

Making For Peace

(Preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist, July 21st, 2024 - Mark 6:30-34, 53-56 & Ephesians 2:13-22)

I wonder where you are most at peace. What calms you? Where do you go for solitude? Where are you most at peace? How do you avoid burnout?

Maybe it is sitting in silence and concentrating on your breathing and meditating. Perhaps it is music that calms your soul. Maybe it is getting into the gardening and getting your hands dirty that rejuvenates you. Or maybe it is a walk along the beach or in the bush or working with wood. Maybe you play a game of golf (although for me that would have the opposite effect). For me knitting or crochet or card making seems to calm me. Maybe you paint or draw or get your head under the bonnet of a car.

We all need to find ways to sustain us for what is ahead, to take care of ourselves in order to care for others.

The psalm for today is that well known one, Psalm 23. This psalm as we know is an invitation to rest in God. God, the good shepherd takes us by the hand leads us to places of plenty, to places of rest, to places of safety. It is like God gets us to sit down and put our feet up, have a cup of tea and simply rest for a bit. In this space we find safety, a comforting word and reassurance that all will be well.

In our readings from the New Testament today we see several kinds of peace. In our gospel reading Jesus takes his disciples by the hand and says come away with me for a while. No doubt he was aware that they had been doing a lot of mission, just as he had asked them to. They were exhilarated by what they discovered but also exhausted. Jesus knew well the possibility of what we today would call compassion fatigue. He knew they needed a break, a time of restoration, a time to catch their breath and regroup. He knew that withdrawal and silence and the opportunity to pray would do that, he did that himself many times. He also knew they needed to tell their stories and share with each other what they had learnt along the way, in order to process and understand the mission they had been engaged with, and we all know that is best done in community, with each other. Such rest would refresh them and enable them to go out again and practice God's love and compassion amongst the people.

Alas, the best laid plans. Not much rest at least for Jesus, the crowds swamp them, and Jesus looks on them with the eyes of his heart and responds to their needs. In the part of the story, we haven't read today, he feeds the 5000. Not much resting.

So, they try again to get away, but no, the crowd again follows and again Jesus, and the disciples prioritise their needs over their rest.

I think our readings today illustrate the need for three kinds of peace and that somehow, we need to balance all three.

The Psalm and the first part of Mark remind us that the worker needs to find peace. They, in order, to go about their task, need to take time for rest, for refreshment, to be

re-energized and reflect on what has been. Such rest gives them the ability to go out again and engage in the work or mission.

In the second part of the reading from Mark we see the crowds yearning for their own kind of peace. They need healing or teaching or kindness or feeding to give them peace. They know the source of that peace is Jesus the Christ, he will be able to give them peace in their hearts. Compassion and healing, is what brings them peace. The disciples, like Jesus so often was, have their solitude interrupted by need. Jesus models for them that sometimes we must give up our individual time of peace for the peace of others who are troubled. Compassion sometimes needs to take priority over rest. Although in order to provide such compassion, we do need to know when it is time for a break, we do need to avoid compassion fatigue or we will be of no assistance to anyone.

Paul in our reading from Ephesians describes a different kind of peace. Paul writing to the church at Ephesus is writing to a community who need to learn how to welcome Gentile Christians, Christians who have come from a different background. This community needs to find ways of living peacefully with each other. Paul reminds them that Jesus is the one who brings peace and to attain such peace in their community they must follow his example. So, what does that mean? It means that love and welcome must override difference. It means that anything that destroys unity will destroy peace and must be broken down, the walls of anger, hostility, resentment, the desire for power and control must be done away with if peace is to reign. In Ephesus expecting people to obey certain rules before they were accepted into that community, was the problem that Paul was seeking to address. We know that Jesus spent his life breaking down such barriers – he speaks to outsiders, heals the unclean, accepts those on the margins.

As I think about this it seems to me that this is what we need to be doing if we want peace in our world. When the barriers are gone, fear goes, anger dissolves, hope, love and peace arise and reconciliation is possible.

Peace is therefore as much about justice and dismantling anything that dehumanizes or oppresses as it is about solitude. It is as much about putting aside petty differences as it is about withdrawing to a quiet place.

Making for peace is about rest, about sharing stories in community and breaking down walls that divide.

Jesus engages in all three kinds of peace – inner peace, peace for others and peace for the world, and we should follow his lead. We too need to live the tension between solitude and practicing compassion.

So, spend time in silence, practice compassion in order to bring peace to others and smash down barriers that divide to bring peace and reconciliation to the world.

Take a deep breath, rest and get ready to practice compassion.