

Finding the Peace of the Prince of Peace

Midnight, 25 December, 2017

Readings: Isaiah 9:2-7 and Luke 2:1-14

Much to the delight of the Woman's Weekly and to the disappointment of my sister-in-law, Prince Harry is getting married. One night when I couldn't sleep, I worked out that I'm only 2543 in line to take the wedding. So I was thinking we could offer a package deal. Wedding at St Luke's taken by yours truly, reception in the hall, honeymoon at Hanmer Springs in the tent, soak in the pool and off back home. All for a small fee. Prince Harry's official title is His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales.

We come to together on this special night because tradition has it that Jesus was born in the middle of the night. Like Harry, Jesus has many titles. And we hear some of them used in the Isaiah passage written some 500 years before his birth. He is to be named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father and Prince of Peace. Of course we would want to add brother, companion and friend. In one church I was at, instead of Jesus our Redeemer, the title on the screen read Jesus our Reindeer. The commentaries I read suggest that Isaiah has borrowed some of these terms from the diplomatic language of his day.

I want to focus on just one of Jesus titles: Prince of Peace. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. The angels proclaimed this reign of peace in their words to the frightened Shepherds, "Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace to God's people on earth."

Why is this peace so important and how does it begin?

Jesus was born into a violent and uncaring world. His homeland was under harsh occupation and no sooner had he been born than Herod, the ruler, was looking to kill him and undertook ethnic cleansing to that end.

We don't have to look very far in our world to see the need for peace. We need it on the Korean peninsula, we need it in Israel and Palestine, we even need peace in our own land. We find the need here in this land where some are affected by domestic violence and binge drinking and mental ill health.

I heard of one couple so tired of war and the rumour of war that they searched the globe for the most peaceful place to live. Eventually they settled in the Falkland Islands, and you guessed it, it was just before the Argentinians invaded.

But peace is as simple as one person lighting a candle in the darkness. The East German pastor of St Nicholas church in Leipzig in the spring of 1989 did just that. Not content with a harsh communist rule he lit a candle and invited others to join him. They sang hymns, read scripture and prayed. Each, armed only with a lighted candle, went to stand quietly outside the church. There were a handful at first, then dozens, then hundreds, then thousands. They surrounded the church several times. Authorities sent soldiers in to disperse the silent protesters. But those sent in refused to attack the worshipful candle bearers and so the harsh East German rule was broken. The wall came tumbling down.

We need the Prince of Peace. But there is only one place where peace can begin. It needs to begin in our hearts. For it is from the human heart, as Jesus reminded us, that hatred and

violence of every kind comes. And it's only to the heart that has opened itself to God that peace can truly come. Deep contentment is the gift Jesus wants to give you this Christmas.

1700 years ago St Ambrose, reflecting on Christmas, wrote: "Begin the work of peace in yourself so that, once at peace yourself, you can bring peace to others."

Jesus at peace in himself is our role model for treating others. He treated women with respect and as equals. He delighted in children and they delighted in him. He crossed barriers of race and sickness, rules and prejudice. He used non-violence when others threatened it. He showed us forgiveness and he showed us mercy. Most important of all Jesus opened with his birth a new way to God. We can draw peace from the knowledge that God loves each one of us, with an infinite, unconditional love. Tonight, as we light our candles and turn again to the manger, we open our hearts in a fresh way to God. God stands ready to give us the gift of peace.

This last year St Peter's has been a gift of peace in our busy corner of the city. Our countless groups have brought an estimated 22,000 visits this year over and above worship. We have gained over one million dollars towards our restoration of the building. Many have joined us and many children and adults have been baptised. We do what we do so that we might be a light in the darkness, a beacon of hope in our community.

Prince Harry may have stolen Meghan's heart, but there is only one prince for the rest of our hearts, the Prince of Peace.

Let us pray:

Light looked down and saw darkness.

"I will go there," said Light.

Peace looked down and saw war.

"I will go there," said Peace.

Love looked down and saw hatred.

"I will go there," said Love.

So may the Lord of Light

the Prince of Peace

the King of Love

Be present to us this night. Amen