

**PEACE ABOUNDS IN US**

Today is Peace Sunday in our Advent tradition so I want to wish you all 'good Peace', "Happy Peace", and I pray that we all accomplish the Peace we need in this busy, busy season of Hope, Peace, Joy and Love.

As we read our texts today, we eventually hear about Peace, but first, we are given a bunch of advice about how to get there. Which, of course is very helpful.

The Prophet Malachi tells us that, "the Lord will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver and will purify the descendants of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, until they present offerings to the LORD in righteousness." So, all the work of the Lord is ON US until we finally present our offerings. It seems we are passive recipients of the great gift from God.

Then, the first chapter of Luke tells us that we will have, "knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of our sins. Because of the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to shine upon those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." The dawn will **break upon us** so we can find the 'way of peace'. Again, passive recipients of God's gift of peace.

Then, much later, Paul says, to the folks setting up the church in Phillippi, " And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight to help you to determine what really matters...". So, by this time, after the resurrection of Christ, we seem to have developed the ability to know the difference between what really matters and what doesn't matter. How did we get there?

We get there because of John the Baptist, crying in the wilderness, crying REPENT, which is preparing the way of the Lord. By the way, not 'for the Lord', but "of the Lord". The way that the Lord comes. REPENT!

In Malachi God is acting on us until we finally do what we are supposed to do. In the first chapter of Luke, God sends mercy on us to guide us to the goal of Peace, until, later in Luke, we finally know what really matters.

But John is pretty clear that we need to DO something. We need to REPENT. Metanoia is the Greek for "repent" and it means 'to change our mind' or a 'change of perspective'. No biggy, right? Just change our mind.

Come with me as we take a closer look at what scripture tells us about 'change your mind'.

Our Gospel today begins with a lengthy list of all the earthly powers; Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate, Herod and his brother Philip, Lysanias and the priests Annas (who was retired but still very powerful) and Caiaphas. In the earthly places of Judea, Galilea, Ituraea, Trachonitis and Ablene. That's a lot of power over a large part of the ancient world. Luke names every locus of power, every place where the Word of the Almighty ought to land. But it does no land there.

The Word of the Almighty comes through the wilderness. The scary backwater where there was no law, no safety, no peace. One guy crying in the wilderness. John, whose name in Hebrew means "love". So, there we

are love leading us in the scary places to the salvation of peace, urging us to just change our mind, change our perspective, change our heart.

In our hearts and minds, we have strengths. We all have those things that we are most comfortable with, those things that we notice and acknowledge. We have a kind heart, we come to church, we have a pretty good education, we think well of our neighbours, we pay our taxes, we support charities for the needy.

In this Advent season, we wait for God to arrive. While we wait, we may be keep looking for God to arrive in our places of power. But scripture says that God doesn't come to places of power. Instead of waiting for the powerful to show us God, maybe we could change our perspective, change our mind, and look for God where John tells us that God already is.

Look to the lowly. Look to the little things that are wandering around in us, unnoticed and lost in the swamps of our minds and hearts. What are the quiet overlooked, powerless things? What are those tender places? Our sorrows and our wounds? What are the 'outlier' hopes and oh-so-fragile dreams, almost forgotten and almost smothered by the powerful? Look here for the movement of the Spirit because scripture tells us that the Holy enters from the bottom, from the wilderness, from the powerless places.

So, if all our powerfulness is not the power for Peace, what is the power for Peace? And how do we get there if it's not through our power? Scripture says, "Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways made smooth. No highs, no lows, no wandering around, no rough edges or scratchy surfaces. That's all, just smooth out EVERYTHING and do this simply by changing our mind, our heart, our perspective. Metanoia ... repent.

No biggy, right? Well of course it's a biggy. It's huge because most of us don't even know what our mind and our heart is up to that might need changing because it's all lost in the wilderness. It's like trying to eat an elephant ... it's huge!

But Desmond Tutu once wisely said, "There is only one way to eat an elephant; one bite at a time."

So, let's start 'biting' our way to the peace that is promised by John the Baptist ... the peace of the way of the LORD.

Bite number one

"Every valley must be filled." What are our valleys? What creates our 'lows'? What do our depths of despair look like? When do our sadnesses swallow us up? Our grief, our darkest time throw us into the pit where there is no foothold to climb out? Prepare the way of the Lord ... fill in that hole so the light of the coming Christ is not buried.

Bite number two

"Every mountain and hill shall be made low." What are our mountains? What creates those huge obstacles that get in our way? Is it our lack of confidence in ourselves? Is it our suspicion of new things (hand up)? Is it our fear of not being right? Prepare ye the way of the Lord ... knock down that mountain so the light of the coming Christ is not blocked.

Bite number three

“The crooked shall be made straight.” What are our crooked paths? Those meandering mistakes in judgement? Perhaps we operate on and believe something we discover isn’t true? I remember that last time I spanked a child of mind. Suddenly what I had learned from my parents wasn’t true anymore. Sorry, Carson. No more spanking for us. What are the mistakes in judgement that we may still be making? Prepare ye the way of the Lord... straighten that crooked path so the light of the coming Christ is not lost.

Bite number four.

“The rough ways made smooth.” What are our rough spots? Perhaps it’s those things that bug us about other people? Those things that we call ‘differences, but we really mean, ‘what’s wrong about them because they aren’t like us.’ Those times when we judge another for their opinion or their behaviour. I read recently that the reason we are so vexed by our differences is because we humans are so alike. If you were a dog and I were a cat, I wouldn’t give a hoot about how you did anything. But, when we are both dogs ... now I care. “Be a dog, for heaven’s sake!”. Prepare ye the way of the Lord ... smooth out that rough surface so that the light of the coming Christ is not troubled.

There we are. In four bites ... the light of the coming Christ will soften despair, lighten sadness, temper fear and suspicion, reduce those lapses in judgement, even bring judgement to a halt, and help us notice our ‘corrections’ and “shoulds”. We are the way God enters the world. We are the way God is preparing. As we create peace in our hearts, we prepare the way of the Lord.

Even as we wait, we become more and more ready to oppose the power of sin, with hope and peace in our hearts. Are we ready to fill of the valleys and bring down the mountains and straighten the paths and smooth the rough edges? Are we ready to know that God is on our side while the power of creation refines and washes our souls?

I close today with a poem from our Paula Papky ... Are you Ready?

“Are you ready,” cries the stranger  
on the dusty desert road,  
“for the good news God is sending,  
as Isaiah long foretold?”

“We are ready!” cry the children  
in their poverty and pain;  
from the homeless and the hungry,  
“We are ready!” sounds again.

“We are ready!” cry the mothers  
as they bury their war dead;  
from the ruined cities daily  
rise the ancient cries for bread.

“We are ready!” cry the pris’ners,  
“we are longing for release!”  
From the banished and the tortured  
come the whispered prayers for peace.

“We are ready!” cry the oceans,  
the neglected skies and earth;  
from the whole creation groaning  
comes the longing for rebirth.

“Are you ready,” cries the stranger,  
“to oppose the power of sin?”  
“We are ready!” comes the answer.  
“Let the sending now begin!”  
AMEN