

WELCOME AND NOTICES

CALL TO WORSHIP

‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’

John 14: 27 (NIV)

PEACE, PERFECT PEACE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ibqgZxWa6bM>

**Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?
The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.**

**Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties
pressed?**

To do the will of Jesus, this is rest.

**Peace, perfect peace, with sorrows surging
round?**

In Jesus’ presence naught but calm is found.

**Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away?
In Jesus’ keeping we are safe, and they.**

**Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?
Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.**

**Peace, perfect peace, death shadowing us and
ours?**

Jesus has vanquished death and all its powers.

**It is enough: earth’s struggles soon shall cease,
And Jesus calls us to Heaven’s perfect peace.**

OPENING PRAYER & CONFESSION

We bless you, Abba, Father, for you have visited your people in one like us in all things but sin, and in human fragility you have revealed the face of divinity.

Gather into your arms all the peoples of the world, so that in your embrace we may find blessing, peace, and the fullness of our inheritance as your daughters and sons.

Grant that all people may hear together the song of joy, and find their homes in the garden of justice and hope, that we may experience the fullness of life, which is your will for all, in the coming of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.

Confession

Loving Father all the fancy words in the world, expressed in eloquent prose, decorated with emotion, spoken with conviction, cannot compete with a heartfelt 'sorry' when all other words fail.

There are times when we are all too aware of our limitations, conscious of sin and the distance it creates between us.

Sometimes 'sorry' is all the heart can bear to say aloud. It is only you who can read and understand the language of our hearts. Only you who can translate our 'sorry' into the prayer we would have prayed if we had the words within us.

Then you forgive, and having forgiven, surround us in an embrace of love, drawing us close to your heart as it was always meant to be.

Thank you, Loving Father. Transform us, through your Spirit, and empower us to serve you this day and all days.

Amen. Thanks be to God.

OFFERTORY PRAYER

Help us to be generous givers, dear Lord, both of our money and our lives, that we might make a difference in this place. We ask this through your son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, whose birth we celebrate this Christmastide and who gave all that he was that we might know life in all its fullness. **Amen.**

READING: Isaiah 9:2, 6-7

The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God



REFLECTION: CAN WE LIVE WITH REALITY? (4) Prince of Peace in a world in crisis – part 1

In March 1863, during the American Civil War, a young man of 18 named Charley Appleton sneaked away from his home and went off to fight for the Union army against the Confederates – without his father’s knowledge or permission. After months of camp fever, Charley finally saw battle and was seriously wounded. News of his son’s wound came to the father on Christmas Eve and, being a poet, he sat down the next day and expressed his anguish in verse. Charley’s full name was Charles Appleton Longfellow and his father was Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, the most popular American poet of his day. We will be able to hear the poem he wrote on that bleak Christmas morning, for later it was set to music as the popular carol, ‘I heard the bells on Christmas Day’, which we will sing shortly.

Longfellow’s despair – for he had been told his son might not survive his wounds – comes through most strongly in the second verse:

*And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.*

But his despair didn’t last long. Despite living in a country in crisis, as civil war raged around him, Longfellow was an avowed Christian and he quickly rallied, expressing in the very next verse his deep belief that God was in charge, ensuring that good would triumph over evil and that peace would prevail:

*Then rang the bells more loud and deep
God is not dead, nor does he sleep.
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.*

At the birth of Christ, the angels proclaimed peace on earth, goodwill to men. But, when it comes to Peace, the world sends mixed messages. We only need to turn on the TV or look at a newspaper or online to see vividly that there is very little ‘Peace on Earth.’ In fact, statisticians tell us that since the beginning of recorded history:

- The entire world has been at peace less than 8% of the time!
- Out of 3,530 years of recorded history, only 286 years have seen peace.

- In the same timespans, more than 8,000 peace treaties have been made -- and broken.

Two thousand years ago, Jesus came to earth as the Prince of Peace. But this same Prince of Peace spoke these words in Matthew 10:34 (NIV): "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword." So how do we reconcile this apparent contradiction? Maybe it would help to begin with a definition of peace.

We usually associate peace with the absence of conflict. It is almost as if we define Peace by what it is not -- war. If there is no war there is peace. However, the word translated peace in the Old Testament is so much more than that. Shalom is indeed used to describe the cessation of hostilities, but the word also pictures health and wholeness. It denotes harmony and completeness. To have Shalom is much more than a quiet life without conflict. Biblical peace requires Justice. There is an unbreakable connection in scripture between PEACE and JUSTICE. As the Prince of Peace, Jesus personifies this connection. What we see in Jesus is the perfect example of a peaceful warrior.

Does that sound like another contradiction? Perhaps it does – we’ll find out more in the second part of this reflection after our next song which, as I said earlier, is Longfellow’s poem set to music.

