

Sermon for Zion Presbyterian Church, November 11, 2018 - Remembrance Day

Hymns: 330 – O God Our Help In Ages Past; 800 - O Canada; 739 - Lord, make us servants of your peace; 730 - O for a world; 794 - Abide with me; 324 - Great is thy faithfulness; 733 - O God of love, true source of peace; 736 - For the healing of the nations; 732 - O day of peace that dimly shines

Scripture: Isaiah 32:14-18; Psalm 37:1-11; John 14:23-27; Ephesians 2:13-22

Sermon Title: “Songs and Stories of Peace”

Isaiah 32:14-18

For the palace will be forsaken, the populous city deserted... until a Spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

What makes for peace? What, in our world of violence, clamour, envy and greed can possibly bring peace? Is it a world to end all wars that can bring peace? Is it the threat of nuclear annihilation that can bring peace? Can the United Nations bring peace? Can technology bring peace? Can invasions? Can sanctions? Can wealth? So far, none of these has brought peace. We stand in the twenty-first century which has experienced even in its first eighteen years, invasions, occupations, civil war, sanctions - all of these proposed as (believe it or not) solutions, and yet still there is misery, still there is war. What makes for peace?

Isaiah knows. Isaiah has heard, has seen, how peace is to come, if peace is to come at all. He knows it won't come, “*Until a Spirit from on high is poured out on us, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.*”

We can't do it on our own; a Spirit from on high is what we need; the inspiration, guidance and strength of the Most High is what we need. And then, for peace to come, something surprising must also come: Justice. And something more surprising still: Righteousness – or to define Righteousness, living in right relationship with God and one another. First, Justice. Then, Righteousness. And the result? “*The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.*” That starts with us. That starts with each one of us, opening our hearts to the Spirit of God, and seeking to live in justice, in righteousness, in peace.

What makes for peace? Justice. Righteousness. May God send upon us a Spirit from on high, that we may bring justice and righteousness into our communities, our country, our world.

Hymn 730, verses 1,2,5 – O For A World

Psalms 37:1-11 – Responsive Reading

- *Do not fret because of the wicked; do not be envious of wrongdoers,*
- *for they will soon fade like the grass, and wither like the green herb.*
- *Trust in the LORD, and do good; so you will live in the land, and enjoy security.*
- *Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.*
- *Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.*
- *He will make your vindication shine like the light, and the justice of your cause like the noonday.*
- *Be still before the LORD, and wait patiently for him; do not fret over those who prosper in their way, over those who carry out evil devices.*
- *Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath. Do not fret--it leads only to evil.*
- *For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.*
- *Yet a little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look diligently for their place, they will not be there.*
- *But the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.*

Justice, righteousness – it all sounds a bit too abstract, a bit too amorphous. We like plain, straightforward advice. After all, it is one thing to strive for justice, and quite another thing again to live in a world where justice is a stranger, where righteousness is mocked as weakness, as quaint, as out of step with the times. The terrorist with a bomb, the mob with blood in their eye, the tyrant in the seat of power seem to have the upper hand. And so, from the Psalmist, practical advice:

“Don’t fret because of the wicked, or envy their success; they will fade like flowers in the frost. Trust that God knows what God is doing, and has our interests at heart; do good, and take delight in God, no matter what others are doing. God will be sure to show the good to be right. Be still, be patient; anger and wrath will accomplish nothing, and only serve to bring you down to the level of those at whom you rage. The wicked will come, and the wicked will go, and they will soon be gladly forgotten. But goodness will last, and last forever.”

“Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath.” How much energy has each of us wasted, how many days, weeks, months, years have we taken from our own lives, nursing old

grudges, reliving past hurts, holding fast to words spoken in anger, clinging to the wreckage of old fights? When forgiveness would have take the bitterness out from our hearts, and cast it aside, and allowed us to move on? How many lives have been lost, how many tens, hundreds, thousands, as nations have nursed old grudges, resurrected old hatreds, when a new beginning would have brought hope and promise, justice and peace?

