

## THINKING OF PEACE with Eldon Godfrey

This morning, I wish to speak to you about PEACE. What do we think when we hear the word? Wikipedia suggests that “Peace is a concept of societal friendship and harmony” and goes on to add... “in the absence of hostility and violence.” In a social sense, peace is commonly used to mean a lack of conflict such as war and freedom from fear of violence between individuals or heterogeneous groups. Webster suggests the condition that exists when nations or other groups are not fighting - friendly relations between individuals, untroubled by disputes.

I like this second expression as being a positive statement about PEACE. Historically, as well as today, wars were placed in the nature of religious differences. Perhaps most commonly considered may be the Crusades. These were a series of religious wars sanctioned by the Latin Church in the medieval period. The most commonly known Crusades were the campaigns in the Eastern Mediterranean aimed at recovering the Holy Land from Muslim rule, but the term “Crusades” is also applied to other church-sanctioned campaigns. These were fought for a variety of reasons including the suppression of paganism and heresy, the resolution of conflict among rival groups or for political and territorial advantage. At the time of the early Crusades, the word did not exist, only becoming the leading descriptive term around 1760.

Politicians speak of peace yet it seems that war at one level or another is in the news daily. Religions speak of peace yet it seems violent acts are attributed to religious differences and are generalized as ‘hate crimes.’ So — if we all want peace, why is peace such an elusive characteristic of human behaviour?

Looking briefly, a darker side of human behaviour can be found in the word Peace:

P = people / power,

E = Envy - despite the 10th commandment that says, “Thou shall not covet anything that is thy neighbours.”

A = Avarice - extreme greed for wealth or material gain,

C = Corruption - just as conflicts are present daily in the news so it is that we read daily of corruption and

E = Enmity - derived from an anglo-french word meaning enemy - suggests true hatred, either overt or concealed. Hostility implies strong, open enmity that shows itself in attacks or aggression.

A brighter side of human behaviour can also be found in the word Peace:

P = People - the Foundation / Pillars of Peace,

E = Equality / Environment - everything that is around us. It can be living or non-living. It includes physical, chemical and other natural forces. Living things live in the environment. They constantly interact with it and adapt themselves to conditions in their environment. Equality is the state of being equal, especially in status, rights and opportunities.

A = Advancement Opportunity - to grow and advance through education. It is therefore essential that educational opportunities be made available to all. (On March 16, 2018,

the Korea Foundation for the Advancement of Science and Creativity conducted the workshop, "Donation for Education," bringing together representatives of government, private enterprise, universities and schools and individuals with the most positive of themes being **"All Children are our children."**)

C = Cultures / Compassion - Meriam-Webster defines culture as the customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group; also the characteristic features of every day. Compassion is defined as the recognition of the suffering of others, then taking action to help. The Bible defines the meaning of compassion in several ways. We are to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves... defend the rights of the poor and needy. (Proverbs 31:8-9 NIV)

E = Economy / Endearment - the wealth and resources of a country or region, especially in terms of the production and consumption of goods and services. Equality requires careful management of available resources. The term endearment is a word or phrase used to address or describe a person for which the speaker feels love or affection.

Clearly, the common denominator, at the top of the list is PEOPLE - it is the behaviour or people that defines conditions of Peace. On the negative side, we see anger fuelled by envy, avarice, greed and/or corruption or the need/desire for an individual and then a like-minded group to exercise power. On the positive side, we see cooperative relations that lead to "win/win" outcomes.

What should be a simple starting point is to realize and truly accept that we all share space on this planet Earth and share the bounties of the Earth. The sharing of physical space and resources should extend to the sharing and respect for beliefs or faiths.

Consider Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Christianity. In her reflection on May 19, 2019, Rev. Peggy stated, "I commend all of us for our faith and understanding that as Christians, while we affirm the teaching of Jesus, we are aware of and open to the traditions of other faiths."

**Judaism:** The Hebrew word for peace is SHALOM which is derived from one of the names for God.

**Islam:** is derived from the root word 'salam' which means "peace." Muslims are followers of Islam, in which God (romanized Allah) is the absolute one. God is neither a material nor spiritual being. According to the Quran, "No vision can grasp him, but His Vision is over all **vision; He is above all comprehension, yet is acquainted with all things..**"

**Buddhism:** Does a Buddhist believe in God? 'Yes' is probably the best answer. However, even though most of the world's Buddhists decide the name of Buddha, Buddha is not a deity or supreme being in the same way that the Christian God is.... For Buddhists, what and how you practise is more fundamental than what you believe.

