

Sermon – Christmas Day 2018
Preacher: The Revd Jim McKenna

Gospel: 1 John 1-14

Light and Peace

We live in a world darkened by war, violence, and suffering of different kinds. All of us have experienced darkness in our personal lives and in our families. Sorrow, disappointment, illness, loneliness and so on.

Fortunately, the lamp that Jesus lit in our world continues to burn brightly. His light was not lit in Bethlehem and then extinguished. It shines today in the midst of devastation, disaster and upheaval. It is a persistent and defiant light which no darkness can over-power.

The flowing goodness of Jesus still illuminates the world as it did at His birth in a stable in Bethlehem over 2000 years ago. It shines in the darkest places. When a tragedy occurs in a community, all of a sudden the barriers come down, linking the lives of people. For a time there are no strangers, no rich people, no poor people, no Christians, no Moslems, no Jews. Just brothers and sisters helping one another to get through the pain. We have experienced this at St Luke's in our ministry to the street workers.

There was a Russian writer who spent four years in a Siberian Prison. It was a bleak experience which brought him into contact with some desperate men. In his book "Memoirs from the House of the Dead", he gives a moving account of what Christmas Day means to these men. He writes that on Christmas Day the mood of the prisoners was very touching. They felt that they were not altogether outcasts or lost souls. They felt like human beings, and experienced a bond with one another and the outside world – Christ's light knows no barriers. It continues to shine, and has the power to draw us into its light where we can experience the love and peace of Christ.

One of the things we associate with Christmas is peace. At the birth of Christ the angels sang "Glory to God in the highest and peace to God's people on earth." Each Sunday Mass we continue to proclaim these wonderful words of the Gospel, when we sing the Gloria.

On Christmas Eve 1914, the British and the Germans troops faced each other from rat-infested trenches on the battlefield. By midnight some of the British began to sing Christmas Carols. Then they heard the Germans joining in. A short while later, the temptation to unite became too great, and both groups of men ventured into "no man's land", singing and exchanging Christmas greetings. They exchanged food, and there was not a trace of hatred on their faces. The news of this reached the Generals, and the soldiers were herded back to their trenches. If this proves nothing else, it proves the power of the birth of Christ, and the light He brought to the world. There was a greater force than two armies on the battlefield that Christmas Eve.

The peace of Christ is not merely the absence of violence and evil. It is something much deeper and richer.

The Hebrew word for **Peace** is "Shalom" and it conveys a much richer meaning than the English word "peace". It conveys a sense of completeness and well-being.

You may like to experience it as we pass the peace of Christ to each other this morning.

Peace can exist in the midst of a troubled world, and in the midst of unresolved problems. It is something so deep within us that it is independent of other circumstances. It is a state of inner calm. It is a gift from God. It is the gift of Incarnation. God reaches out to us in **Peace**.

Our gift to God is to make **Peace** with one another. **Peace** is communion with God.

May God help us to experience the **Peace** that only God can give-

- the **Peace** that passes all understanding
- the **Peace** no-one can take away from us.

Shalom.

References: Gospel of John 1:1-14
Flor McCarthy