

What's in a name? Prince of Peace

Here's a question to think about as we begin:

What do you think about when I mention the word peace?

Probably foremost in our minds will be the middle east. The desire for peace there. Northern Ireland may come to mind and the peace process that is on-going there. We might think of the 70's hippy movements. We could sum these up as peace in a political context.

As Christians we are certainly encouraged to seek that kind of peace – praying for it (we are to respect and pray for those in government).

We may think of a peaceful place. A waterside, up a hill, the fireside, feet up favourite relaxing music, beside a sleeping baby.

I recall my mother who at times would request a moments peace!

It might be the sort of thing you use describe how you feel after being troubled about something. 'Ah, I have more peace about it now'

This idea of peace seems important in the gospel story, doesn't it?

As we heard in the readings it was what the Angels proclaimed – peace on earth. What did they mean? Political, social, personal?

Well I think it is deeper than that but also affects the areas we have thought about already.

The Hebrew for peace is? (ask congregation)

Shalom

The Hebrew meaning is that of being uninjured, safe, sound whole. When one gives the greeting of Shalom it means may you be well and no harm come to you and your family in your body, soul or mind. May your relations with your neighbours and those who govern over you do you good.

It is a rich term wishing wholeness in every area of life – emotionally, physically, spiritually, socially and politically.

This is a harder question but do you know the Greek for peace?

Eirene

The word irenic comes from it. A person is irenic if they are peaceable or peace making. And is in fact the origin for the name Irene.

It means complete reconciliation in that whole sense – physical, emotional between two feuding parties.

So the idea of peace in the bible is more than superficial. It is a deep and rich concept of wholeness and reconciliation. Jesus would not be associated with anything that was other than rich and full of meaning. He comes as the Prince or Champion of Peace.

Let's explore it

Peace with God

Peter said **Acts 10:36** ⁶ *You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.*

The bible describes the human race as in need of reconciliation with God – needing to know this rich concept of peace with him. Why, because the bible story describes how we are in rebellion against God. We may not feel it but as far as God is concerned we are so for example when we hear Jesus speaking about the prodigal son we are meant to read ourselves into his situation. We are off, separated from our Father in heaven, doing our own thing?

Is that right? We live fairly decent lives, we don't do any harm. Does that really apply to me, we might reasonably ask? God tells us in his word that we have all fallen short of the mark. I suppose when

we think about it we don't keep our own standards let alone God's. If it weren't so then Jesus would not have to have come. The fact that he did indicates there is an issue for us all. We thought about this in more detail the other week.

So as in the parable of the prodigal son (depicted on ppt by 18th century painter Batoni) we too need to be reconciled with our father in heaven. We need to return to him but the beauty of the parable is that when we return the Father (God) he is what? Waiting there for us. Waiting for the reconciliation – re-union, deep peace to be restored between us. But as in the parable we are the ones who have to make the move to return to him. It is a beautiful parable – realistic about who we are but vivid in it's description of the waiting father. And in the parable there is celebration, restoration and peace and wholeness restored.

That is the picture Jesus uses to help us understand what gaining peace with God means. It is coming to Him acknowledging that we have run off our own way, come asking for forgiveness and being received into his fold, his family. Receiving his love his acceptance – his peace.

I am wondering if someone is here this morning and thinking have I ever come to God in that way. In his way? I sat in church for 17 years before I understood that message but when I did I came. I said sorry and received Jesus as Lord over my life, the Prince of

Peace who gives me peace and a new relationship with God. Maybe this is the morning for someone to do that.

But having come to him then there is peace. We can be confident in him. In approaching him. Sometimes as Christians we can wonder what God thinks of us what God wants for us.

When we come to him in faith in the Lord Jesus he sees deep reconciliation between us. More than superficial. We are at peace with him body, mind and soul. And he adopts us into his family. We become his own. His family. His dearly beloved.

Think about that. The one whom we described last week as the author of life, the creator of all that is, infinite and beyond imagining. Whose holiness burns brighter than the sun. We have peace with him. He is our father, our shepherd, our Lord, our God. We are part of his family and he is for us. When we hurt he is concerned, when we rejoice he is delighted.

This babe in the manger is the Prince of Peace. Who through the cross and through faith in him we have peace with God. We are not alone in the world. We are not meaningless in the vastness of space but we are loved, we are accepted by God the author of life who wishes for us Shalom. Peace with him and wholeness in part now and in full to come.

Time of silence – think what that means for you, thank God for the peace he gives and maybe bask a little in that peace.

Two short reflections:

Inner Peace

Depending on your personality inner peace can be hard to find. The scriptures encourage this :

Philippians 4:6-7 ⁶ *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.* ⁷ *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

We must see our lives as in the care of the Lord. That does not mean we will live life untroubled. We live in a fallen world like everyone else where difficult things happen. We must enter through the open door of prayer and give things into his hands, trust and let his peace descend. Don't be robbed of the peace that is yours by right by not giving things over to God.

If you don't know what to say use the words of the hymn

*“Father, I place into Your hands
The things I cannot do
Father, I place into Your hands*

*The things that I've been through
Father, I place into Your hands
The way that I should go
For I know I always can trust You"*

So God wants for us deep peace (shalom) and reconciliation with him, deep peace (shalom) within ourselves and

Deep Peace (Shalom) with one another

Character clashes, fall out's, hurt and what have you are part of life but they can be less frequent. And certainly there are plenty of encouragements from God to having received peace with him to seek peace with one another. Not just being cordial but peace that fosters love and agreement. Peace that brings wholeness not cooled down resentment. Peace that brings forgiveness and forgetfulness about past hurts. If the prince of Peace is present then I think he would expect no less. Do you?

What's in a name? Prince of Peace?

We have deep peace with God
Deep Inner peace
Deep Peace with each other