



## New life – a prayer for peace

– peace, the expression of new life

### On peace

Facts, figures and thoughts from Peter Heazlewood

Springtime. What a great time of year! A time to celebrate new life and warmer air. We're at that time of the year somewhere between complaining about the cold and complaining about the heat. Cold wind gives way to warmer conditions, plants and flowers we thought were dead miraculously come to life and football season makes way for cricket season. The days lengthen and we get a sense of an awakening world and new life.

So, let's talk about an awakening world. Our focus during this season, is surely the embodiment of an awakening world – a world rising in hope and promise, newness and harmony.

Our focus this season and our prayers during this time is for peace.

Surely at this time, the world is ready for peace.

So where else would one go to for an authoritative definition of the word 'peace'? Well – Google of course! Not just Google, but indeed to the first page of your search results – Wikipedia! (I'll have to get a bit more creative in my research process!!)

So, in the world according to Wikipedia:

*Peace is an occurrence of harmony characterized by lack of violence, conflict behaviors and the freedom from fear of violence. Commonly understood as the absence of hostility and retribution, peace also suggests sincere attempts at reconciliation, the existence of healthy or newly healed interpersonal or international relationships, prosperity in matters of social or economic welfare, the establishment of equality, and a working political order that serves the true interests of all.*

Wikipedia

Well, what an interesting definition. If you're looking at this material in a group setting, you might want to discuss whether this definition suitably defines peace for you? Have there been any omissions? What do you think?

Despite the Wikipedia definition being fairly clinical, there are some interesting words to be found here. Words and phrases like 'harmony', 'sincere attempts', 'reconciliation' and 'newly healed' confirms that peace is an active entity ie something that changes or can change depending on circumstances. This suggests that peace is something that has to be worked on – maintained. It is not something that 'just is', but rather something that we have to work on to sustain. It is part of an active birthing and growing process – a bit like the season of Spring?

Back to Wiki.....

*The term 'peace' originates most recently from the Anglo-French *pes*, and the Old French *pais*, meaning "peace, reconciliation, silence, agreement" (11th century). But, *Pes* itself comes from the Latin *pax*, meaning "peace, compact, agreement, treaty of peace, tranquility, absence of hostility, harmony." The English word came into use in various personal greetings from c.1300 as a translation of the Hebrew word *shalom*, which, according to Jewish theology, comes from a Hebrew verb meaning 'to restore'. Although 'peace' is the usual translation, however, it is an incomplete one, because 'shalom,' which is also cognate with the Arabic *salaam*, has multiple other meanings in addition to peace, including justice, good health, safety, well-being, prosperity, equity, security, good fortune, and friendliness. At a personal level, peaceful behaviors are kind, considerate, respectful, just, and tolerant of others' beliefs and behaviors — tending to manifest goodwill.*

*In many languages the word for peace is also used as a greeting or a farewell, for example the Hawaiian word *aloha*, as well as the Arabic word *salaam*. In English the word *peace* is occasionally used as a farewell, especially for the dead, as in the phrase *rest in peace*.*

Wikipedia

Some great words again - justice, safety, prosperity, equity, good health. Did you notice the reference to, and relevance of the Hebrew word 'Shalom? I love the word and its translation 'to restore'. 'Shalom' – a word we use quite frequently in our church culture, has within its restorative notion, fantastic possibilities. It is an active word. Peace in this context becomes a verb rather than a noun, and that's important.

The Oxford English Dictionary identifies the word 'peace' as being a noun – a thing.

For Christians (and for everyone), I think it important that we recognize that words like 'love', 'hope', 'grace' and 'peace', can or should become verbs – doing words. We pray that through our various ministries, that 'doing' is happening. In this context, I believe that 'peace' is a verb. To use the 1960's vernacular, 'Peace out!'

As Christians we are called to maintain peace rather than abandon it. To state the obvious, abandoning peace is about abandoning justice, abandoning safety, abandoning prosperity, abandoning equity and abandoning good health. Its simply wrong - and the cost to all of us in surrendering these things is significant.

