

God's Gift of peace for a chaotic World Luke 2:1-14

This has been an extraordinary week both for our nation and the world. Locally there has been the record \$44 million dollar Lotto Powerball win. Internationally, after news of the first All Blacks loss in 19 Games to the Irish in Chicago died down, the news became all about the US Election. And it was Donald Trump, the man who is probably the most unlikely president-elect in history, was elected as the next President of the United States. At this stage, no one knows the future, how he will do and what will happen during his term as President and how that might effect American let alone the rest of the world. Mr. Trump's supporters could turn out to be right, but so could his detractors.

One lesson we should learn from this extraordinary election is that yesterday is no longer an effective predictor of tomorrow. Before the U.S. election the voting polls taken pointed to Hillary Clinton being in the lead, but come election day the polls hadn't got it right, proving that yesterday is no longer an effective predictor of tomorrow. That is because we live in a world dominated by an unprecedented continuous level of change, and with it, the chaos that ensues. Now these two things entered our world when Adam and Eve sinned. They are two things which will plague humankind until Christ returns. So, from the beginning humankind has had *change* and *chaos* in the real world to content with.

It is interesting to note that the election of Donald Trump did not happen in a vacuum. What should we care you might say. Why do we even bother discussing or considering this when we in live in a nation miles away from everything down here in the South Pacific Ocean? Well, to begin with, one of the most popular internet searches in the last week in the USA has been 'moving to New Zealand'. More importantly though is the reason that, we should view the election of Donald Trump in the larger worldwide context of the Brexit. The United Kingdom voting to leave the European Community. Coupled with the rise of nationalist parties across the world in the likes of Germany and Holland, the immigrant crisis in Europe, global terrorism, devastation in the Middle East, Vladimir Putin's sabre rattling along the borders of Russia, China's expansionist activities, bad feeling over climate change, and seismic shifts on marriage, sexuality, euthanasia and the liberalisation of drug laws. I believe there has never been such a high level of turmoil around the world in my own lifetime. Much of

the world it seems is shocked at the election of Donald Trump, which has not happened in a vacuum but, as I have explained, needs to be considered in the context of recent world events.

Now, you and I can choose to reflect worldwide culture, or to redirect it. So, where does a Christian redirect the current culture of the world to? One way is to remind people of themselves their feeling of anxiety, fear and being overwhelmed with the world seemingly out of control, or, we can remind them of Jesus. Those in this turbulent time who stake their future to their present are understandably frightened of both because what people believed to be true and would happen, hasn't, with regards to the U.S. election, along with other major issues currently facing the world. But we can take heart because no matter what is happening in the world, eternally and spirituality we are above it all in the most amazing way because we as Christians personally know the testimony of the Holy Spirit speaking to our spirit that, we possess God's Gift of peace for/while living in a chaotic World!

2,000 years ago this gift arrived. The God of unconditional love left heaven to come to us in human form. Now think about this... Jesus was unafraid to enter a world full of darkness and chaos in order to reach humanity. The King of kings made the biggest sacrifice in human history by leaving everything behind in heaven to bring us His peace, along with his love, compassion, joy and salvation. He left everything for you and me, for all humanity!

When Jesus came it was soon to become one of the most chaotic times in history. Yet, he was not afraid and left everything to come down to earth to reach the world, the biggest sacrifice in human history. Jesus entered the chaos of our world, not to be served, but to serve. Jesus humbly gave all of Himself to save us, and His salvation is the free-gift that cost Jesus everything because of His great love. And now, we get to have the Kingdom of God alive in each one of us! All that we need to do is make space for Jesus to live in and through us. And when we do this we will have the promised gift of peace living in us, flowing through us, and touching the lives of those around us.

Psalm 2 was written about a thousand years before Jesus lived, and it begins with the rhetorical questions v.1: "Why do the nations conspire? Why do the peoples plot in vain?" The psalmist could easily have been writing about today, nations waging war against

one another and against God, people plotting against one another, against God's plans and against God's purposes here on earth. But the psalmist also introduces one who is coming, one who will bring justice and peace, and who will end all of the chaos that is so real in our world. In Luke 2:1-14, we meet this One, the Lord's anointed, the Son of God, born in Bethlehem.

The world that Jesus entered was ruled by the 'Pax Romana'. It was experiencing the Roman veneer of a certain level of tranquility that it had brought to the Empire. Within two years that peace was shattered as Jesus, taken by his parents, fled from Israel's evil tyrant, the ruthless King Herod to become refugees in Egypt for two years until Herod had died and the family could safely return and live, not near Jerusalem but in Galilee.

