

## He is our Peace

*Ephesians 2:1-22. St Mark's Camberwell 6pm Service. 29/8/10. Mark Hood.*

Of course we yearn for peace. With so much division, deception, disappointment and disintegration in our close friendships and in the wider world around us, of course we yearn for peace:

for an end to all the troubles  
and for the beginning of fully reconciled friendships  
and a fully reconciled planet.

It's the message we hear prominently every Christmas. The Pope urges and prays for peace. The Queen wishes peace to all. Muslim leaders like Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's made a Christmas speech recently: *"the worship of God, for love and brotherhood, for the establishment of justice and for love in human society"*. It's the same message you get in your family Christmas Cards – 'peace on earth, goodwill to all men'.

We want peace in the school yard, where there is no bullying or facebook harassment. We want peace in our love relationships, and not an endless string of disappointments from people that we invested trust in, that have gone and blown our trust. We want peace between different groups in our wider world: between different ethnicities and so on. We want peace between nations, such as Israel and Palestine

So how will we find it?

Typically we look for peace through compromise. OK. You give up a bit, I'll give up a bit, and together we'll reach a conclusion that we can live with. But with compromise, there's still resentment. It's not peace. Or we try to find peace through payment or punishment.

"he killed my son when he was drunk driving. I hope he rots in jail" (But notice how even punishment never brings about peace. Justice is important, but lots of the time fines or imprisonment just doesn't establish peace).

When we come to Ephesians 2, we're coming to the heart of God's message about how to find peace, lasting, full, deep, reconciling, fulfilling peace. And we find that peace has a vertical dimension: peace with God; as well as a horizontal dimension: peace with each other. And it's no surprise to you to find that Jesus death on the cross is at the centre of finding peace - v13-14 you who were enemies have been brought near by the blood of Christ, for, v14 'He is our peace'

And in chapter 2, this point that Christ is our life and our peace is made strongly in the two halves of the chapter, by a three-part structure, which is repeated.

**where you've come from**  
**how you found / find peace**  
**where peace leads to.**

Tonight, we'll cover the first half vv1-10 briefly, because we've preached this passage a couple of times recently, so that we can dig a bit deeper in the second half.

***Ephesians 2:1-10. Where you've come from***  
***Peace with God: by Grace v1-10***

and it begins, *"You were dead through your sins in which you once lived"*

On my Dad's farm one of the cows, thinking it could drink from the puddle in the middle of a dam, waded out and got hopelessly stuck in the mud. Have you ever been stuck in a quagmire with your gumboots? This cow, all 500kgs, was seriously stuck. Seriously because, every time the cow struggled to get free, it only succeeded in sinking down further. Stupid cow! On its own to be sure, it was as good as dead. It took Dad to come in with a front end loader, put the forks under cow, and rescue it from starving, drowning and dying in the mud.

**Where you've come from**

When Paul says, 'you were dead' a really stark truth for us to accept, he means we were the living dead. Spiritually dead towards God. Unable to bring present ourselves before him. Though our pulse was beating, our heart was dead

towards the living God because of our trespasses and sins, which refer to our countless acts of failing to live as God demands, rejecting the good life God intended.

Our whole life reflected this condition of being the living dead,

**following the times:** 'the course of this world' which means feeding on and following the mainstream with its smut, lies, dirt, and depravity: of the kind we have in 'Two and a half men': beamed into our lounge rooms each night for family viewing.

**following the tempter,** here Satan is described as 'the ruler of the power of the air, at work amongst the disobedient'. Which is not saying 'all non-Christians' are demonically possessed, but simply that influences us with his lies, schemes and devices, aimed at destroying faith in Christ.

**following our own temperaments** 'the passions of our flesh, the desires of flesh and senses' the cravings of our unquenchable appetites for food, fun, pleasure and more.

The destination of the living dead is the wrath and condemnation of God. Paul says just this in v3: 'you were by nature children of wrath' this was your way of life, this was your destination in life. You were living under the condemnation of God and heading towards the same judgement for eternity.

This is blunt and alarming news that Paul describes. Blunt in the sense it's a wakeup call, and alarming because v3 says this is the predicament of 'everyone' who is away from Christ, who lives apart from Christ. It's so blunt and alarming that many write it off as 'primitive'. *"This is primitive Christianity, we enlightened folks know better today"*. How do you respond to this?

Paul thinks rather than primitive, this message of God's wrath against sinners is in fact very contemporary. Contemporary because that is what God in Christ came to save us *from* 'saved *from* the wrath of God.'

Which is why v4 comes as such a strong turning point. We were under wrath... BUT GOD, God who is rich in mercy... does not treat us according to the wrath we deserve. What does he do? v5 God makes us alive with Christ. He lifts us up out of the mud, he brings us from death to life, just as he did with Christ.

And his kindness goes on, for in v6 he raises us up to be with Christ so that our eternal future is secured, nothing can take it from us, and he seats us with Christ in the heavenlies, thus calling us worthy, and honourable, and significant, and loved, dearly loved, besides much more.