A final comment on language. 'Peacekeeping' according to the Oxford English Dictionary is also identified as a noun. That's interesting. So is the definition – 'The use of international military force to maintain a truce'. I'm willing to suggest that broader thinking might project the scope of peacekeeping beyond just the military and 'peace by force'.

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The other day, I was driving along in heavy traffic, when all of a sudden I heard the unmistakable sound of road rage – one driver screaming abuse at another. Both drivers had their windows wound down and were unashamedly yelling abuse at each other. It was truly scary, truly confronting and I believe, truly wasted energy.

On a broader scale (and I'm not telling you anything you don't already know), countries hurl abuse at each other every day. The abuse though, comes in the form of missiles and arms – and on a broader scale, the consequences are devastating.

Why does this stuff happen? Where do people get the energy to hate? Why do we seem to put so much less energy into peace? Or, is it just harder to see? Imagine if we put the same energies and investment into peace. So, lets turn the situation around. In my road-rage scenario, imagine a driver winding down his/her window and calling out "Wow!! You're a such a great driver!!" or "Just thought I'd let you know you cut me off – maybe the experience will make us both better drivers. Have a great day!" What different world it would be.

Maybe my imagining is fanciful and my questions are naïve? Yes they are. But they remain valid.

While I practice my naivety, I'll ask another question – Wouldn't it just be easier to live in a world of peace?

There are so many ways to approach the question of peace. One option is to examine the opposite of peace - war – and to recognize the cost of war. Cost takes many forms. There is the cost of lives, cost of displacement, cost of home, cost of hope and cost of property. There is the cost of culture and the cost of harmony and joy. A further more sobering and possibly more tangible measure of cost is an examination the level of dollar investment humans place in arms acquisition, protection and aggression.

It is reported that that there was 1,747 billion dollars (USD) spent globally on the military during 2013. The big players might not be surprising. The United States spent 640 billion dollars, The People’s Republic of China spent 188 billion dollars. Russia spent 87.8 billion and Saudi Arabia 67 spent billion dollars<sup>1</sup>. No, you’re not misreading this. That’s billions! In a single year.

It might surprise many to know that in 2013, Australia was ranked number 13 in the top military spenders on the planet. We spent 24 billion dollars (USD) on military during 2013.

Now I’m not so naïve that I don’t understand that spending on military actually plays a part in sustaining world peace. It does, such is the complex arm-wrestle that is international politics (remember the dictionary definition of ‘peacekeeping’) But how sad is that?

Now, let’s take it another step and imagine (in all naivety) that last year, 1,747 billion USD was spent globally on stuff other than military. Imagine if that same amount of money was instead spent on say, medicine, or food production and distribution. Imagine if it was spent on education, housing, health and sanitation? Imagine! Imagine a world where instead of living in fear of our neighbours, we were able to live alongside them in peace? Imagine a world where we look after them, and they look after us? What a different world we’d have!

Have you noticed that amongst many other things, the Old Testament seems to describe a constant swing between war and peace. There are battles and armies, times of peace and times of conflict. As a small boy-child, I had an ongoing fascination with the armies, the armour, the giants and the slingshots.

Fast-forward to the New Testament – and fast forward for me moving beyond boyhood and starting to think beyond the OT parade of kings and queens, armies and battles. The Gospel introduces the world to a new way of thinking. Jesus Christ - Prince of Peace - teaches of a new way of living. That through faith and belief in a God of love, peace is achievable for all time and for all people.

In John’s Gospel, Jesus says “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid”(John 14:27). In Matthew’s account of what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus declares “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called Sons of God. Blessed are persecuted for the sake of righteousness for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:9-10). Another translation of this most confident declaration reads “Happy are those who work for peace. God will call them his children” (Good News translation).

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<sup>1</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute 2013



So far, I haven't raised the issue of peace-makers.

World history has been (and continues to be) blessed with those who dedicate themselves politically and personally in the pursuit of peace. Some are world leaders, some represent movements and organizations. Some are simply individuals. Hopefully we can call *ourselves* peace-makers. For all these people we give thanks and pray for continued strength in a challenging world.