I HEARD THE BELLS ON CHRISTMAS DAY

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F756Mjxxrvc>

**I heard the bells on Christmas day
Their old familiar carols play
And mild and sweet their songs repeat
Of peace on earth good will to men**

**And the bells are ringing
Like a choir they're singing
In my heart I hear them
Peace on earth, good will to men**

**And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men**

But the bells are ringing
Like a choir singing
Does anybody hear them?
Peace on earth, good will to men

Then rang the bells more loud and deep
God is not dead, nor doth he sleep
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men

Then ringing singing on its way
The world revolved from night to day
A voice, a chime, a chant sublime
Of peace on earth, good will to men

And the bells they're ringing
Like a choir they're singing

And with our hearts we'll hear them
Peace on earth, good will to men
Do you hear the bells they're ringing?
The life the angels singing
Open up your heart and hear them
Peace on earth, good will to men
Peace on earth, peace on earth
Peace on earth, good will to men

REFLECTION: CAN WE LIVE WITH REALITY? (4) Prince of Peace in a world in crisis – part 2

So ... Jesus the Peaceful Warrior? What's that all about?

Let's look at how Isaiah describes Jesus in chapter 42:1 (GNB): *'Here is my servant, whom I strengthen — the one I have chosen, with whom I am pleased. I have filled him with my Spirit, and he will bring justice to every nation. He will not shout or raise his voice or make loud speeches in the streets.'*

Do you see the tension here? Isaiah says 'he will bring justice' in one breath, and in the next, 'he will not shout or raise his voice.' Amazingly, Jesus was able to proclaim the message boldly, but at the same time he was not itching for a fight. Trouble came -- because many people opposed his message -- but Jesus was not looking for trouble.

Matthew quoted this prophecy from Isaiah right after Jesus performed a miracle that stirred up plenty of trouble. In Matthew chapter 12, verses 9-14 (NIV), we read that Jesus was in the

synagogue on the Sabbath when a man with a withered hand approached him. The Pharisees tried to draw Jesus into a fight by asking: 'Is it lawful to heal someone on the Sabbath?'

Now Jesus could easily have blasted them -- I know I would have done. He could have said, 'You people want me to leave this man in his misery, don't you -- because that's just the kind of scoundrels you are.'

But instead, Jesus reasoned with them, saying in effect, 'Look, I'm only doing what is right. I'm sure any one of you would pull a sheep out of a well on the Sabbath, wouldn't you? And isn't a person more important than a sheep?'

But the Pharisees still became angry when he healed the man, so angry in fact that they began to make plans to kill him. Jesus hadn't provoked them intentionally ... but he would never compromise just to keep the peace.

The nonconformist minister Matthew Henry, whose commentary on the Old and New Testaments was greatly valued by the 18th century evangelical preachers, including John Wesley, once said this: *'Peace is such a precious jewel that I would give up anything for it ... anything, that is, except truth.'*

As the Peaceful Warrior, Jesus boldly proclaimed the truth, but he always spoke the truth with love. So what does that say to us? Like Jesus, we should be bold in declaring God's truth. We should not be naïve about the fact that we live in a world of Spiritual Warfare. But we need to keep in mind that the goal of Spiritual Warfare is Peace. We know that Jesus never tried to alienate the precious souls for whom he died. He gave us the model of the Peaceful Warrior.

Let's remind ourselves again: Isaiah said of Jesus, *'He will not shout or raise his voice or make loud speeches in the streets.'* This is a Warrior who brings Peace. Jesus never backed down from a battle, but he never stirred up trouble where it could be avoided.

Jesus might also be described as a Gentle Conqueror. Let's look at the description of the Gentle Conqueror in Isaiah 42:3-4 (ERV): *'He will not break even a crushed reed. He will not put out even the weakest flame. He will bring true justice. He will not grow weak or give up until he has*

brought justice to the world. And people in faraway places will hope to receive his teachings.'

Here is the picture of a Gentle Conqueror who will not mistreat even a bruised reed. People in Isaiah's day knew exactly what he was talking about, but this requires a bit of explanation for us. Reeds were used for various purposes -- including for instance making flutes -- but they weren't useful if they were damaged in any way. Typically, a bruised reed would be broken in pieces and cast aside.

But the prophecy says the Messiah is so gentle, he would not break even the seemingly useless reed. It also says he will not put out even the weakest flame. Again some explanation is required. When a lamp ran low on oil, the wick would start to smoulder. The easiest way to deal with that was to simply snuff it out. Then you could add some oil and relight it. But the prophecy lets us know that the coming Messiah would be so gentle that he would not snuff out the flickering wick. Instead, he would take extra care to add the oil slowly. All the while he would continue to protect the weak flame until it burned brightly again.