God has given us life, life to the full, peace itself in full measure, because peace begins with right relationship with God in the vertical dimension. He does all this because of his grace. It's a present, a gift, available to all, to be received by trusting Him, trusting that what he here promises he will surely give.

Do you trust him?

Have you received the gift?

If vv4-6 speak from God's perspective, vv8-10 do a recap from our perspective. And we see here the main idea that we were not saved by our good works. On the contrary nothing we did gave us God's favour, he just showed us his favour because of his love. We're not saved by our good works, but we are saved TO DO good works.

So it's right for us to ask each Christian: Is your life a model of good works? Do other people see your good works and praise God? Or are you like all the rest? Only 'doing good' when it suits you. We have saved by grace, now we live to do good works, pointing all the time away from ourselves towards God.

Peace in all its fullness is first peace in the vertical dimension, peace that comes from God by his grace, as a gift.

Second, as we now move to vv11-22, we see this peace from God plays out in relationships in the horizontal direction.

I don't watch lots of telly, but the other night, I happened to see the story there about 29 y.old Paul Howes who today is the president of the Australian workers union, the most powerful union in the land. In his youth, here was a guy who had a rough dad, who dropped out of school and became a socialist. His thinking being, that if just shared all our wealth and goods, the world would be happier, there would be peace. But then he travelled to Cuba, to see

how socialism operated there, and found it's just one set of people exercising power over another set of people, and sometimes in far more brutal ways compared with our democracy here. So he came back, got involved in the unions and was one of the so called 'faceless men' behind the ousting of Kevin Rudd. Socialism doesn't create peace.

What does? The cross. It's the cross of Christ that creates peace – peace with God, turning aside God's wrath, and peace with people, removing the hostility between them.

Let's see this from the text. Paul tells the Ephesians Christians and us that we should always remember that we did not deserve God's grace. Because for a long time, God only worked through the children of Israel, the children of the promises. As Gentiles Christians, the Ephesians and us, were hopelessly cut off.

This is emphasised in five ways:

- without Christ – a Messiah
- aliens from the bountiful provisions of Israel
- strangers to God's promise of peace
- no hope
- without God

There is nothing about your heritage which caused you to be loved by God. Nothing. In fact there were only reasons for you not to be loved by God, as you lived according to your own ways, in opposition to your creator.

Once more we find this critical turning point in the text - *"But now in Christ Jesus..."*

Once more God in Christ stepped in for our benefit. This time, the reason why we've been extended grace is made clear. God acted in Christ through the cross:

<sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup>For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

How is it that God so works his peace in people that peace is created through people? He broke down the hostility through his flesh, which means that when Jesus died and rose again he created one new humanity. The division between Jew and Gentile is broken down because it's no longer the working of the law that makes people holy before God, it's now the believing in Christ that makes people holy. Which means it's no longer: 'I'm better than you because I'm this or that' rather 'none of us is better than the other. All of us have been blessed to receive God's grace.'

He is our peace.

Now let's think this through a bit more. What is the source of conflict between you and your friends? Is it betrayal, one friend against another? Is it indifference? Your friend thinks you're boring and is more interested in others? What causes couples married and not married to break up? A hundred different reasons... but is it dashed expectations, where the spouse expected one thing, but got another? Is it an argument that never got resolved but continued to fester? There are heaps of reasons why relationships break down. I haven't mentioned shame, suspicion, poor communication and more.

How in these situations: is this idea that Christ is our peace, relevant?

Just this:

in Christ Jesus you have unfailing, unconditional love.

in Christ you have full reliability, trustworthiness

in Christ you have a Saviour who not only counts you as friend, but calls you brother / sister, and gives you a name, an honour in God's presence.

The point is this:

As believers you possess all that you need and more from God for a life of full peace, full accord, full reconciliation

and having all of this from God means that it just comes naturally that you would extend this to those around you.

So there's no longer a reason to hold a grudge. There's sadness at past hurts, yes, but never bitterness. There's regret that things didn't go better than they did, yes, but never revenge. There's deep grief at losing loved ones, but life is not a black hole of misery. A joyous future awaits.

In Christ we have found peace with God and so we now live, having received this gift, by offering the same peace to all.

But you reply: "We don't see this peace - you say is available - everywhere" And that's true. Which is why Christ comes *preaching* peace v17. "*So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to you who were near*" This peace is preached every time God's word is read and applied

Tonight, if you have not tasted the grace of God, Let me plead with you not to walk away from these gracious terms of peace. Look where it leads to:

No longer strangers / aliens, but citizens of heaven. Members of the family / the household of God, all built on the 'bedrock of historic Christianity' with Christ as the cornerstone.

Because of God giving us his peace we are now the family of God, together with every church around the world.

So let's live like this: a family of God here at St Mark's, where we know each other, are involved with each other and take steps to engage with each other, beyond our normal cliques. I learned the other day that 2 of us (both been here more than a year) have barely spoken. This is not family living. Tonight at supper; talk to someone you don't know. Next week at Pizza, sit with someone you've never sat with before. I dare you.

Christ Jesus is our peace. He has made peace with God on our behalf, so that it is not only our present reality, but the very thing we can work to achieve – by his power – with others. Brother / Sister, live in the peace Christ brings.