shepherd. And as serious Biblical scholars, we know that sometimes we are the shepherds and sometimes we are the sheep. And at all times we are the ones Jesus has charged to bring peace.

I want to be clear, the peace we bring is not the absence of discussion or disagreement. As I often say, I can't get 4 people to agree with what we should have for dinner and how it should be prepared. That would be the absence of discussion or disagreement. The peace I'm talking about is the peace of God which surpasses all understanding and keeps our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

It's the peace Jesus teaches us when he says, love God and love your neighbor as you love yourselves. It's the peace that has us see God's image in the face of everyone we meet. It's the peace that helps us hear that God's peace is borne out of love for us. It's the peace we have when we realize that we can, and we should, work together for the good of us all.

We have a song in the hymnal that describes what Jesus wants us to do...

Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me
Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be.
With God our creator, children all are we.
Let us walk with each other in perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me, let this be the moment now.
With every step I take, may this be my solemn vow:
To take each moment and live each moment
in peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me.

As we enter this week, let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.

Response to the Word: **O come, O come, great Lord of might,
who to your tribes on Sinai's height in ancient times did give the law in cloud and majesty and awe.**
REFRAIN: REJOICE! REJOICE! EMMANUEL SHALL COME TO YOU, O ISRAEL.