

Peace, not Control

A sermon shared with the congregation of St. Andrew's United Church

December 5, 2021

by Rev. Dave Le Grand

Peace.

Our popular culture knows something of Biblical “peace”, particularly the word “shalom” – a whole peace, health, happiness, all is well in you and around you.

We heard a storytelling version of the priest and dad-to-be, Zechariah's, Benedictus. It comes after a long period of being rendered unable to speak after an angel told him he and his wife Elizabeth, very old now, were to be parents. He was flabbergasted, couldn't grasp it; the angel was annoyed and Zechariah literally left speechless.

His son is born, and he proclaims a blessing:

By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn ... will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.”

I have before used an analogy about the challenge of walking in darkness. First let me say that darkness and shadow are beautiful: Darkness a time for rest, for a sense of wonder; Shadow and the cool under a tree is most welcome on a hot summer day. But, when you awaken in the night, walk down the dark hall (and your beloved partner has just that evening temporarily put a piece of furniture in your path along the hall), well, that is a moment when darkness is not so sublime.

Spiritually, psychologically, the metaphor of “shadow” can allude to such moments of fear, uncertainty. One commentator put it this way:¹

When the chaos of the world is too much to bear, *we journey, we wait, in shadow*. When the diagnosis is positive, and the prognosis not optimistic, *we sit in the shadow*.

When the job is lost and the source of the next pay is mystery, *we sit in the shadow*.

When we fail to love as we were called to love, *we sit in the shadow*.

When we see perfectly preventable deaths around us, *we sit in the shadow*.

Though some would claim that God does not go where God is not wanted, such a claim is in direct opposition to the claim of Christmas; it is a myth that the Bible speaks of a God who goes where God is not expected, nor wanted.

[Often the Bible proclaims] that God goes where it one time seemed impossible. God breaks through the cosmos... crumbles our dividing walls, and ... God came as a baby.

The claim of Christmas is that God broke through the darkness. Zachariah said, “Because of God's compassion, the dawn from heaven will break upon us, to

¹ Robb McCoy, <https://fatpastor.me/2012/12/22/declare-that-the-dawn-is-coming/>

give light to those who are sitting in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide us on the path of peace.” (Luke 1:78-79 CEB)²

That word “peace”. Luke uses the word Peace more times than all the other Gospels combined. The Greek word here for peace, “eirene” (i – ray – nay) has many meanings, among them: “security, safety, prosperity” or “tranquil state of a soul”.

This story of Zechariah and his Benedictus blessing was written decades after Jesus was gone; Rome had enforced peace through violence. Luke the storyteller reminds us that God’s peace is not that: not a peace I create for myself when I hear what I want to hear, choosing to be tone deaf to contrary viewpoints; Not a peace achieved through forcing compliance.

We cannot construct or plan peace, we live it, follow it. Trusting, listening, especially in times when we are rattled. Oh, that is hard for me. How about for you?

On December 8th, Buddhist neighbours celebrate Bodhi Day. The reality, we know, is true and deep peace never comes when we try to control. Buddhist Neighbours will be celebrating Bodhi Day; the day that Buddhists believe the Buddha gained enlightenment. Millions will be celebrating, particularly in special temple services.

Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh put it succinctly, and I paraphrase:

Peace is not a destination, instead peace is the path itself.

We too, following Jesus, seek that peace. That child blessed by Zechariah and Elizabeth, John, would preach about holy transformation, a coming of peace, that would transcend anything humans can contrive.

May we be the peace, live peace one action and word at a time. Amen.

²Luke chapter 1 verses 78-79 Common English Bible (CEB) Copyright © 2011 by Common English Bible