

Third Sunday after Trinity

THE REWARD OF THE RIGHTEOUS

Continuing the theme of discipleship, this week Jesus invites us to take to heart that those who welcome the one who comes in his name, welcomes him, and whoever welcomes him, welcomes the One who sent him.

INVOCATION

+ In the name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen

The Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.
We lift up our hearts in thanks and praise:
Glory to you, O God!

PRAISE

Colours of day dawn into the mind,
The sun has come up, the night is behind.
Go down in the city, into the street,
And let's give the message to the people we meet.

*So light up the fire and let the flame burn,
Open the door, let Jesus return.
Take seeds of His Spirit, let the fruit grow,
Tell the people of Jesus, let His love show.*

Go through the park, on into the town;
The sun still shines on, it never goes down.
The light of the world is risen again;
The people of darkness are needing a friend.

So light up the fire ...

Open your eyes, look into the sky,
The darkness has come, the Son came to die.

The evening draws on, the sun disappears,
But Jesus is living, His Spirit is near.

So light up the fire ...

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Almighty God,
to whom all hearts are open,
all desires known,
and from whom no secrets are hidden:
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,
that we may perfectly love you,
and worthily magnify your holy name;
through Christ our Lord. Amen.

As we come before God asking him to cleanse our hearts that we may worship and follow him in Spirit and in truth. In a time of silence reflect on your life in the last week, asking God to amend what is wrong, and to affirm what is good.

Then say:

You were sent to heal the contrite:
Father, have mercy.

You came to call sinners:
Christ, have mercy.

You plead for us at the right hand of the Father:
Lord, have mercy.

Almighty God have mercy upon me, forgive me my sins,
and keep me in eternal life. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE DAY

God our saviour,
look on this wounded world
in pity and in power;
hold us fast to your promises of peace
won for us by your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

READINGS

Read: Jeremiah 28.5-9

This is the OT reading set for today, but it is part of a longer story and it is useful to read verses 1 – 4 also. Hananiah has prophesied that the Lord 'will break the yoke of the King of Babylon,' the beginning of a time of peace in which Israel will enjoy emancipation from Babylonian rule. Jeremiah counsels caution: wait and see if Israel will truly be at peace; if so, then it will be known that the LORD has truly sent the prophet who proclaims it.

Verses from Psalm 89

I will sing forever of your mercies, O LORD;
through all ages my mouth will proclaim your faithfulness.
I have declared your mercy is established forever;
your faithfulness stands firm as the heavens.

“With my chosen one I have made a covenant;
I have sworn to David my servant:
I will establish your descendants forever,
and set up your throne through all ages.”

Justice and right judgment are the pillars of your throne;
merciful love and fidelity walk in your presence.

How blessed the people who know your praise,
who walk, O LORD, in the light of your face,

who find their joy every day in your name,
who make your justice their joyful acclaim.

For you are the glory of their strength;
by your favour it is that our might is exalted.
Behold, the LORD is our shield;
he is the Holy One of Israel, our king.

ALLELUIA

Alleluia, alleluia!
Your words are spirit, Lord, and they are life.
Alleluia!

Read: MATTHEW 10.40 - 42

REFLECTION - *The Message of Peace*

Today's gospel reading is the concluding part of a block of teaching in which Jesus commissions the disciples whom he sends out in his name. Earlier he has advised them to find suitable lodgings in each town or village they enter: 'Wish the house peace as you enter it; if it is welcoming, let your peace descend on it, and if it is not, let your peace come back to you.' (*Matthew 10.11-13*) Jesus concludes by speaking of the reward that awaits the good disciple. We could focus on that - and especially in these times it would be good to hear a comforting message - but I think we can take him at his word and not speculate what 'a prophet's reward' might comprise. Instead, I prefer to focus on the more important matter of what Jesus meant when he spoke about peace: What was it that was to 'descend' on the welcoming house? It's all too easy to assume that we have got the true message and look forward expectantly to our reward, and not to measure our understanding against that of Jesus.

We may feel that we know what peace is, but my feeling is that we do not. When there is trouble, especially war in the world, we try to

bring the warring parties together to make peace, by which we generally mean ending the hostilities. The Korean War ended in 1953 but almost seventy years later there is no peace between North and South, just a dangerous and unstable stand-off. Similarly in Northern Ireland; the violence may have ended, but we can't really describe the different communities to be at peace. These different understandings of peace are reflected in the dispute between Jeremiah and Hananiah: who was the true man of peace? Hananiah seems to me a kind of court prophet, somewhat along the lines of a certain type of I political advisor today who says what the leader wants to hear. Their advice may deal with the immediate problem, and secure the leader's immediate future, but it leaves the deeper issues unresolved. Some contemporary examples may come to mind...