These word pictures of the bruised reed and the smouldering wick show an amazingly Gentle Conqueror who gives care to those who are weak and wounded. The model of the Gentle Conqueror is greatly needed in our world today. There is a lot of loose talk about heroes in so many different spheres nowadays but in my view a true hero is a Gentle Conqueror who shows both power and compassion and inspires others to liberate rather than dominate. And the one who perfectly meets that standard is Jesus Christ: He is the Peaceful Warrior, the Gentle Conqueror, and the Prince of Peace.

Isaiah's prophecy concludes (Chapter 42, verse 4 ERV), *'He will bring true justice. He will not grow weak or give up until he has brought justice to the world.'* What we see here is a Biblical portrait of an Unwavering Commander, a Mighty Warrior, an Invincible Conqueror, who is at the same time the Prince of Peace. Jesus Christ has all the power of the Universe – and more. And yet, this Gentle Conqueror takes time to care for the wounded and the broken and for those whose flame is barely flickering. Jesus is the Gentle Saviour,

humble and caring. But make no mistake about it: He is also the Invincible Conqueror. He will never compromise with evil, but he will conquer evil with good.

This was the hope that motivated Henry Wadsworth Longfellow when, despite the worry of a badly-wounded son and his grief at losing his beloved wife Frances in a terrible accident two years earlier, he wrote these words of faith and hope:

*Then pealed the bells more loud and deep;
"God is not dead, nor doth he sleep;
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail,
With Peace on Earth, Goodwill to Men."*

In John 16:33 (NET), Jesus said, *'I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace. In the world you have trouble and suffering, but take courage—I have conquered the world.'*

Make no mistake: Jesus Christ is the Prince of Peace. And He will prevail.

Let us pray:

God of mercy, help us to listen to your voice, a voice that speaks of peace to all people. Let the sound resonate within us, until a whisper becomes a shout which cannot be ignored. Move us with your love, so that our actions echo your peace, and we may bring tidings of comfort and joy to those touched by conflict. Fill us with your hope, Lord, and quieten the fear and hatred which divides us, as we seek to build a future together, of true and lasting peace.

We ask this through Jesus Christ, our Lord, our Saviour, and our Prince of Peace, **Amen**.

IT CAME UPON THE MIDNIGHT CLEAR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkjH7sowY4U>

**It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to men,
from heaven's all-gracious King."
The world in solemn stillness lay,
to hear the angels sing.**

**Still through the cloven skies they come
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats**



**o'er all the weary world;
above its sad and lowly plains,
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.**

**And ye, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now! for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road,
and hear the angels sing!**

**For lo! the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendours fling,
and the whole world send back the song
which now the angels sing.**

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION

In peace let us pray to the Lord.

Father, at this holy time, your Son our Saviour was born in human flesh. Renew your Church as the Body of Christ.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, there was no room for your Son at the inn. Protect with your love those who have no home and all who live in poverty.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, Mary, in the pain of labour, brought your Son to birth. Hold in your hand all that are in pain or distress.

Holy God. **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, our Christ came as a light shining in the darkness. Bring comfort to all who suffer in the sadness of our world.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, the angels sang, 'Peace to God's people on earth.' Strengthen those who work for peace and justice in the world.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, shepherds in the field heard good tidings of joy. Give us grace to preach the gospel of Christ's redemption.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, strangers found the Holy Family and saw the baby lying in the manger.

Bless our homes and all whom we love.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, heaven is come down to earth, and earth is raised to heaven. Hold in your hand all those who have passed through death in the hope of your coming kingdom.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

At this holy time, Christians the world over celebrate Christ's birth. Open our hearts that he may be born in us today.

Holy God, **hear our prayer.**

Father, at this holy time angels and shepherds worshipped at the manger throne. Receive the worship we offer in fellowship with Mary, Joseph and the saints, through him who is your Word made flesh, our Saviour Jesus Christ.

Amen

THE LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread.

Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours now and for ever. Amen.

JOY TO THE WORLD

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kqi8aphPtNQ>

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!

Let earth receive her King;

Let every heart prepare Him room

And heaven and nature sing

And heaven and nature sing

And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing

Joy to the world, the Saviour reigns!

Let men their songs employ;

While fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains

Repeat the sounding joy

Repeat the sounding joy

Repeat, repeat, the sounding joy

He rules the world with truth and grace

And makes the nations prove

The glories of His righteousness

**And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders, wonders, of His love**

**Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven and nature sing
And heaven, and heaven, and nature sing**

**He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love
And wonders of His love
And wonders, wonders, of His love**

CLOSING PRAYER AND BLESSING

Gracious Father, as we leave this church this morning help us to continue walking in the peace that surpasses all understanding. Help us to focus on you and your word and not the things of this world that cause us to be depressed and anxious. As we go back to our homes, help us to continue resting in you. Help us to refrain from things that will steal our peace and joy. In Jesus' name, we pray.

Amen.

May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be with us all, all those we love, all those we care for, and all those we pray for, this Christmas season and ever more.

Amen

**Go in peace to love and serve the Lord.
In the name of Christ. Amen.**