

World peace, that’s a phrase that has become a joke here of late. It reminds me of Sandra Bullock in the movie *Miss Congeniality*. She played the role of Gracie Hart, a very tom-boyish FBI agent who went undercover at the Miss United States Beauty Pageant to capture a terrorist who dubbed himself “the Citizen”. When she received her orders to go undercover Gracie expressed her disdain for beauty pageant contestants as “stuffed bikinis who want world peace”. She was making fun off how beauty contestants answer those philosophical questions like “What is the one thing you want most in life?” The standard answer is “world peace”. Oddly, later in the movie when Gracie is asked that sort of question, we are given a dramatic pause as we expect her to rant on her view of beauty contests. Yet, she bites her tongue and says, “world peace”. Is world peace only something that beauty contestants want?

Well, peace is a hard thing to imagine. Really, what do we mean when we say peace? I think we have a predisposition to think about peace as being among nations when it can also mean peace among neighbours. Moreover, in this world of talk shows, we have also been brainwashed into an understanding of peace as inner peace. Unfortunately, there is no peace with oneself unless there is peace with one’s family and friends and immediate community.

This past week we got a slap in the face of how damaging a lack of inner peace can be. My sister lives in Omaha, Nebraska and hardly a mile from her house a troubled nineteen year old, took the route of mass murder/suicide because he did not have inner peace, meaning a healthy love of self and others. His suicide note reflected that he believed himself to be simply a pain in the bum to everyone in his life, a far cry from inner peace. Although, we can contribute a good bit of his disposition to mental illness, we can not help but also chalk one up to the failure of family and friends to have the courage to get involved in the life of one of their own. I don’t say this to blame the family or the friends who took him in. I say this to expose a culture that let’s someone who is suffering so painfully to slip through the crack because mental health is a “private” matter.

Peace among neighbours is another hot topic these days particularly when houses are being built hardly ten feet away from each other. In this compact world, neighbours commence to feuding when one neighbour does something that the next-door neighbour considers to have a negative impact on their property value. It is a strange world when the first thing a person does upon moving into one of these urban sprawl subdivisions is build a fence, a fence which will require their neighbours approval and assistance if built on the property line (negotiate your way through that sometime) or you can just say “to heck with my neighbour I’m building it one inch on my side” which is exactly what your cheap neighbour was hoping you would do in the first place.

So anyway, peace – peace is such a hard thing to imagine. In order to have it on the global level we have to learn how to do it at the neighbourly level. In order to have it at the neighbourly level we have to learn how to do peace at the individual level. But, and a big one at that, the prophet Isaiah does not lead us down that road of thinking. The way he “sees” things is quite different. I use the word “sees” quite particularly. His vision, his imagination, of what things will be like when God finally says “enough” is quite different than our saying, “I’ve got

to get myself together and then get things right between my neighbours and me and then hopefully when we've all got our patchouli together, we can work on world peace. That is not what Isaiah sees for God's world that has been put to rights.

Isaiah's vision, his imagination (and please don't think imagination here in the sense of he's just imagining things. Imagination to the Old Testament Prophets was seeing the way things will be.) Isaiah's imagination is that One will come, one whom we've come to know as Jesus Christ, and in the end he will put things to right. The Spirit of God will be upon him. He will judge according to righteousness and equity giving the poor what they need. He will strike the land with the Word of the Truth and his breath shall put to death the wickedness and the wicked, those who have worked against God and his people. His imagination of that day calls us to re-imagine or world within the bounds of the first days of creation when God spoke the Word and the breath of that Word brought things into being out of nothing.

Let me step aside here and talk about God creating things out of nothing. There is a Russian physicist, Alex Vilenkin, who has written a book Many Worlds in One: the Search for Other Universes in which he describes what a good many, if not a majority of physicists, are saying about how our universe came into being. Without mentioning God, he says that that only reasonable, theoretical, and mathematical conclusion we can come to when talking about the origin of our universe – or any universe for that matter – is that it came into being out of nothing. In the midst of non-existence, no space and no time, a particle out of nowhere began to tunnel creating a false vacuum which led to the big bang and fourteen billion years later there's you and I on the planet earth, a planet that is in a Hell of a mess...and...there are an infinite number of parallel universes where we might exist or not where things might be better or worse. We who are used to thinking of a world according to Isaac Newton might think that sounds weird, but...things have changed with the discovery that atoms are made of protons, neutrons, and electrons that are made of something else.

Back to Isaiah, when this One, this Jesus Christ, returns and sets things right – imagine this – wolf will lay down with lamb, leopard with kid, lion with calf, cow and bear. Lions will eat straw instead of hunt and kill. Predation will not exist in this new creation. Moreover, Isaiah calls us to imagine a world where not the old and the wise lead, but rather a little child. This may seem odd until we remember Jesus pointing out that the FAITH of little children is what we are called to have, indeed gifted to have. Finally, Isaiah calls us to imagine a world when all peoples and things are full of knowing God.

You know, our modern world says that God cannot be known. Yet, the Bible says that God can be known as he has revealed himself in Jesus Christ as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Isaiah imagines, sees, that one day the whole earth and not just the people on it, the whole earth will know God, indeed, know God as the loving communion of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Peace on earth, world peace, if you can imagine it, looks like the loving communion that is the Trinity, loving communion not only among people but among the animals where predation rather than self-sacrificing love is the rule of life.

For Isaiah world peace does not come about by me getting myself together so that I have inner peace and then, having inner peace, I can work with my neighbours to have peace among neighbours and then, having peace among neighbours, we can work together and bring about world peace. Isaiah says that God himself will intervene and fill everything with the knowledge of himself, hich the loving community of the Trinity, and then there will be peace, peace in which there will not even be predation in the animal world. Can you imagine that?

Well, believe it or not, God has given his creation a foretaste of this peace. Paul’s letter to the Roman Christians exhibits this. Paul wrote Romans to address a problem in the Roman churches where Gentile (non-Jewish) Christians were not welcoming Jewish Christians into their midst. Boldly, Paul, who had no prior relationship with the Roman churches says, “Welcome one another, just as Christ Jesus has welcomed each of you.” Hospitality in the name of Jesus Christ is to core component of world peace.

In Biblical imagination, the seeing of the prophets and apostles of the Bible and of Jesus himself, there will not be world peace until Jesus returns and God puts all things to right. But until then, we are to offer hospitality to one another just as Jesus has welcomed each of us. Isaiah’s vision of peace has been given partial hands and feet in the communion of the church. The way we Christians welcome one another is the linchpin of world peace. We are not gathered here on Sunday morning just to sing hymns, hear a sermon, and drink some coffee. We are here to show hospitality to one another, to love one another as Jesus has loved us each.

Jesus has shown loving hospitality ti us each by giving us the gift of the Holy Spirit so that we know personally the relationship that he and God the Father share, a relationship marked by steadfast love and faithfulness. Churches are not clubs marked by philanthropic gestures. Churches are communities, communions of people who because they know the love God in Jesus Christ by the free gift of the Holy Spirit, where spouses don’t bark at one another simply because that is unproductive communication; where parents don’t bark at and demean their children; where people show steadfast love and faithfulness to one another because they have experienced this from God in Christ. Please do not think that I am insane in saying that we have a foretaste of world peace here. The more openly we model our love for one another and all peoples before the community around us, the more hospitality we show to the world around us expecting nothing in return, the more we foreshadow world peace. Being hospitable to one another and to everybody is our gift of giving the foretaste of world peace to Caledon.

Friends, the word welcome is probably the centermost word of the Christian faith. Welcome one another, indeed welcome all peoples with the same love that Christ Jesus has welcomed us each. Amen.