The world that Jesus then lived and grew up in according to the Roman historian, Tacitus, could easily be a description of events in our time in terms of international tension. Tacitus writes about an unsettled world; crisis in the city of Rome which affects the entire Roman Empire. Here's what he said:

"The history in which I am entering is that of a period rich in disasters, terrible with battles, torn by civil struggles, horrible even in peace. Four emperors fell by the sword; there were three civil wars, more foreign wars, and often both at the same time. Italy was distressed by disasters unknown before. Beside the manifold misfortunes that befell mankind there were prodigies in the sky and on the earth, warnings given by thunderbolts and prophecies of the future both joyful and gloomy, uncertain and clear."

So it was that Jesus entered a world that seemed to be coming apart at the seams, with the turbulence of both civil and international war occurring simultaneously. There were internal threats as well the chaos created by false fears, false hopes, false Messiah's, and false prophets. And yet the newborn Jesus entered our world as the Prince of Peace, which was declared by the large host of heavens angels who recognised the Glory and Majesty of God, giving God the praise... "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." V.14 This peace was a peace of mind and soul made possible only by the birth of a Saviour v.11.

Many Jews were looking for a great political leader to deliver them from Roman rule while yet others were desperately hoping for a

Saviour who would deliver them from sickness and physical hardship. But this announcement pointed directly to a Saviour who would deliver them from sin and death as their Messiah, the Lord. Salvation for the believer is the way that leads to peace, the Messiah's peace, the tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ leaving such a one with nothing to fear from God, and content with your earthly lot, what ever sort that is.

When Jesus was born the angels proclaimed a much deeper internal and everlasting peace than the Roman peace could ever deliver to the world, a peace that would be extended only to those on whom God's favour rests.

This verse tells us there is no assurance this experience of God's peace will rest on all or be given to everyone. It states that it will be given only to those who are pleasing to God, on whom his favour rests who become the objects of God's *good pleasure* which is God's kindness, goodwill, and good purpose known as His favour.

Peace with God is only received by having faith in Christ, and, when you truly believe then God's favour, his peace comes to rest on you Romans 5:1. And this peace is not merely a subjective feeling, as in 'peace of mind', but is actually a new and real relationship with God like we have never had before. Before we believed, whether we knew it or believed it or not, we were God's enemies, but now things have changed in the best way possible because we are God's friends. And don't we know it because his favour, his peace rests upon in a real and tangible way

Believe it because the Messiah in the line of David was called the Prince of Peace whose rule will bring will bring wholeness and wellbeing to both individuals and society as well Isaiah 9:6. And it was Christ the Messiah, the prince of peace himself who promised peace to his disciples in John 14:27 *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you.* Here in fellowship with God through Christ's saving work is his great gift given to all his disciples who will achieve total well-being and receive inner spiritual rest.

The Apostle Paul was a recipient of Christ's gift of peace. He writes of it in his letter to the Philippians [4:7]. *And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.* Again, this was not merely a reference to a psychological state of mind

but an inner tranquility based on peace with God, that peaceful inner state of those whose sins are forgiven by God and are now friends with God. However this relationship with God instantly changes your 'friend' status with another who is not happy at all that he's lost you as a follower, and whose enemy you now are.

Christ's gift of peace in a chaotic world does not represent the absence of strife, trials and tribulation. We must remember that upon believing and receiving Christ as Lord that he also brought conflict. Jesus said in **Matthew 10:34**

"Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."

Our first reaction to these words of Jesus would be that they seem to be a complete contradiction of everything we've learned thus far about Jesus as the Prince of Peace. But I want to reassure you that it is true that Jesus Christ came to bring peace between the believer and God, and peace among humans. Yet, the inevitable result of Christ's coming is conflict. Conflict between Christ and the antichrist, between light and darkness and between Christ's followers and the devil's followers which can extend to even occurring between members of the same family Matthew 10:35-36. So it is then that the Christian believers peace with God also involves opposition to Satan and his work.

Jesus' brother James taught that in relation to fights, quarrels and our own needs and desires, that we are to humble ourselves and no longer be friends with that unholy trinity of the World, the Flesh and the Devil but instead to *Submit yourselves, then, to God.*

Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. **James 4:7**

Do this and you will continue to receive and experience Christ's peace on a daily basis because you remain in a right relationship with God, you're no longer Satan's friend because he no longer has power, control and authority over you. Submit yourself to God and you 'unfriend Satan'. Instead, as Christ's follower you get to be a living witness to God's gift of peace for a chaotic world and get to help point people in the right or righteous direction.

So the challenge remains for us, with all that is happening, the constant ongoing change and perceived chaos, the Lord is calling his people with Christ's peace in our hearts to respond with faith, hope, and love until Christ returns and frees us from the chaos of the world. Can you practice this in your daily lives this week?