



Remembrance Sunday 10th Nov 2024 at St John the Evangelist

Isaiah 10:33-11:9 and John 14:21-29 – Power and peace as re-ordered by Christ

On Remembrance Sunday, if we don't have personal experience of war, we can be fearful of saying the wrong thing. The trauma of war, the sudden loss and grieving from a distance ... most of us have no personal experience of such pain. And even fewer people have first-hand experience of the intensity and exhilaration of combat.

But although, here in Cambridge, our understanding of war and its impact is often through a screen or the printed page, we all seek peace.

If we are people of faith, we will pray for peace.

And yet war goes on.

Peace eludes us.

The ACLED website, providing verified Armed Conflict and Location Event Data, highlights both the hotspots for conflict, and the factors feeding into national trends.

The proximate cause of war might appear to be based upon an ideology. It might be grounded in the claims of history. But dig down, and often the root cause is economic.

When I was a lawyer in the field of restructuring companies, one of my most vivid memories, of a conference in Jersey, was the talk from an expert on global risk. He shared with us how governments were anticipating wars in densely-populated parts of the world over the important watersheds - the sources of rivers, high in the mountains – as wars were fought about access to water.

The United Nations, which in the 1940s identified its first objective as the maintenance of international peace and security, now sees the support of sustainable development and climate action as one of its key roles.

And the United Nations, in offering a forum to gather together, to discuss common problems and to find shared solutions, is founded on the idea that nations can become partners for peace.

But dialogue towards reconciliation requires more than time and the parties' participation. It requires courage and humility.

Dialogue must acknowledge difference before it can seek to build consensus.

No surprise, then, that we have the rise of strong men who prefer pursuing war to engaging in peace talks; strong men don't have the patience, or the inclination, for such dialogue.

And so peace eludes us.

The prophet Isaiah sees things differently.

Isaiah shows us that before there can be peace, power must be re-imagined.

Peace requires a re-imagination of where power lies, and of who exercises power. Isaiah tells us: ***The tallest trees will be cut down.***

And Isaiah's message is that such radical change won't come about through the co-operation of nations. It will happen only with the return of one person: the one who ***comes out from the stock of Jesse. The spirit of the Lord will rest on him.***

The one who came from the stock of Jesse was Jesus: descended through David, King of the Israelites, whose father was Jesse. So the return of Jesus – the Christ - will be the catalyst for the re-ordering of power.

And with the re-imagination of power comes the re-imagining of peace.

Isaiah paints a picture of a world that is radically different from the world as we know it now. A new peace where ***the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard with the kid, the calf and the lion ... together; the cow and the bear ... together.***

We understand the purpose of the incongruity here if we treat it as religious imagery. It is not a blueprint for a new eco-system entirely different from the world which, as created by God, was **very good**, a world where wolves, and leopards, and lions, did not deny their natures as predators, and yet where all animals co-existed sustainably.

Isaiah's peace of the future is as strange to us as a world where predators happily live beside their prey; a world without killing, without violence, without fear.

Such perfect peace will come with the one who, unlike any human being, **will not judge by what his eyes see or decide by what his ears hear**. Who will have **the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, and the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord**.

Christ, the one who **with righteousness [will] judge the poor, and [will] decide with equity for the meek of the earth**.

Christ, the one who renews the earth *through his mouth*.

That idea of power re-ordered through speech evokes an image from the Revelation at the end of the Bible, the vision given to John, when he saw Christ with a sword coming from his mouth. Reminding us that Christ is the one who in the beginning was the Word; the Word who was with God and who was God.

The one who was with God when he breathed the breath of life into the very first person to know the Lord. The one who in the future, **with the breath of his lips, shall kill the wicked**. Christ, the one who brings about the re-ordering of power, the re-ordering of life, through the Word and by the Spirit.

Christians do not expect the perfect peace to come about through the co-operation of the nations, but only with the return of Christ. Christ alone can bring about a new world order and a perfect peace.

And in the meantime, we heard from John's gospel how Jesus promised his disciples: ***Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.*** How he told them ***do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid.***

Jesus offers peace that the world cannot give. Jesus offers the peace of trusting in the death and resurrection of Jesus: the one who achieved for us on the cross the supreme reconciliation with the Father; the one who in the resurrection, secured the ultimate defeat of death.

The peace of Christ is the peace that enables Christians to live amidst the world's turmoil and turbulence.

The peace that is practised by Christians by loving the Lord and by keeping his word.

When the world is eventually re-ordered for a perfect peace – a perfect peace of righteousness and of equity - that perfect peace will not be achieved by war, or by peace-keeping troops, or even by peace conferences. It will be achieved through the return of Christ.

And meanwhile, Christians live in the peace of Christ, loving the Lord and keeping his word.

Until then, people of faith - of every faith – we pray for peace.

Until then, everybody – every single one of us – we work for peace.

Rev Ceri Payne

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