As homework (and because I should finish), look up a list of Nobel Peace Prize winners, or Google up 'peacemakers'. Have a think about and discuss their achievements. What do they have in common? What were their motivations? Have their legacies been lasting? Has the world been worse off for their work? Who are the peacemakers in our community?

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We live in challenging times. We don't need to look too hard to encounter the pain and cost of abandoning our dream for peace.

Let's pray for peace – because no one can argue that peace is not needed. Lets pray for world peace. Let's aim high despite the cliché!

So Shalom! Restore and be restored. Across Spring (and of course beyond) we'll pray for peace – for restoration and new life. *Today* is the day for a new start. *Today* is the day for re-birth and a celebration of peace. Our prayers must be for global peace, because global peace is what's needed.

And we pray in the name of Jesus Christ - The Prince of Peace.

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Some quotes.....

“You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist”- Mahatma Gandhi



“If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends.  
You talk to your enemies” - Archbishop Desmond Tutu



“Peace is the only battle worth waging” - Albert Camus

## The Word

A study by Gareth Darlow

*People notice peacemakers because they dress funny. We know how the people who make war dress - in uniforms and medals, or in computers and clipboards, or in absoluteness, severity, greed, and cynicism. But the peacemaker is dressed in righteousness, justice, and faithfulness - dressed for the work that is to be done.*

Walter Brueggemann

### Read Isaiah 1:1-23

People in the ancient world believed that they were finely balanced between order and chaos. Shalom (which we most commonly translate as “peace”) was not just the opposite of war, but the absence of chaos.

Biblical scholar Paul Hanson writes, "Perhaps the best way to begin to understand shalom is to recognize that it describes the realm where chaos is not allowed to enter, and where life can be fostered free from the fear of all which diminishes and destroys"

When God creates the earth in Genesis 1, he doesn't simply create from nothing, but pushes back the waters of Chaos. Later in Genesis, in response to the disobedience of the people, God allows that Chaotic water to re-cover the earth. Interestingly, that chaos distresses God to the point that he promises never to allow such destruction again.

The book of Isaiah covers a particularly turbulent time in Jerusalem's history. Jerusalem was, over the centuries, attacked and battered by the Persians, the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Isaiah chapters 1-39 seem to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE and the deportation of her people into Babylon. Chapters 40-66 seem to describe the people being restored to their home.

- In this first Chapter of Isaiah, God seems to “lay charges” upon Israel. What are the charges that God lays?

- Is Israel's disobedience simply a personal affront to God, or a refusal to take part in God's Shalom? What are the consequences of that disobedience?
- Are there people in our world and communities who we see taking part in God's Shalom?
- Who are today's widows and orphans? Who are today's oppressed and cheated? Can we see long term consequences for their mistreatment? Can we see consequences even now?
- Has there been a time in your life when you've been part of a group and somebody has acted in a destructive way within that group? How has it changed your experience? Has the group been able to keep functioning? What has needed to change for that to happen?
- Even now, as "court is in session", the poet seems to be suggesting that there is still time for Israel to change her ways. (*Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.*) All that Israel needs to do to re-establish God's Shalom is to once again take part in that Shalom. The "way things are" can sometimes seem so monolithic that change is impossible. How do we bring about the change that we hear God calling us to?

#### **Read Isaiah 2:1-4**

Even as the poet (while still pleading for Israel to change her ways!) understands that disobedience will hold sway and predicts chaos for God's people in response, God is already promising a restoration of God's peace. And not just for Israel! God's chosen people will stand as an example, and God's shalom will flow from Israel to the world! Already, God is foreshadowing Israel's restoration, and in that restoration, peace.

