

## Sermon Archive 227

Monday 24 December, 2018

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lesson: Isaiah 9: 207

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Endless peace.

At one point a good friend, of some long standing years, came to stay with me a while. I drove her around town to a number of places. Though she's not a brutal person, neither is she tactful. When the proper opportunity arose she said to me: you drive like an angry person. Obviously there's something not at peace within you."

She was right.

-ooOoo-

I pour a cup of tea. I've bought some special china: Royal Albert flowers on thin bone material. I go through the ritual of turning the tea pot, letting things rest. It's a slowing process - slow, gentle, patient - waiting for the tea to brew. The tea pours into the cup; the milk meets it from a dainty little jug. I drink slowly, enjoying the taste, the ritual, the pause.

The phone rings. I answer. It's agitated. Agitaté. Con frustriro! Off now into the next emergency, a theatre of war. The tea goes cold.

-ooOoo-

I take three wee prayer books into my hands. Monday night, according to the Catholic Benedict I should pray as thus:

Thank you, Lord, for the care and protection you have shown us throughout this day. Stretch you hand of blessing over us this evening, that we may end the day as we began it, by praising your holy name.

At day's end, the Anglicans implore me to say:

*The angels of God guard us through the night,  
**and quieten the powers of darkness.***

*The Spirit of God be our guide*

***to lead us to peace and to glory.***

*It is but lost labour that we haste to rise up early,  
and so late take rest, and eat the bread of anxiety.  
For those beloved of God are given gifts even while they sleep.*

The Presbyterians give me a different form of day's end prayer:

*We rejoice in your generous goodness, O God, and celebrate your lavish gifts to us this day. Especially we give thanks for friends with whom we have shared, those whom we love and who have loved us, all beauty that delights us.*

Right relationships. Resting into the night. Slowing down. Praying my way into evening peace.

I sit with such treasures of prayer at my disposal, wondering which will guide my heart and soul this night. Each one urges me to take to my sleep at peace.

Yet a thought intrudes. That bastard who cut me off at that corner. The traffic light that went red even though there was no opposing traffic. The person who was rude, and I'll never forget.

-ooOoo-

What happened, O God, to those well sought, but never enduring efforts at peace.

There was a war, my Lord, once called the war to end all wars. There was the phrase born from the next one "never again", only to have it happen again. There were the many, many resolutions made by people of good faith and Christian hope that things could now ever be different.

But brave young peace, nobly intentioned peace, hopeful peace, rash and youthful, fresh-faced and foolish peace, didn't make it through morning. Gone by lunchtime.

Someone one day should write a story about this. They should put the original human beings in a garden, give them one fatal apple, one nagging serpent, and one sadly predictable outcome. Just watch and see how permanent, how enduring is this dreamed of thing called "peace".

God, we thank you for the peace makers, and the peace keepers - those people who caught some kind of spark, burned some kind of flame - gave themselves to work for peace. Some of them on the world stage - peace among the nations. Some of them person to person - peace in the home. Some of them in the heart - peace for the confused person driving his car in the most strangely angry way, not quite knowing

what's wrong. What's all that about?

Thank you for them - who work with them - who carve out for them a little quiet.

But, despite them, their brave work, near the end of the year we've shared, honesty requires us, O God, to acknowledge that our best efforts at peace are like a cup of tea in a chipped piece of china, quickly losing its heat.

Why doesn't peace last? Why does it go quickly to only just luke warm?

Indeed, the iron curtain fell, only to have the Gulf War begin. The smooth words around North Korea fell quickly into a trade wars between West and East. There is this constant, regular falling back out of peace. People moving out. People being angry. People being hurt. People starting wars.

Is it because each one of us needs to find peace before any of us can receive it? Is it because the serpent bites the heel and the heel is doomed to crush the serpent? Is it because we're seeking to build on a peace other than the peace which the world cannot give?

Our God, at Christmas, we yearn for a peace that does not pass - for a peace our scriptures might dare to describe as "endless". "There shall be endless peace." Peace, somehow, from some other place.

-ooOoo-

Be still, my soul. In all this "why can't we find our peace", you're driving your car too fast. You're trying to move yourself through things that won't be negotiated by pushing, driving, accelerating.

Just stop!

Come with me to Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph are propelled by census, by the cycles of life and pregnancy, by the practical needs for a place to stay, and some way of being where they need to be to sign the politics.

Some miracle is going to stop them. A miracle of God is going to come upon them, such that they will end up, under the stars, among the animals, vaguely hearing rumours of angel song about peace coming to earth.

Keep running. Keep moving. Keep pushing. Keep growing. Keep denying. Keep blocking. Keep talking. Keep shouting. Keep insisting. Keep driving. Keep claiming. Keep insisting that all be peaceful . . .

No! There is a word, a quiet word, an old word, an almost silent word, about a peace that will be endless. Sourced not from the usual small victories of well meaning people - God bless the well meaning people - they mean so well - and show the heart of God. Blessed be the peace-makers (who will grow to preach that?). But no, this peace is a peace of a slightly other, no, the **completely** other grounding. One day he'll say his peace is as the world cannot give, his peace.

I have to say, my God, I don't know what that peace will be. But I know that my world needs it. I, in my angrily operated vehicle, need it. Our world lurching from conflict to conflict needs it. Something that will not pass - but that will sustain and bless us until all is well, finally well. What says the prophet? "There will be endless peace."

For goodness sake,

All the boots of the tramping warriors  
and all the garments rolled in blood  
shall be burned as fuel for the fire.  
For a child has been born for us,  
a son given to us;  
His authority shall grow continually,  
and there shall be endless peace

-ooOoo-

Endless peace?

Tonight?

We wait for the birth of the Prince of Peace,  
and we keep a moment of quiet.

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