

## *Peace - as Isaiah envisioned and Rahab hoped for*

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, December 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022 - Matthew 1:1-5 & Isaiah 11:1-10)

Peace. Stillness. Quietness. Calmness. Serenity. The absence of conflict.

How we yearn for peace, especially as we are now into the silly season, and as we look around the world at the dreadful conflicts taking place in places we love.

During Advent our readings from the prophet Isaiah paints a picture of peace. A place where wars will cease, weapons are turned into farming implements, a place where enemies co-exist and live together sharing what they have – wolves and lambs, calves and lions, cows and bears, lions and oxen. He speaks of a time when justice, righteousness and peace will reign. How we yearn for such a place and time.

In our second week of Advent, we are going to look at our second woman in Jesus' genealogy, Rahab, like Tamar is she one of Jesus' great-great-grandmothers. Rahab is a woman, living in the midst of conflict. and finds herself having to take sides.

Rahab was a Canaanite woman living in Jericho. A woman who was a bit of an outsider because of her profession, Rahab was a prostitute. No doubt the constant subject of rumour, innuendo and judgement. A woman known no doubt to many of the men. A woman financially independent and perhaps with the knowledge of many state secrets. No doubt she was exploited by some of the men who would visit late at night. No stranger to answering the door late at night. One night she answered the door to some foreigners – Israelites. What was she to do, if anyone found them there with her no doubt they would have all been killed. If she kicked them out, then no doubt their people would take their revenge. She faced a huge dilemma. So, thinking on her feet she hid them to buy some time and then she helped them escape, although she sent them on a bit of a wild goose chase to buy herself some more time. She knew that the Israelites were planning to invade Jericho and destroy all in their wake. She couldn't tell people about the impending invasion – who would listen to the word of a 'lady of the night' so she had to think about those closest to her. So, she made a deal with those Israelite spies, she helped them escape in turn for them saving her and her family. she helped them with the proviso that when they came to destroy Jericho, they would save all in the house with the red cord hanging out of the window.

They kept their part of the bargain and saved all in her house and allowed them to live here in their own land, albeit as foreigners in their own land. Her kindness saved some of the people, but no doubt she spent her life thinking about whether she did the right thing, did she make a deal with the devil?

She went on to marry a man called Salmon and had a baby boy called Boaz who we will learn more of next week.

Rahab – an outsider, a foreigner, a woman of dubious character - just like Tamar becomes part of the family tree of Jesus. Her desire for peace for her family at least, led her to act with kindness and compassion to strangers. A difficult decision no doubt, but that which saved her family, in the midst of horrendous conflict.

Peace is not the absence of conflict, rather it is how we respond to conflict. Rahab teaches us to respond with kindness, generosity, and compassion. Perhaps the right response is to try and understand where the other one is coming from and find out what we hold in common. She suspended judgement, something her fellow residents were not able to do concerning her. Rahab was just looking for a peace filled life.

When I think about people finding peace in their life circumstances, in their hearts, in times of their greatest fear, it seems to me that they find it when someone cares, when someone listens, when someone comes alongside.

Our world waits for peace, we yearn for peace in communities, in our homes and within ourselves.

Gandhi said – the day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace.

Martin Luther King Jr said – Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.

Mother Teresa said – peace begins with a smile.

Rahab shows us that peace begins with kindness and welcome.

Isaiah gives us a beautiful picture of such peace.

This Christmas will you work for peace?

Will you pray for peace?

Will you seek peace in all aspects of life as we celebrate the birth of the 'Prince of peace'.