

## HOW TO FIND THE PEACE OF CHRIST

Nicky Ing - 16th May 2004

Joel 2: 21-27; Psalm 67; Rev.21: 10,11 & 22-27; John 14: 23-29

Today in our church calendar we are moving towards the Ascension...which will be on Thursday, an important feast day for us here in Hilton, in the dedication and naming of this lovely Church. Then, ten days after Ascension Day, we shall be celebrating the day of Pentecost...the coming of the Holy Spirit. The reading from John's Gospel this morning reflects that ...because it is part of something the scholars call Jesus' 'Farewell Discourse' in which he promises his friends that although the time has come for him to leave, he will send them the Holy Spirit to be their Advocate and Guide. In the structure of the Liturgical year, this reading is a kind of introduction to Ascension and Pentecost, so it takes us forward to that, even though in the Gospel it is set before the crucifixion and resurrection...in other words, before Easter. What is most important in this is that Jesus is about to go away....and everything his disciples do in his name after this will be done in the physical **absence** of Jesus, but in the quite different **presence** of God the Holy Spirit.

The reading from Revelation tells us about the reality of heaven...it points us forward to the vision of what the completion and fulfillment of God's design for the human community will look like. **Nothing** in this fits with the way in which we understand things in terms of our cities and towns here and now!!! In the Heavenly City, there is no temple...there is no church building...nobody shuts the gates of the city in the daytime, because gates are for protection against **enemies**, and open gates are a symbol of perfect safety. There is no sunlight or moonlight, because God himself is the light and that is all that is needed...people can come in at any time and bring into the city of God all the glory and honour of all the nations of the world. Nothing unclean that can bring about destruction and death can enter...and only the redeemed of God will be there... nothing is lacking...no good thing...and people are **free** to be in the presence of God in worship, in perfect **peace** and without fear, because they live under God's protection.

This is a vision of a perfect world, isn't it...and I suppose that we too would long to live in this kind of perfection. But for today, we live in the here and now. We are not perfect people and we do not live in a perfect world...we live in a world which contains all the elements of what is good and beautiful, and also the shame and terror of evil, and it is all mixed up together...we have to choose between them...but of course the good news of the Gospel is that evil **is** destroyed, good **does** have the victory.....because of the resurrection of Jesus who overcame sin and death for us all.

In the good news Gospel of John, Jesus tells us that we must keep his word if we love him. He promises us that the Holy Spirit will be present to teach and guide us. And just as John of Patmos in Revelation has a vision of God's open and unguarded presence throughout the Holy city as the source of safety for its people, so John the Evangelist in the Gospel sees the presence of Jesus and his Father through the work of the Spirit as the source of peace for his disciples... a peace which reflects the Hebrew

word 'SHALOM' ... meaning not just peace as the absence of fear, but meaning **safety, fulfillment, and joy.....** Jesus says to us: **'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.'**

It is often difficult, I think, for us to accept this kind of peace which Jesus offers. Our lives seem to be filled with 'overbusyness' and anxieties...**inevitably** this is so, if we are to keep ourselves afloat in the society in which we live!!! There seem to be so many things needing to be done, the day never gets finished...there is speed and noise and there are pressures and family and school commitments, our work to be done, and deadlines to meet...other people may irritate us sometimes and even disappoint us too. We are often afraid of the future...especially when we watch our TV screens and see the horror of war and retribution right in front of our eyes...someone told me she could not sleep one night this week because of the horror of what she saw on the TV news in Iraq. It is not surprising at all...and we all have our own particular anxieties, right here where we are...whether it be a parent worrying about a wild teenager, or perhaps it is financial stress...how to cope with rising costs of living...or a broken relationship...or perhaps someone in the family is very ill, and we feel helpless in not being able to do anything about that...or a loved one dies, and we feel totally bereft .....and we have to learn how to live our life in a new and very different way.....how can we find the peace of Christ in all these situations...????

As I thought about this I realised that the key to our acceptance of Christ's peace is in **prayer**. Here is the place where we learn to draw closer to God and begin to respond to his love for us...the **connectedness** of our relationship with God is a vital aspect of our life if we are to deepen our awareness of God's presence with us at all times and all places. I believe we need to be **continually** asking God to increase our desire to know and love him more...and to notice God's presence in the little things that happen to us and around us in each day. One day this week as I came away from a particularly difficult situation which seemed to have no easy answers, and I was thinking about all the people concerned in that situation, just as I was about to open the door of the car I looked up and there was the most **huge** and **beautiful** perfect rainbow right across the sky...somehow it reflected for me in a powerful way, the glory of God and also the promise of God....and at that moment I felt strangely comforted....there was a sense of peace and beauty in it: even though the situation was difficult, God was reassuring me that I must trust him for all the answers. Of course it is different for each of us...but we need to keep alert for signs around us that God is present and that God cares about all the difficult things we have to face in life. A continually prayerful attitude will help us to find peace of soul...it is something we need to be asking for, more and more. (And if we ask, we know we will receive it!)

But it is easy to become discouraged and lose heart: to be dragged down by bad news...there is so much of it about! And also we are afraid of our own inadequacies. (**Joyce Rupp p86 Fresh Bread**). We need a spirit of hope, not of discouragement!!

So, the other attitude we need, I believe, in finding internal peace with God, and it ties in with our prayer, is one of **gratitude**.. If we consciously cultivate a spirit of thankfulness, it becomes a way of life for us...I often notice people who express gratitude.....and such people are a real joy to have around; they create a warm

atmosphere and we are drawn to them somehow. Somebody once said: **‘Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos into order, confusion to clarity...Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow’** .....We need prayerfulness, and a spirit of gratitude.....

Jesus wants us to have life, life in abundance. If we have his peace in our hearts, then we will be able to live in peace with one another. The question for us to think about is: Can we open our hearts and let the Light of Christ shine into all the dark corners and drive out our fears and anxieties from us? Do we long to draw closer to God in prayer and learn to **trust** him more for everything that happens in our lives?? Dare we ask for a spirit of gratitude which reminds us that every good and gracious gift comes from God alone? Jesus longs to give us more than we can ever ask or imagine...Listen as he calls us each by name: **‘My own peace I give to you... I do not give to you as the world gives...Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. Peace I leave with you. It is my gift to you. It is yours to have and it is also for you to give away to the rest of the world’** Amen