

I Give You My Peace

a sermon preached on the

2nd Sunday after Pentecost

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at

St Luke's in the City, Christchurch

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Lection: Isaiah 49: 8-16a; Matthew 6: 24-34

The modern world is built on anxiety. You can see the worried look on people's faces hurrying to work at the start of the day. You see it even more as they travel home, tired, but without having solved life's problems. Their faces are wearied, puzzled, living the unanswerable question as to what it all means. This world we live in thrives on people setting higher and higher goals for themselves (and others), so that they can worry all day and all year about whether they will reach them. If they do reach their goals, they will set new ones. If they don't, they will feel they have failed.

Is this really how we are supposed to live?

Jesus' warnings indicate that much of the world throughout human history has faced the same problem. The difference is the level at which the anxiety strikes. Many of Jesus' followers had just enough to live on, and there was always the prospect that they would not have even that. As with many in today's world, one disaster, like the family breadwinner being injured, sick, or dying, could mean extreme poverty.

Worry and anxiety affects us all. It is part of our human nature. Each passing day we can be led into situations where we possibly respond with anxiety and worry. The breakdown in human behaviour, the increase in violence and vandalism, increases in the cost of living, power supply, rents, mortgages, food etc. Jesus tells us not to worry about these things. That worry can damage your health; disrupt your productivity; affect the way you respond to and treat other people; reduce your ability to trust in God. And, Jesus is right.

However, how do we explain this to the homeless people we find from time to time sleeping on the dirty old mat in our rear church porch? How do we explain it to the lady living in the Council flat who, because of a 24% rise in her rent, can no longer afford to buy a non-subsidised prescription medicine which gives her a better quality of life? There are many, many more stories of this nature. What do we say to these people?

Do we pat them on the head and say, "Jesus loves you – don't worry. I will pray for you", and then walk on by?

What I have just said to you is not an exaggeration. It is not a fantasy. I have heard it said. I have seen it happen. I have experienced it.

Comments such as these are not only inappropriate – they are in conflict with the teaching of Christ. The parable of the Good Samaritan comes to mind.

Jesus tells us to seek first His kingdom. The Kingdom of God is about God's sovereignty sweeping the world with love and power, so that human beings, each made in God's image and each one loved equally, may relax in the knowledge that God is in control. Reflecting on the birds and the flowers isn't meant to encourage a kind of romantic mysticism, but to stimulate serious understanding that God the Creator loves to give good gifts, loves to give us the Kingdom, loves to bring His care, compassion and rescue right to our own doorstep.

Through the Holy Spirit, God bestows on us the gift of peace of the soul. You will remember on the night before He died, Jesus spoke of peace even as He was aware of the suffering He was soon to face. Where did this inner peace come from? It came from His total union with the love of God.

Jesus has left us this very same peace. “I give you my peace”, he said. His peace is no worldly attempt to escape suffering, but the inner strength to cope with any situation. Nor did He remove us from temptation. Instead He gave us the inner power to combat temptation. His peace is from the Holy Spirit, deep within the soul, underneath all the worries and anxieties which disturb the surface of life.

Amen.

References: Matthew 6:24-34
T. Wright
G. Stanton

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