

Prince of Peace

Readings: Jeremiah 33:1 – 3, 10 – 16, John 14:25 – 31

Imagine there's no heaven
It's easy if you try
No hell below us
Above us only sky
Imagine all the people living for today

Imagine there's no countries
It isn't hard to do
Nothing to kill or die for
And no religion too
Imagine all the people living life in peace, you

Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people sharing all the world, you

Chorus:
You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope some day you'll join us
And the world will be as one

While we not agree with every single word contained in John Lennon's lyrics, I am sure we agree with the underlying sentiments of a world where there is peace and harmony; unity for all people!

What you think that world would look like?

Our current situation is very different isn't it? I got a calendar from my cousin in the UK this week. After promising us an email with family news, this is what her accompanying note said:

We keep hearing about earthquakes and numerous aftershocks in NZ so lots of shaking going on. Then there's Brexit and a prospective US President Trump. Shaking everywhere.

All those things are true and scary and they make us feel very uncertain about the future. At Standing Committee this week (SC is the Vestry/management committee for our Diocese) we were told that those worst affected by the earthquakes seem to be those in the wider Ward community. They were just starting to get back on their feet after the lot 3 years ago. They are left feeling very confused – should they rebuild again or should they move and start afresh? I know we are praying but please pray especially for them.

We are dealing with the obvious things my cousin mentioned. In addition we have recently heard the latest statistics regarding child poverty.

New Zealand child poverty has hit a "crisis" point according to Auckland City Mission CEO Chris Farrelly and we "need to take action".

The 2016 Child Poverty Monitor 90,000 kids are living in severe poverty. 90,000!
Double the population of Nelson!

There are no easy answers to child poverty. This week the Dunedin Longitudinal Study has shown how children in poverty are far more likely to grow up to commit by far the most crime, claim the majority of welfare benefits, be more likely to smoke and be overweight. This is no surprise.

Is this the kind of world we want? Is this how things are meant to be?

Jeremiah records the promises of God for peace and prosperity in chapter 33. It is a wonderful picture of what the world can and will be like one day. And that's great – seriously that picture does give us hope that one day the world will be [almost] like John Lennon envisages it.

But what about now? Are we content to wait until Christ returns and puts everything right? Is there any hope at all for our short-term future? What can we do to make a difference in the here and now?

I want to look at the chapter in Jeremiah to see how God calls us to pray. Then we'll turn briefly to John's Gospel and consider Jesus' promise to his disciples. Finally we'll consider what this means for us in this time and place in which we live in relation to our theme: Prince of Peace. That is the "So what?" bit.

Jeremiah has a very similar message of the previous chapter. The prophet was still confined in the courtyard of the guard (32:1-2). God's message comes in similar form: I am the Lord who made heaven and earth, who formed and established it. I am the Lord: awe-inspiring words that emphasise God's covenant-keeping faithfulness on behalf of His people (32:18; Ex. 3:13-15).

Having established his credentials the Lord goes on to give insight of his plans to Jeremiah. We didn't include the prophecies of judgment in our reading but they are there in verses 4 & 5.

Always after judgement comes blessing. Judgement is always temporary. Perhaps we are living in days of judgement of a kind now? Our own stupidity and selfishness has led to many of the afflictions we and our world face today.

After judgement God will bring health and healing to this earth, it's people and creation itself. God detailed this blessing for Jeremiah:
There will be a restoration for the land as Judah and Israel are set free from captivity. Enemy nations will tremble with awe and will tremble as they see the peace and prosperity (33:9) God will provide for his people.

Jesus tells these things so that the disciples may believe. The Spirit tells us things today, just as God spoke through Jeremiah back in the day, so that we might believe. Believing is not an intellectual acknowledgement of what has happened or what will happen.

Believing in the Christian context is a belief that leads to action. The action we are called to first and foremost is prayer. We pray for the Prince of Peace to come as God has promised through Jeremiah, through Isaiah, through the Holy Spirit.

Prayer leads us to see the actions we can take to partner with Jesus who is the promised Prince of Peace. Jimmy Dorrell received his seminary degree in 1978. Wanting to touch those that ordinary churches couldn't reach, he and his wife Janet moved into the North Waco neighbourhood. They lived among the poor and shared Jesus' "good news" through relationships and empowerment opportunities. His passion for the poor and getting the middle-class involved in the lives of the poor became the strategy for Mission Waco that continues today. Jimmy Dorrell and his wife Janet Dorrell founded Mission Waco Mission World which includes empowerment and community development work in Waco, Mexico, India and Haiti. He has written one of my favourite books – Trolls and Truth along with another one I have just ordered called Dead Church Walking.

From Jeremiah we see that God's promise for peace will come when we partner with God through prayer. From John's reading we see that peace will come through listening to and believing what the Holy Spirit says. This time of year we prepare for the coming of the One who moved into our neighbourhood, who became one of us – the Prince of Peace.

So what about us?

Jer 33:10 – 12 gives a wonderful picture of a nation living under God:

- What hopes and dreams do you have for our country, our local community, or your own family?
- How regular are you in praying for these things?
- How might God partner with you to help bring some of these things about?
- What one small thing might you do this week towards advancing your hopes and dreams?

Our hopes might be somewhat in line with John Lennon words:

You may say I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I know some day they'll join us
And the world will be as one

Let's pray:

Prince of Peace – please fill our hearts with your peace so that it overflows to those around us. Let us take time to hear and trust what your Spirit is telling us as we step out in faith with you. Amen