- Can there be peace without restoration? If we live in a world with enormous discrepancy between "winner" and "loser", is peace a possibility?
- We talk in Australia about living within a peaceful society, but often find ourselves feeling threatened. What are the threats to that peace?
- Empires (whether Babylon, Persia, Rome or any other) function on a vision of peace which comes through victory. "Once all my enemies are dead, I will have peace." Isaiah's vision is of a peace that goes hand in hand with economic and social justice and understanding. Is it possible for us to enjoy peace in one part of the world while chaos reigns in another  
When we are threatened by Chaos do we try to achieve "Peace through victory" or "Peace through justice?"
- We pray weekly "forgive our sins as we forgive those who sin against us." What are ways in which we can live out God's shalom in our day to day lives?

# Prayer

As a Christian faith community, we recognize the importance of spending time as individuals or as a group in prayer – meditating on the grace and power of God to move in the lives of those for whom we pray.

Prayer can take whatever shape or form you wish it to and it is important to understand that whilst you and/or your group are praying, so to are others in our community. It may be that some members of your group don't subscribe to the conventional notion of prayer. Where that's the case, it may be useful to encourage them to spend time thinking about issues of peace, how we can support those who experience play a part in establishing peace on all levels – globally, nationally, regionally and locally.

Some may find it difficult to pray or lead prayer publically and that's okay. You may wish to use these words as a guide, or to break the ice.....

*Loving God*

*We bring before you our prayers for peace.*

*We recognize that we live in a world of challenge. We recognize that peace is a gift that the people of the world don't enjoy equally. We recognize the need for your hand of peace in the lives of so many of your people.*

*We pray for those affected by conflict – for those individuals and communities displaced and fractured by war.*

*We pray for those in our nation and in our community who can't find peace.*

*We pray for leaders – local leaders and world leaders. Let their decisions be decisions of peace and restoration. Let their decisions be those of compassion and mercy. Fill their hearts with longing for peace.*

*We pray for peacemakers. Work in the hearts and minds of those who strive to bring peace in the world. Provide energy, wisdom and support for those with capacities to change the world through peace.*

*Loving Lord, where there is peace, we give thanks. Where there is harmony, we give praise. Where there is restoration we watch in wonder. Let your peace reign in the hearts of each person in the world.*

*Loving God, we bring our prayers in the name of Jesus Christ - The Prince of Peace  
Amen*



## Prayer points

The following 'prayer points' are not exhaustive, but may assist in guiding your praying:

*We pray for:*

- *Those people who are victims of war*
- *People in leadership and other roles who are able to influence peace outcomes*
- *People who work for peace*
- *People we know or know of who need to find peace*

## The miracle of silent prayer.

Consider silent prayer and meditation. As a group or individual, don't be afraid to allow groups periods of silence during which those who are present can allow themselves to focus on whatever they feel is important.

# Outreach

We are hopeful that you and your group will decide on some sort of outreach activity (or activities) to complement the theme of 'New life - a prayer for peace'. The choice of outreach activity and the extent to which your group engages this, is wholly the decision of you and/or your group. It may be as big or as small as you decide.

It is hoped that your group will embrace the outreach part of this process as it presents possibilities for very real positive change for others and as such, represents a critical part of ministry in the name of Christ.

**IMPORTANT** - Recognize that in outreach, we are dealing with other people – some we know, some we don't. Ensure that actions we do for other people either directly or indirectly, are done with their permission. If dealing with a person or an organization, obtain permission first. Always respect other people's privacy and right to confidentiality.

# Create

You are invited to contribute to the season's topic creatively. This could mean music, artwork, craftwork, poetry, drama etc. How do you respond to the issue of 'peace' creatively? Its exciting here to consider the possibilities for creative response, and once again, groups or individuals are invited to engage in this part of the process in whatever way they feel comfortable.

# Celebrate

At the conclusion of the Season and our focus on peace, it would be great for your group to celebrate the journey and any outcomes that have been experienced. Celebration can take whatever form your group wishes it to. It may extend simply to a quiet prayer of thanks, through to a presentation or celebration in worship.

Towards the end of the season, the Leadership Group will be in touch to see how you might wish to celebrate.

## ***Finally.....***

We encourage your group to embrace the possibilities of *Seasons*. If you require further information or assistance, please get in touch with one of the Leaders.

Finally, we give thanks to God for the talents and energies of our people.

Coatesville Leadership Group