

ALL-AGE TALK, CHRISTMAS CELEBRATION, 8.12.24

A PEACEFUL STABLE...? A PEACEFUL CHRISTMAS...?

Was the stable where Jesus was born a peaceful place ...? Don't think so ! Our Christmas story this morning reminded us this. Even before the choirs of angels over the hills. Even before the shepherds turning up un-announced... I don't think the stable would have been particularly quiet. There would have been a fair amount of noise from all those animals, disturbed by this human family in their midst... Also noise from the baby Jesus himself. Now, I know the carol 'Away in a manger' tells us this: 'The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little LORD Jesus, no crying he makes'... Really? I'm sure Jesus would not have held back from trying out his lungs & his vocal chords. As a normal baby, born in difficult circumstances, I have no doubt Jesus' cries would have reached some decibels in those early hours & days...

Of course, we all know that true peace is more than an absence of noise (& stress & busyness). But this is a time of year when piped music surrounds us with the noise of Christmas songs & carols. A time of year when stress levels & anxiety rises for many people. A time of year when most people are extra-busy. In the midst of all this, there is this simple question: At Christmas, a time of year usually linked with 'peace', where can we find peace...? Sometimes, especially at Christmas, peace seems so hard to find. Hard to come by. What is REAL peace really all about?

Let's see... Perhaps this very full Christmas stocking will give us some answers. The word for peace in the Bible is 'Shalom', which means 'fullness' or 'completeness'... So who knows? This full stocking may hold some answers. Let's try to find out what is in here shall we? I'm going to need some help to unwrap the gifts that are in here...

Oh look, there's some sweets in here... Don't know what they are doing here... I don't need these... Perhaps we can find some people who would like them... Hands up... You will have to come down the front... (Look the presents are all wrapped in an ordinary, brown paper Primark shopping bag, which says...'Love the feeling'. We all love the feeling of Peace don't we...? So what is real peace all about?)

- 1) Glitter-ball heart – peace with ourselves
- 2) 2 figure statue – peace with others
- 3) Dove – peace with God

‘Shalom’, the Bible’s word for peace, talks of this three-fold peace: peace with yourself, peace with others & peace with God. Whenever someone says ‘Shalom’ or peace to someone else they are doing three things:

- They are blessing the other person
- They are inviting the other person to return the blessing
- They are asking a question: ‘Are you at peace’?

Are you at peace this Christmas? If you are not sure you can say ‘yes’ to that question right now, I have good news. God wants you to receive & to know peace. We know this, because Jesus is our Prince of Peace & our King of Love. Someone who was prepared to lay down his life for each of us... Jesus stood in our place, died in our place, so that we might know peace with God & be given new life... Alleluia! Thanks be to God ! Good news – for you!

We’re now going to spend some time, reflecting on God’s gifts for each of us. God wants to give us HOPE & PEACE this Christmas. God wants to give us other gifts too. The good news of Christmas is this: ‘Glory to God in the highest... peace on the earth’...

I invite you now to take up your own candle & to turn it on. Let us spend some time in the quiet, as you hold & look at your candle. One thing we might think about... Is there anything that God wants you to lay down... Is there something that you need to bring to God this Christmas – so that you can find peace?...

Perhaps you simply need to bring yourself to God, as you are... While we are reflecting on the God who longs to bring us peace this Christmas, let us listen to a song... A song called ‘Prince of Peace’ by John Baldwin... While you are listening & praying, you might like to bring your candle here to the front table, as a way of asking God for peace. As a way of offering yourself to God...

(PRINCE OF PEACE – SONG)

... THANK YOU (THANK YOU LORD!)

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PRAYERS (GATHERING FOR WORSHIP & THE LORD’S PRAYER)