“Be strong, do not fear! Here is your God. He will come and save you.” He will come and save you. What weighs on your heart? Are you out of work or do you feel stuck in an unfulfilling job? Are you worried about finances or legal issues? Are you or a loved one facing a serious health issue? Are you experiencing regret? Are you disillusioned or unsatisfied or unsettled? Are you worried about your children’s safety or their ability to thrive or their decision-making or their happiness? Are you hurting from a broken relationship? What weighs on your heart? He will come and save you.

Isaiah proclaims that our Savior will come: the eyes of the blind will be opened; the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame will leap like a deer; the speechless will sing for joy; waters will break forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert; the burning sand will become a pool; the thirsty ground will be springs of water. These words were written to imbue hope: leaping and singing and breaking forth. But let’s be careful not to infer from these lyrical words that Christ’s coming will solve all of our problems. I wish it were so, but surely we’ve learned that that isn’t how the Created Order works. Being saved doesn’t mean we are assured of good health or financial security or fulfilling relationships or all our dreams coming true. Remember the unexpected way in which our Savior came into this world. Jesus was not born in a palace, but in a manager. He was not swaddled in fine linens, but in bands of cloth. Being saved isn’t about societal norms of success. Being saved is about peace. Jesus did not gather an army so he could conquer a nation. He, simply, conquered our hearts.
I read two articles last week about the importance of religion to our well-being. Several parishioners shared one of these articles with me. Coincidentally, I read the other article in a daily feed the next day. Both articles are enlightening for a secular world. The article in *The Wall Street Journal*, entitled “Don’t Believe in God? Lie to Your Children,” (Erica Komisar, December 6, 2019) notes that gratitude and empathy are inherent in most religions. The article points out that these virtues are protective against depression and anxiety; gratitude and empathy are protective against depression and anxiety. The article in *The Harvard Gazette*, entitled “Psychology’s new openness to religion,” (Alvin Powell, December 5, 2019) describes how psychologists are incorporating religion and spirituality in patient therapy. A program was developed after a survey showed that religion and spirituality are potentially powerful forces in the emotional lives of many patients. Eighty percent of the patients surveyed reported that religion is useful in dealing with stress. The article reminds us that Alcoholics Anonymous, the single most widely used mental health treatment in the world, is entirely spiritually-based.

Hopefully, many people will read these articles because this emotional healing through religion is precisely the gift of Jesus Christ. There is a peace that lies deep within us, woven in our Creation, the well-spring of our being. This peace is God’s presence within us always. Jesus came into this world so that we would tune into our created self and know that God is right here with us, integral to our being.

So, how do we go deep and find this peace? There’s a good movie out right now: *A Beautiful Day in the Neighborhood*. It’s based on a true story about a magazine writer assigned to interview Fred Rogers from the long-running tv show *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*. The plot of the movie engages by skillfully revealing how the magazine writer is impacted by the interview. But, another message from this movie caught my attention. Fred Rogers personified
empathy. With his characteristically calm and patient demeanor, he focused his attention on people in need, and he engaged with them for as long as they needed, no matter the disruption to his schedule, even the filming of his daily tv show. Yet, it is clear from this movie, that Fred’s own life wasn’t perfect; there were frustrations and disappointments. The message I took away from the movie was that Fred Rogers was deliberate in doing the personal work of staying connected to that inner peace.

It makes all the difference to my day when I start with prayer. Whether I have twenty minutes before I need to get out of bed, or just five minutes, thanking God for a new day, thinking about all of you and the joys and concerns of your lives, thinking about my family and friends, thinking about the needs of this world, desiring inspiration for my ministry here with you and for how I live my life, these prayers give texture and tone to my day. Prayer draws us to that quiet place inside ourselves where we know God, where we know peace. It takes practice, like just about everything we do in this life. With practice and attentiveness, we find moments throughout the day to express a concern to God or to give thanks for a kindness or for laughter or beauty or joy. A posture of prayer keeps us connected to our inner peace.

We sing this Advent season, “Come, Thou long expected Jesus, Joy of every longing heart, Rule in all our hearts alone, Let us find our rest in Thee.” When we make the time to be quiet and draw inward, we find the strength and the desire to turn outward. We find the peace that nurtures our lives: the peace that grants perspective and patience and insight and acceptance of what we cannot change and gratitude for the many blessings of this life.

What weighs on your heart? Do not fear. The Prince of Peace will come. He will come and save you. Amen.