

Mark 1:1-8 John the Baptist Prepares the Way

1 The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. ^[a]

² As it is written in Isaiah the prophet, ^[b]

“Behold, I send my messenger before your face,
who will prepare your way,

³ the voice of one crying in the wilderness:

‘Prepare ^[c] the way of the Lord,
make his paths straight.’”

⁴ John appeared, baptizing in the wilderness and proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. ⁵ And all the country of Judea and all Jerusalem were going out to him and were being baptized by him in the river Jordan, confessing their sins. ⁶ Now John was clothed with camel's hair and wore a leather belt around his waist and ate locusts and wild honey.

⁷ And he preached, saying, “After me comes he who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. ⁸ I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit.”

Here what the Spirit is saying to the church

Thanks be to God. Amen.

“I believe strongly that a person who is not happy cannot work for peace. That happiness does not need a lot of conditions. Happiness is there - only our capacity of enjoying it is in question. And by being yourself, by being in touch with the oneness of life, you become more peaceful. You know how to deal with your anger, your frustrations, your worries and only by establishing peace in yourself - then you can be helpful in contributing to peace.

The best thing a tree can do is be a real tree. The best thing a human being can do is to be a real human being. And that is the basic condition for peace. To be oneself, to be happy, to be smiling, to be kind to other people, is the strongest face of peace. That is why being peace is the best for doing peace, making peace.” -

Thich Nhat Hanh.

Zen Master, Thich Nhat Hanh, is a Vietnamese born global spiritual leader, revered for his teachings on mindfulness and peace.

In shopping malls, in our homes and in our churches we hear carols singing, *“Peace on earth goodwill to men,”* *“Peace on earth and mercy mild,”* or as we sang this morning, *“Peace is a ribbon that circles the earth, giving a promise of safety and worth.”* Peace in their day was the hope of Mary and Joseph as they awaited the birth of their son two thousand years ago. The world today is stilling longing for that peace.

A week ago, Don and I, met with the staff and residents of Hyland House just over on King George Blvd. We connected with them through Doug and Joy Watkins of this congregation. Doug served on the Board of Directors there for a number of years and we, as a congregation, have supported them through donations of underwear and socks during Advent.

Hyland House is a 35 bed shelter for people who find themselves without a home. It offers a range of personal development services to residents including Life Skills; Employment search; Accommodation search; Community integration and Budgeting.

Senior Manager, Peter Fedos, asked a staff member to give us a tour of the facilities so we met a few people for whom Hyland House is now home. For a brief moment, I found myself alone in the hallway just off from the dining room. A man, who I will call John, approached me with hand extended saying, *“Welcome to my paradise.”* John shared that he’d done the whole circuit of shelters in Surrey but *“By far,”* he says, *“Hyland House is the best!”* gesturing his approval with ‘two thumbs up!’

We spoke briefly with residents who invited us to see their modest rooms. Part of the commitment to living in community is that every resident performs a daily chore which is assigned weekly and rotated regularly so that no one gets stuck cleaning toilets all the time. No doubt, a good way of ‘keeping the peace.’

There is a sense of peace as you walk about the grounds. Hyland House offers a sense of safety and worth to those who live there. It's evident that, for the first time in a long time, people are able to find peace – peace of mind, peace of body, peace of spirit. It is this sense of 'home' that creates an atmosphere of peace.

We HAVE the power to bring about peace in our day because the truth is that peace begins at home. It's an inside job and it begins with you and me. It begins by first establishing a peaceful relationship with yourself. Like Thich Nhat Hanh said, *"by being yourself, by being in touch with the oneness of life, you become more peaceful. Only by establishing peace in yourself - then can you be helpful in contributing to peace."*

True peace is not only the absence of war or conflict, it is also the absence of poverty and disease, access to clean water and freedom from slavery. Peace is the affirmation of the full humanity of every person.

Stopping the Violence, a sister project to Hyland House, operates a women's shelter and an art therapy program for the children of domestic violence. Deara, the Senior Manager, shared that, *"It is a very difficult time for women and their families when they choose to leave violent and abusive partners at Christmas. We have a 20 bed capacity and do what we can to make the house warm and welcoming. We never know who will be in the house over Christmas."*

The peace Jesus referred to when He said, *"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you,"* is about the lasting peace that will never be achieved until the things that make for war are rooted out of the minds and hearts of humankind. The future of the world is our responsibility. We cannot sit apart in the belief that we need do nothing; neither can we shift our responsibility to some other person or organization that we consider better suited for the work than we feel ourselves to be. So, what can we do?

1. Be violence free. Don't condone or stay silent about an act of violence.
2. Speak up for those who are victims of abuse.

3. Teach our children that strength is not defined by domination.
4. Teach our children self-esteem and self-worth.
5. Create a peaceful and safe environment in our home.
6. Support or donate to a women's group or shelter.

At our leave taking, I told Peter Fedos that BNUC would pray for the work of Hyland House and Stopping the Violence. I also asked if there were more tangible ways that BNUC might lend support. I have since received their response. I've invited Kim Cathcart and the Sunday School children to help coordinate our response.

Immanuel – God with us - calls us to be in community with one another - to be our brothers and sisters keeper. Sent forth from worship each week, we go out into the world, to be the hands and feet of Christ. John the Baptist said, *"After me comes One who is mightier than I, the strap of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie. I have baptized you with water, but he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit."*

GO LIVE: (From a Distance)

Friends, we have been baptized not just with holy water but by the power of the Holy Spirit. We ARE the disciples of the Living Christ called to bring God's Light and Love into this world – in the here and now.

Hyland House provides those with no place to live a "room at the inn." Stopping the Violence offers sanctuary to those who live without peace. It takes all of us working individually and collectively to bring about that "peace on earth" we so long for. We are that voice of hope. We are that voice of peace. It's the voice of every man. Amen.