December 7, 2025

When Our Silence Becomes Prayer
Selected verses from Luke 1

Timing Matters

I've learned something in married life: you can be completely right… and still be completely wrong—simply because you said it at the wrong time. As many of you know, we have a little dog at home, so we have to take Joy out for walks. One day I said to Juhee, "Let's take Joy for a walk." Great idea, right? Healthy, responsible—nothing controversial about it.

But the problem was the timing. She had just come home from church, hadn't even taken off her coat yet, and was standing by the table trying to catch her breath. And in that moment, even the most reasonable suggestion became… the wrong thing to say.

And then there was another time. I wanted to surprise her by meeting her on her way home, so Joy and I walked toward the road where she'd be driving by. I saw her car coming from a distance, so I stuck out my thumb like a hitchhiker. And what do you think happened? She drove right past us. I called and asked, "Did you not see us?" "Oh, I saw you," she said. "But I was too hungry and too tired… I just couldn't go for a walk, so I kept driving." The point is: timing matters. Same words. Different timing. Completely different meaning.

Timing matters. And meaning lives inside timing. I believe the same is true with Scripture. It's not only what God said and did that matters—*when* God said and did it also carries deep meaning. The timing of Jesus' coming into the world carries deep meaning. Today's passage begins with the words, *"In the days of King Herod."* This was during what was known as the *Pax Romana*—the "Roman Peace." It was a period of relative calm after Caesar had conquered surrounding nations through overwhelming military force. In other words, it wasn't a time of world war, or nations rising against nations in open bloodshed. It was a time Rome proudly called peace.

And yet, it was during this so-called Roman Peace that Jesus, the Prince of Peace, entered the world. What does that mean? Kelley Nikondeha writes that "the first Advent was God's critique of what the world called peace." Peace built on the domination of the strong over the weak is not peace. "Peace" maintained through oppression is not the peace God desires. A society where a small group of elites enjoy stability and prosperity by exploiting the vulnerable—that is not God's peace either.

This is why God chose that moment—during the false peace of the *Pax Romana*—to send God's Son into the world. It was God's way of saying: the peace created by violence and oppression is not true peace.

False Peace

Two thousand years have passed, yet we still hear the same false promises of peace and prosperity built on violence, power, and domination: "We need stronger nuclear weapons for peace." "We need a bigger military for peace." "We need to deport 'dangerous' immigrants for peace." And these aren't just words—these actions are happening. Now, we no longer have a Department of Defense—we have a Department of War. Thousands of immigrants—documented and undocumented—now live under constant fear of deportation.

On November 22, our district superintendent called an urgent meeting, and all clergy were asked to attend. Can you guess why? The conference learned that ICE, CBP, and Homeland Security may be considering targeting places of worship during the holiday season. Because

more people gather at churches during Christmas, churches could become potential sites for raids. Our D.S. wanted us to be prepared in case this actually happens.

But let me ask you: Will there be peace if ICE raids a church and arrests hundreds of immigrants? Will there be peace if we destroy all our enemies with superior military power? Some people may think so. But as Christians, that is not the peace we are called to believe in—and not the peace we are called to embody. This is why, whenever we talk about peace, we must ask two honest questions: Peace for whom? And who is paying the price for that peace?

God's Peace Campaign

By sending Jesus during the so-called Roman Peace, God exposed the empire's false peace—one built on the blood and tears of the vulnerable. God's peace does not depend on violence or war. God began a very different kind of peace campaign in a small hill-country village. And it begins quietly—with a promise of new life to an aging couple who had long carried the ache of childlessness.

Luke introduces us to an ordinary priest named Zechariah. It was a difficult time to be a priest because King Herod manipulated the priesthood, promoting those loyal to him and pushing faithful priests like Zechariah to the margins. Temple elites lived in luxury while village priests struggled to survive. Zechariah saw the injustice firsthand—feasts in Jerusalem while widows in his village had no bread to feed her children. That was not peace.

