

Acts 16: 9-15

John 14.23-29

Cathedral 25th May 2025

*'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.
I do not give to you as the world gives.'*

John 14: 27

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In the name of God, Creator, Redeemer and
Sustainer.

The Hebrew Scholar Josephus in the first
century AD writes:

"When the triumphal ceremonies were over, as
the Roman empire was now firmly established,
Vespasian made up his mind to build a temple of
Peace. ... he ... adorned it with paintings and
statues ... that men had hitherto travelled over
the whole world to see ...

There too he laid up the golden vessels from the
Temple of the Jews, for he prided himself on
them...."

Josephus, *The Jewish War* (VII.5.7)

At the heart of this great Temple of Peace is the
loot from the spoils of War from the known world

with goods from the Temple having pride of
place.

Another Historian Tacitus in the first century
attributes the following remark to a British
chieftain who witnessed the establishment of
the 'Pax Romana' after the legions invaded the
British Isles:

*'They have made a desolation and they call it
peace'.*

So when Jesus says: '*Peace*', how different is his
meaning?

The Hebrew word for peace as we know is
Shalom and the word envisages a society in
which there is completeness, wholeness, unity
and fullness.

The Greek word used in the New Testament is
eirene which had a more limited meaning
equating more to the idea of a truce between
warring factions.

So given the Hebrew understanding and the Greek understanding what is the Christian understanding?

There are perhaps three time-dimensions to the Christian understanding of peace:

- past (something already established by God),
- present an experience to be lived
- and future a hope to be fully realised.

Looking at the past peace is about what God has already done. The Eden story is about being in peace and harmony with God and nature, which through 'The Fall' gets disturbed by evil, so we speak of Jesus Christ coming in history as the new Adam to make us once again at peace with God. The Ascension, which we celebrate this coming week, our humanity is again reconciled and taken into God.

In terms of the present - The priest's greeting at the Eucharist: *'The peace of the Lord be always with you'*, and the response *'and also with you'* is not meant to be a liturgical nicety. It is the peace of Christ we offer, being at peace with

ourselves and our world whatever is thrown at us.

It is confidence of living as a disciple of Christ, that same Christ who post-Easter greets the disciples gathered behind locked doors 'for fear of the Jews' (John 20.19) with the phrase 'Peace be with you.'

Future

In terms of the future - the Christian peace has a dimension that belongs to the end of time (in Greek the word eschaton is used). Prophets like Isaiah envisaged and looked forward to a complete transformation of nature and of humanity in passages like Isaiah 11.(6-9):

*'The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,*

...

'They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain ...'

This image is actually portrayed in one of the Nicholson icons in the apse on the left-hand side of the High Altar.

The establishment of peace in the full sense will coincide with the realisation of the Messianic Kingdom at the end of time. After all one of the titles of the Messiah is 'Prince of Peace' (Isaiah 9.6).

So as the Christian understanding of 'Peace' has these three time-dimensions; it also incorporates the fullness of the Hebrew meaning of Shalom, so I want to explore six characteristics of the word.

1. First 'Shalom' as completeness and wholeness and a sense of unity, which we have already seen in passages like Isaiah with the wolf and the lamb living together in harmony. This Shalom needs to be experienced at every level - at the level of an individual, the family, a community, within and between nations, between humanity and the environment. It demands a sense of being at one with the world and having a hope and a confidence in the underlying reality of a God who sustains all creation in existence. It embraces everything from the way we treat our neighbour to the way we deal with our rubbish!

2. It is about an end to war. Isaiah (2.4) speaks of the hope that the tools of war will be converted into ploughshares and pruning hooks. We have the symbol of the Menorah which has this text from Isaiah on its base - in English, Manx and Hebrew and which has been made of spent shells used in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. It stands as a reminder to us of the eternal peace we strive for.

3. Peace also requires justice. The Old Testament Prophets were constantly demanding justice. Jeremiah (6.13f) railed against arrogance amongst his own people:

'...all high and low are out for ill-gotten gain; prophets and priest are frauds, [they say], 'all is well.' [or is at peace] All well? Nothing is well!'...

Time and time again the prophets condemned a false peace and security that rests on oppression. President Trump may want peace between Russia and the Ukraine, but to get it he uses his economic muscle to demand minerals in return for supporting Ukraine.

Likewise Hamas will not disappear no matter what Israel throws at it because Israel's oppression creates recruits. Nothing can justify Israel's act of genocide – and I ask myself have they learnt nothing from their own history of being oppressed!

4. Peace also needs harmony. The early Christian Church brought about what hitherto had been seen to be an impossibility harmonising into one community Jews and Gentiles. The author of Ephesians puts it this way (2.14f)

'Jesus himself is our peace. Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the enmity which stood like a dividing wall between them.'

Paul sees all sorts of walls coming down: between men and women, slave and free etc. Yet we continue to build walls – physical walls, as in the new higher stronger Berlin-style wall stretching across Palestine which is 8 metres high. (The Berlin Wall was 3.5 metres high)

or Trump's wall building on the southern U.S. border. We are not immune from it in the UK/IOM either with the xenophobia associated with migrants often fleeing war or the effects of climate change trying to cross the English Channel. Of course some of the walls we build are of an invisible kind manifest in prejudice and bigotry.

5. Peace also has the quality of reconciliation. – something that doesn't come cheap. *'To make at one those separated'* is the meaning of the word atonement, and that is precisely what Jesus did by his sacrificial death on the cross and this work needs to be continued by his disciples - us.
6. The Christian notion of peace has a dynamic element. If peace is finally wholeness and justice then there can be no rest until it is available to all. Peace therefore demands a striving for a better order to allow a fully human existence for all and a sense of living sustainably with creation as a whole.

Christian peace therefore demands a sacrificial striving. And since sacrificial reconciliation runs so counter to the selfishness and aggression of fallen humanity, peace needs the grace of the Holy Spirit to have any real content.

Our world longs for peace, but it wants it on the cheap. So when we offer one another a sign of peace, let us remember what we are asking for. So I end as I began with the words of Jesus:

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I do not give to you as the world gives.'*

John 14: 27

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