**Hinduism:** Hindu texts contain the following passages: "May there be peace in the heavens, peace in the atmosphere, peace on earth .... May everything in the universe be at peace. May I experience that peace within my own heart." (Yajur Vega 36:17). "A

superior does not render evil for evil.” (Valmiki, Ramahayana) - How similar this statement is to that found in Romans 12:17 - 21 - “Do not repay anyone evil for evil.”

**Christianity:** The strongly professed belief in God, that God’s only son, Jesus Christ, was sent to earth to lead the way for our redemption and life everlasting.

And so, dear friends, I repeat my earlier question: “Why is peace such an elusive characteristic of human behaviour?” Have you ever asked yourself, “Why am I a Christian?” May I boldly suggest that unless you have done some serious study in adult life and reached a considered conclusion, it is rather a function of the beliefs of your parents and the geography of your birth, meaning that if your parents were Arabian and you were born and raised in an Arabian country, there is a strong likelihood you would be Muslim. But being children of Anglo-Saxon / European / American parents, born and raised in a ‘western nation’ with parents being the dominant factor, there is a strong likelihood that you were raised in a Christian environment.

This morning, we have been privileged to experience the Sacrament of Baptism. As a congregation, we have been given the privilege of being the welcoming committee to the church family - to the family of St. David’s. We must never forget the responsibility we accepted. We all have personal thoughts at such times. Whenever I attend a baptism, I think about the need to provide a healthy mental environment for the candidate — so important for a young child.

At the moment, our world is beset by the hideous illness of ‘racism,’ an illness that is created by evil. Recalling the Pacific theatre of World War II and the post-war days of 1949, the theatrical genre of Rodgers and Hammerstein gave us the musical presentation of ‘South Pacific’ in which Hammerstein captured the embryo of racism when he wrote, “You’ve got to be taught before it’s too late — before you are 6 or 7 or 8 — to hate all the people your relatives hate — you’ve got to be carefully taught.”

The rainbow, in its beauty, follows the storm — any storm. we, the family of St. David’s, must uphold our responsibility to Emma by ensuring that our door is always open — open to all — that the rainbow at our front door is a statement of peace and equality for all.

the 14th Dalai Lama, Spiritual leader of Tibet, has reminded us: “Love and compassion are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive.

If every person adopted the mindset that love, compassion and kindness were superpowers and set about using them daily, imagine how different the world would be.”

He also reminds us: “People take different roads seeking fulfilment and happiness. Just because they’re not on your road doesn’t mean they’ve gotten lost. Do not preach to others. Share your heart, but never judge another for their beliefs.”

Archbishop Desmond Tutu:

“God’s love is too great to be confined to any one side of a conflict or to any one religion.” He also warns us, “If you are neutral in situations injustice, you have chosen

the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its food on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

Where are we on our search for peace and our understanding of peace?

### **There Will Be Peace (David Roberts)**

“There will be peace:  
when attitudes change;  
when self-interest is seen as part of common interest;  
when old wrongs, old scores, old mistakes  
are deleted from the account;  
when the aim becomes co-operation and mutual benefit  
rather than revenge or seizing maximum personal or group gain;  
when justice and equality before the law  
become the basis of government;  
when basic freedoms exist;  
when leaders – political, religious, educational – and the police and media  
wholeheartedly embrace the concepts of justice, equality, freedom, tolerance, and  
reconciliation as a basis for renewal;  
when parents teach their children new ways to think about people.  
There will be peace:  
when enemies become fellow human beings.”

The Christmas story of the birth of Jesus focuses for a moment upon the shepherd keeping watch over their flocks by night when an angel appeared and as Luke tells us from Luke 2: 13-14: *And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth, peace, good will toward men.*

And as we sing: “Hark the Herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King. Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled,” we remain aware that peace was not on earth at the time of Caesar Augustus who set out to tax the world but we are told and reminded that the Prince of Peace will show the way if we let him into our lives and hearts.

From Matthew 5:9, when referring to the Sermon on the Mount in terms of the Beatitudes, it states, “Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.”

As children of God, may we live as Christ and work towards justice and peace. And, so I leave you with the question, “Are we individually and collectively up to the challenge of being Peacemakers?”