Jesus intended more than this when, after the resurrection, he greeted the disciples with the words, 'Peace be with you! As the father sent me, so I send you.' (*John 20.21*) Jesus' greeting echoed his words at the Last Supper when he said that peace was his parting gift to them: 'Peace is my parting gift to you, my own peace, such as the world cannot give.' (*John 14.27*) Passing on this gift of peace is the true mark of those who come in Jesus name. So, what is this peace that Jesus can give but the world cannot?

Jesus' understanding of peace will have been rooted in the idea of *shalom*, a Hebrew word generally translated as 'peace' but whose meaning is far richer than most modern secular understandings. *Shalom* characterises a society founded on justice – not simply procedural justice, but a substantive justice, or social justice, where the poor, the orphans and widows are cared for, and in which each person can grow to his or her full potential; a society in which everyone's needs are taken seriously. This is a huge challenge, and one that we duck, as we see in the Black Lives Matter movement, the disproportionate effect of the the coronavirus on BAME communities, the continuing fallout following the fire in Grenfell Tower – not to mention the way global warming has a greater impact on poorer countries than on those better off.

Building a society where everyone's interests are taken seriously requires the same hard and exhausting work of building peace that follows the cessation of fighting in places like Northern Ireland. Real peace requires those who have been divided to be reconciled, bound together like a cornerstone binds two parts of a wall, if everyone's needs are to be taken seriously. This is the gift that Jesus gave the disciples, and the hope for peace today rests on the conviction that Jesus, in his own person, is the source of reconciliation. This was St Paul's understanding of the sacrificial death of Jesus:

God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself, no longer holding people's misdeeds against them, and has entrusted us with the message of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5.18-19

St Paul was writing to a Church that had experienced sharp differences among its members which they had not been able to overcome. His great insight is that reconciliation is a divine gift, not a human achievement. It is by opening themselves to receive this gift that the Corinthian Christians will be reconciled.

Seeing reconciliation – peace – as a divine gift takes reconciliation beyond secular ideas which tend to equate it with conciliation, a process of conflict mediation whose goal is to lessen conflict, to broker a compromise, which will enable those at difference to find a way forward and live with their differences. Reconciliation has more fundamental character: conciliation tends to find a way around differences, but reconciliation looks at conflict and its causes head on, seeking a different outcome – it strives, not to enable the parties to live with their differences, but rather to transcend them. Like Christian hope, Christian reconciliation is rooted in the future, not the past, as Robert Schreier explains: '[It] never takes us back to where we were before. It is more than the removal of suffering for the victim and conversion for the oppressor. Reconciliation takes us to a new place.*' As St Paul said, when we are united in Christ 'there is a new creation; the old order has gone; a new order has already begun.' (2 Cor. 5.17) It is that new creation that Jesus' death makes

possible. That was his gift to the disciples, and it is his gift to the world.

As a gift, peace, reconciliation, is more received than achieved. Schreiter puts it well: 'reconciliation is not a skill to be mastered, but, rather, something to be discovered – the power of God's grace welling up in one's life.... Reconciliation becomes more of an attitude than an acquired skill; it becomes a stance to be assumed before a broken world, rather than a tool to repair that world ... reconciliation is more spirituality than strategy.'* He likens the process of reconciliation to entering a mysterion, a pathway in which God leads us out of suffering and alienation into the grace of his new reality. This grace is transforming, and creates the conditions not only for forgiveness, but also for those estranged to rediscover their humanity. A good example is the Peace and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa through which the victims of apartheid not only affirmed their own humanity, but did so in a way that also affirmed the humanity of their oppressors.

'My peace I give to you...' Passing on that peace is what earns the good disciples their reward.

* Robert Schreiter, *Reconciliation* (Orbis, 1992) pp. 55–56, 26.

Pause and reflect.

PRAYERS

A time of free prayer and intercession. You may like to begin with this hymn:

Take my life and let it be
consecrated to thee;
take my moments and my days,
let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my hands and let them move
at the impulse of Thy love;
take my feet and let them be
swift and beautiful for Thee.

Take my will and make it Thine,
it shall be no longer mine;
take my heart, it is Thine own,
it shall be Thy royal throne.

Take my love, my Lord I pour
at Your feet, it's treasure store;
take myself and I will be
ever, only, all for Thee.

Then use the traditional five-fold pattern:

For the Church

For the World

For family, friends, neighbours and the local community

For the sick and all in need, near and far

For those who have died

At the end:

Merciful Father, accept my prayers,
for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ.
Amen.

CONCLUSION

Our Father...

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ,
The love of God,
and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit,
be with us all, now and for ever. Amen.