If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (Romans 12:18)

You do not want to mess with Christmas in Turku, Finland. Every year there a Declaration of Christmas Peace is read in public and broadcast on television and radio. Their tradition has gone on almost uninterrupted since the 1300s in Finland's Christmas City, and it's declaration serves as a reminder and encouragement to spend the holiday in harmony, to threaten offenders with harsh punishments, and to wish everyone a Merry Christmas. The proclamation reads: "Tomorrow, God willing, is the graceful celebration of the birth of our Lord and Savior; and thus is declared a peaceful Christmas time to all, by advising devotion and to behave otherwise quietly and peacefully, because he who breaks this peace and violates the peace of Christmas by any illegal or improper behavior shall under aggravating circumstances be guilty and punished according to what the law and statutes prescribe for each and every offense separately. Finally, a joyous Christmas feast is wished to all inhabitants of the city."

Although he did not threaten extra harsh punishments for criminals, Paul, the author of Romans, encouraged us to "live at peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18) as much as possible. The NIV Bible titles this section of Romans 12 "Love in Action," and this exhortation is preceded by "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (verse 17) and followed by "Do not take revenge, my dear friends" (verse 19). The guidelines are for actions that reflect powerful forgiveness, love, and the wholeness and unity of God's shalom. This is a relevant reminder to us during Advent and one that continues beyond. As we focus on dwelling in God with Us, let us allow His peace to flow through us to everyone we come in contact with.

What would you put in your family proclamation of Christmas peace? Who do you have trouble getting along with? What steps can you take to practice living in peace with that person during the season?