

Sunday, December 8, 2019

Isaiah 11:1-10

Matthew 3:1-12

Does it Feel like Christmas, Yet?

In recent days if one turned on the tv or radio to hear international news stories what was heard involved political controversies and unrest, labour strikes, stand offs, gunfire, death tolls after rallies for change as well as diseases spreading around the world. There seems to be no stories of change from bad to good or situations changed through non-violent discussions or reconciliation being in process. Yet we who are here know that in just over 2 weeks we will celebrate Jesus' birth. It hardly feels like Christmas when we experience what seems to be the furthest from any sort of 'peace on earth, good will to all people". But then it is in these times when it might be most like Christmas as well. Because it is in the strange, uncomfortable, and confusing circumstances when we can get to the true and original spirit of Christmas. For it is in these times- when we seem to lack internal peace when we can understand the depth of God's love for us in enabling Jesus to be born.

Maybe what we need to realize is that the real gift of Christmas is Jesus arriving in a time of unpeace—just like now. And this occurred over 2000 years ago will occur again because of God's love for us. Emmy Arnold writes:

How could God hate us, when He gives us love.... The true Christmas experience is to feel that this Christmas peace is the greater power, that even now on earth it overcomes all unpeace. That this peace shall come to all—this is the expectation and faith of Christmas.

When we see the signs—of all the lights shining brightly in the December darkness, when we see stars way above us radiantly beaming, and when we remember that Star that shone so bright the night of Jesus' birth, we are reminded of the peace that comes and lies in a manger. Each light that shines, breaks into the darkness and takes over. For when a light shines in the darkness there is hope. We might think that these days are filled with human conflict but when we think of the peace that came in Jesus' birth, there is security and comfort and we realize how much we need God to enter the world again and again. For we are people who need this peace.

We long for peace. Peace on earth and peace in our hearts. The original participants in the Christmas story were waiting and hoping for this, just like we are. The shepherds were watching their sheep on a peaceful night until the angels told them of the Messiah born in a local barn. And the angels' song—was a song of prayer: Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom

he favours. The shepherds were just doing their regular job and the angels called to them. We are living our ordinary lives but the question we need to ask, is are we still searching for the One who will bring peace to an unpeaceful world. And how are we going to tell others. And do we want to tell others?

Isaiah wrote of the peaceable kingdom which would come- when the animal kingdom would be turned from predator and prey, from aggressor to passive, and from Jesse's family will come the One upon whom righteousness and faithfulness shall rest. And in this peaceable kingdom there will be hope for all people for peace shall reign forever.

But we must be made ready for this to occur. John the Baptist later preached the message of hope that included the need to repent and receive forgiveness for the kingdom of heaven would come. This same message needs to be shared and heard and acted upon as we get ready for Jesus' birth.

And we should be excited—not just to make special treats to overfill our stomachs but to share in the eating of these treats with those whom we love. When we take part in this time of sharing we are gathered together and making what used to be different become common; making what separates us become whole.

Jesus knew the importance of this as he and his disciples gathered together and shared the Passover meal. But what was different was that he also shared bread and wine and gave these elements of an ordinary meal a new meaning, a new hope and a way of peace. When Jesus shared with his disciples, he knew that the group dynamics would soon change- but in the moment of sharing the bread and cup- there was a moment of peace.

And this is what we shall share together today- a taste of peace as Christ Jesus comes to us again. A morsel of what Christmas can and does mean if we truly believe and have faith in the one who is to come, the one who came and He who died and rose for our sakes.

Does it feel like Christmas yet? Only you may answer this and it has nothing to do with snow, and decorations, gift buying or singing Christmas hymns. What makes us really feel Christmas is where we place our hope- And if your hope is in the love of God who demonstrated His love for all of creation by coming into our world as a baby, we will feel the Spirit move us. Even if we are experiencing despair, hopelessness, and helplessness; even if we are wandering about or going through the motions or sitting in grief or loss, Jesus left heaven for you. So that you might celebrate with or without family friends, without trees, decorations and songs, the true condition of peace in your heart received because of Jesus' birth.

Does it feel like Christmas? Pray for God's Spirit to touch your heart; pray that you might feel peace; and pray that as we eat the bread and drink the cup today, that you would know Christ Jesus the Prince of Peace who comes into this unpeaceable kingdom for you.

Let us Pray;

God of peace and hope, we praise you and rejoice that the real gift of Christmas is Jesus who comes to save us and redeem us. As we pray we ask for your peace in our hearts. Hear our thoughts we ask

SILENCE AMEN>