When Zechariah entered the temple to offer incense, he carried all of this with him—the oppression of Rome, Herod's manipulation and priestly corruption, his neighbors' suffering, and his own silent sorrow. As the incense rose, it carried not just his prayer but the prayers of his village: "Lord, do you see us? How long must we endure?"

And right there—in lament and longing—God broke in. Gabriel appeared and said, "Do not be afraid. Your prayer has been heard." A son would be born. Joy and hope would rise. God had been listening all along.

But Zechariah struggled to believe it; years of disappointment can make hope feel dangerous. So the angel gave him a season of silence—not as punishment, but as holy reflection. A silence long enough for God's peace to take root inside him.

When Our Silence Becomes Prayer

During those long months of silence—while Elizabeth carried the child and waited for the birth—what do you imagine Zechariah was doing? He couldn't speak a single word. All he could do was wait. All he could do was trust. All he could do was listen. And maybe that is exactly what he needed.

Have you ever taken a full day or two of complete silence? No talking at all—just silence. When you do that, two things begin to happen.

First, the inner noise of your own heart becomes louder. Worries, fears, old memories, and emotions you've pushed aside start rising to the surface. Second, your ears begin to open to the voices of others. I imagine this happened to Zechariah as well. In his long silence, he likely heard the unspoken suffering of his neighbors more clearly: the cry of a widow who lost her child because she had no food, the wailing of parents whose son died after being forced into Roman labor, and the weary sighs of a farmer crushed by heavy taxes. He must have heard the quiet, suppressed groans of those living under the sword of the Roman Empire. In his deep silence, he must have wondered, "Is it really peace?" Silence has a way of raising that same question in us as well.

Silence for the sake of listening is sometimes the only way we learn whether "peace" is truly peace for *everyone*. What stories do we miss because we fill the air with our own opinions? What suffering goes unheard because we stay inside our own small corner of life? When we learn to listen—to the stories of those whose lives differ from ours, to the pain our neighbors carry—our hearts begin to widen. Our understanding grows. Compassion deepens. And like Zechariah, our voices become capable of rising not in self-protection, but in solidarity and truth.

Zechariah's silence was not punishment. It was grace. It was the time God used to plant peace deep within his heart. And when the moment finally came and his tongue was loosed, he lifted his voice and praised God's salvation and announced God's breaking-in. And that brings us to one final image—an image of peace, disruption, and Advent hope.

When a Small Act Disrupts False Peace

As we think about Zechariah's silence and God's peace campaign, let me return to an image many of us carry this season: the Nativity scene. When we picture peace, we often imagine something calm, quiet, and comfortable. No conflict. No disagreement. Just a serene scene under soft lights. If you look at the Nativity in our own sanctuary, it looks so peaceful, doesn't it?

But in Dedham, Massachusetts, one church created a Nativity scene that caused quite a stir. Let us watch a short video. **[PPT]** Their display made many people uncomfortable. Some said it distorted the true meaning of Christmas by being "too political." Others said it expressed the heart of Christmas for our time.

One thing is certain: that Nativity disrupted people's sense of peace. It threw a stone into the still water of a comfortable Christmas. It disturbed the quiet many were hoping for. In other words—it disrupted false peace.

And isn't that exactly what the first Christmas did? Jesus didn't come to maintain the status quo. He didn't come to bless Rome's version of peace. He didn't come to make the powerful more comfortable. He came as God's holy disruption— breaking false peace so true peace could begin. A small act, but a world-changing disruption.

This Advent, we are invited into that same holy work. Perhaps it starts small— with silence that listens, with compassion that sees, with courage that refuses to accept the world's false peace. And who knows? Maybe a simple act of truth-telling, compassion, or solidarity— your act, my act— might disrupt the false peace around us and make room for the true peace of Christ to be born again. May our silence become prayer. May our listening become compassion. And may our small acts become holy disruptions through which God's peace enters the world. Amen.