The Psalmist knows. The Psalmist knows that justice, righteousness, and peace will come; but that in the meantime, cast your anger, your resentment, your grudges aside; in the meantime, in the midst of the chaos, trust in God. Delight in God. That, too, is how peace will come; peace within; peace for our world.

Hymn 794, vss. 1, 4, 5 – Abide With Me

John 14:23-27

Jesus said, “Those who love me will keep my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words; and the word that you hear is not mine, but is from the Father who sent me.

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”

Remember the Isaiah passage from earlier? Jesus read it, Jesus knew it, Jesus lived it. “A Spirit from on high,” said Isaiah; and then justice, then righteousness, and then, springing up like flowers after a desert rain, peace.

How did Jesus put it just now? *“The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.”* And what did Jesus teach us? Well, to boil it down to a sentence or two, *“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,”* and, *“Love God and your neighbour - love one another.”* What is Justice? Doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. And what is Righteousness? Loving God, and loving our neighbour as ourselves. That’s it; nothing new, nothing fancy, here. And the result? Peace. *“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.”*

Isaiah, the Psalmist, Jesus; they’re all singing the same song, the same song of Peace. Promote Justice; Live in Righteousness; Trust in God. That’s what makes for peace.

That's what has always made for peace. Peace in our hearts. Peace in our minds. Peace in our homes. Peace in our world.

Justice. Righteousness; Trust in God. It is all the same song of peace.

Hymn 324, verses 1 and 3 – Great is thy faithfulness

Ephesians 2:13-22

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it. So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God.

Justice, righteousness, trust. Easy to say. Harder to live, hard to even conceive, in a world of such division. Walls between us, walls dividing us, walls invisible yet real, walls of race, of creed, of colour, of class, walls fragmenting our world into countless hotly defended shards of rock and border, country against country, province against province, party against party, religion against religion, colour against colour, house against house, spouse against spouse. How can we hope for peace? How dare we hope for peace?

We hope because of this startling claim: *“Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; he has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us, that he might create in himself one new humanity, thus making peace, thus putting to death that hostility through it. You are no longer strangers and aliens, but members of the household of God.”*

Jesus gave himself, gave his life, not just for you, not just for me, not just for us, but for all. For all. For all divided humanity. For those far, for those near; for those we

call enemy, for those we call friend; Jesus gave himself for all. He is our peace; he has broken down the dividing wall.

One family; one household; one people; one world. That is what Jesus has done. Hostility; hatred; division; all died on the cross with Christ, for it was hostility, hatred and division which nailed him there, and it was hostility, hatred and division which lay dead as he rose to new life, never to die again. The dividing walls are broken; the walls have fallen down.

The tragedy of our world is that we labour to build them back up again, to reconstruct that which divided us into fragments of ourselves. We thought, at one point, it would be the United Nations that would lead us to a better world, a world without walls. Yet the United Nations has become an ineffective shell of its once-promising beginning, a finger-pointing festival of accusatory camps. We had hoped that our strong representational democracies would lead us to the promised land, but politics seems irreparably mired in cynical mud-slinging, in a desperate partisan bid to obtain power, not for the public good, but simply to win the next election.

Only with the help of God will the wind of justice blow through our world, the washing rain of righteousness wipe it clean, the light of our faith show with the dawn that the walls which divide us are false, are dead, are gone. For, in Jesus Christ, we are become one. One family; one household; one people; one world. That is what Jesus has done. The dividing walls are broken; the walls have fallen down; it is now up to us to open our hearts to the Spirit of God, to reach out to our world and call all people to God, to call all people to the reconciling work of Jesus Christ, that all may come to know that they are children of a loving God, and live as one people together. "A new humanity."

May the Spirit of God come upon us from on high, that we might bring justice, and righteousness, and trust to our world; that all might know we are, through Christ, one family, one household, one people, one world - one peaceful, blessed world. It is our hope; it is our prayer; it is the Kingdom of God. May we, with God's help, inspired by Christ, empowered by the Holy Spirit, in ways great and small, live the will of God, on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Hymn 733, vss 1,3 – O God of Love