

Isaiah 10:33 – 11:9; John 14:23 - 29

The Peace of Christ ... *“peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you”* ... such a beautiful promise, but what for us is the Peace of Christ?

Peace in some sense is the theme of both of tonight’s readings – both of them set with the promise of Peace, but also set within the context of political troubles, conflict and very human anxieties.

The passage from **Isaiah (10:33-11:9)** is often a reading for Advent (we’re not quite there yet of course) and is very frequently found within the setting of a Service of Nine Lessons and Carols A precursor to the nativity: an image of a little child coming to lead those creatures, normally antagonistic towards each other, into ways of peace. The reading is used to remind us of the infinite promise in the incarnation of Christ’s birth. In the birth of his son, God will come to reign and to bring justice to those who suffer and peace to a world full of strife. The imagery used reinforces this idea of the peace that will be received, in a way that is counter to human experience or expectation.

The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard with the kid, the cow, the bear and the lion all coming together...and a small child shall lead them all. The context of this reading for us is more often than not “Christmas,” but the context of its writing is the political reality of the war between Israel and Assyria ... The destruction and exile of the Jews, the Chosen People. The misery of their diaspora and enslavement ... but the **power** of God’s promise in this disastrous context is huge, for in spite of the times, Isaiah prophesies redemption, restoration and hope. New shoots will come from the stem of Jesse, from the descendants of the father of King David, new branches will grow. The power of a loving God will be restored allowing the actions such as those of little children to bring knowledge into the world.

This is not a reading that is intended to remind us solely of the power of God’s Creation of the World, but shows us that even in a broken world, God’s promise of peace will overcome the troubled times. Even in those times when those who should know him better have chosen to remove themselves from leading his people and from their ordained path. It will not allow any of us to sidestep troubles, but it will give the courage to live within them, by inviting God’s peace to dwell within us.

The images of a **child** accepting God’s righteousness and faithfulness lead us towards the promise of Christ’s incarnation and of his peace. Perhaps at this pivotal moment in our own history, in the environmental imbalance of our world, there is a reminder that it is often the young whose faith and lack of fear will bring us to a world of peace: ecological balance and justice for all of God’s Creation. The young voices around COP26 should perhaps remind us of our own failures to allow God’s peace to rule our world: backing away from universal justice for fear of our own impoverishment and insecurity.

As I’ve said however, this is not really a passage about environmental re-creation , (however important that is), but an extended metaphor to show us what the peace God offers can achieve **within** us. It is that peace we are offered in the birth, the incarnation of Christ. The Peace is of Christ.

In the reading from John’s Gospel (*John 14: 23-29*) we find that Jesus is guiding his disciples towards **PTO**

the peace he offers, at the very time when conflict, insecurity and lack of peace are what they are experiencing.... not least because he is warning them again of his imminent death. He tells them and us of the peace he offers: a peace that is indwelling, comforting and above all, that brings the love of God into our hearts. A love that is both present and eternal.

This passage too is set in difficult times, both in terms of Jesus' own ministry and in the time of the writing of John's Gospel. Political and religious conflict surrounds the words spoken here. . The passage is part of the final discourse between Jesus and his disciples, firmly set on Maundy Thursday: the final journey to the Cross is now very close.

For his disciples the loss of Jesus will seem like a disaster, impossible to bear, but it is, as he explains, a path he has to travel and one which they cannot avoid either. Despite this potential catastrophe, Jesus reassures them. There is absolute hope, a promise of complete peace. Just as in the prophetic words of Isaiah, where peace is set to enter into human life, so in these words of Christ, peace is with them in the present and in the future, even in times of trouble. Christ offers them and all of us, his peace, the peace that draws us all to the Father. It is the peace that through Father, Son and Holy Spirit dwells in our hearts if we are open enough to let it come in. It is a stunning gift of love and grace.

And so with thoughts of both Christmas and Easter threading through these readings we are drawn again to the incarnation of Christ. "The Peace of Christ" comes from our knowledge and shared experience of birth and death, and from our faith in his resurrection: a continuous promise . Whatever we ourselves may go through, whatever those disciples had to endure, there is always the Peace of Christ to settle our hearts and minds. It will guide us into ways that allow us to adopt his ways of love and justice in our own individual lives. Whether we are international activists, or quietly based local workers, our lives should always be lived in a way that displays and reflects the Christ we find in our hearts.

May "The Peace of Christ" be always with and within you.

Amen