

Sunday 20th October

Micah 4:1-4

1 Corinthians 14:4-13

John 14:23-27

Peace – Shalom – Wholeness in the world

Reading the newspapers or watching the TV news can be a pretty depressing experience. Only in this past week you could have found headlines like these:

Racial abuse at a football match

The vitriolic language and death threats that have come from the Leave vs Remain divide

Syria and the warring factions and the position of Turkey regarding the Kurdish people

Ongoing violence in Afghanistan

The punishments meted out to the Catalan leaders in Spain and the subsequent unrest

Hong Kong protests and the response of the authorities

State of emergency being declared in Santiago amidst violent scenes

Climate change protests, the police response and the escalating violence from some protestors and the vilification and insults hurled at people who are protesting because they have genuine concerns

Knife crime in our cities – the constant battle to control it against the backdrop of death after death amongst predominantly young people

County lines drug pushing across the nation – the luring of many into lives of crime and drug addiction

Hate crime and intolerance

Homelessness, effects of austerity, Increase in use of foodbanks, global warming

The theme of our sermon today is peace in the world. But where is this peace. All we can see is a fractured and broken world. Is this all there is? Is there no hope that things will ever get better?

The Hebrew word we use for peace is Shalom. Shalom does not just mean the absence of war, or absence of conflict or disagreement. It means a kind of deep peace and carries with it thoughts of harmony, wholeness, completeness, welfare and tranquillity. (last week singing it at the end of the service)

So we look around and ask the question. Where is this harmony? Where is this wholeness? Where is this completeness, agreement and tranquillity?

Last week we were thinking about this peace, this inner peace. But peace in the sense of our own lives. Peace with ourselves, with those around us with the world in which we live and over all with God. And we thought about how God through his Spirit within us helps us to live lives in harmony with each other, with him and with ourselves.

But Our theme today is much wider, peace and wholeness in the world. Between people, nations, factions and peace with the planet itself. Peace Amongst those with different outlooks, different backgrounds and different hopes. What is God's dream, what is God's vision, what future does God see and hope for the world?

We are given a clue in our reading from Micah, a prophet from the Old Testament who was writing to at a time of turmoil in history.

Micah lived at about the same time as another great prophet - Isaiah. He prophesied during the reigns of Kings Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah; the years 735 – around 700BC. This was after the nation of Israel split into two kingdoms – Israel in the north and Judah to the south. His main message was to the southern kingdom of Judah, but there are some sections addressed to Israel.

Assyria was the great power of the region at that time and threatened all the smaller nations. Israel entered various misguided alliances, and tried to involve Judah. Israel was invaded and conquered; Judah became little more than a puppet state, remaining just a thread of autonomy.

Micah was clearly addressing a nation in crisis. There was no peace, no harmony, no wholeness in the world. All was chaos.

Little has changed in close on 3000 years. So we might do well to listen to his words of hope today. He gives a vision of how the world could be. A world

where there is peace and harmony, a world where life is as God wants and as God intended.

(Read Micah 4:1-4 again)

This is a vision repeated throughout scripture and It is picked up by Jesus himself – who uses the term Kingdom of God to describe it.

Jesus talks of the Kingdom breaking into today's world. You are not far from the Kingdom he tells people; or the Kingdom of God is like this, or like that.

He says we can get a glimpse of the Kingdom whenever we live the way God wants us to live; He talks of the Spirit of God living within us to help us and encourage us. We were reminded last week of Paul talking about the fruit of the spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control – marks of the Kingdom. And in our NT reading today he talks of the supremacy of love.

*Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.*

So the message in scripture seems to be that the Kingdom coming (something we pray for whenever we pray the Lord's prayer) is down to us. The vision of God as declared by Micah becoming a reality is down to us. The way we live, the way we love, the things we do, the way we treat people.

And this kingdom embraces everything from personal morality to justice and order on a world scale. It embraces everything from the way we treat our neighbour to the way we treat the planet. It embraces everything from our attitude to money to our attitude to those who disagree with us. It embraces everything about life.

So if we despair over the news and do nothing about it we are part of the problem and not part of the solution.

But if we see that even the smallest Kingdom action or attitude – arising from the Spirit within and his example of love – even the smallest action can make a difference than we are truly part of the solution; part of Gods dream becoming a reality.

SO what small things can we do

Smile

Neighbourliness

Concern for the environment – our attitude to eco issues

Concern for the weak and poor – our attitude to the homeless (for example)

Giving time and money

Campaigning for justice – in this nation and across the world

Looking out for oppression in the world

Reading the news with a critical eye – weighing things up in accordance with the truth revealed to us in Jesus

Etc etc

Today you received a yellow slip of paper

A cartoon with a serious message

And a chance for you to write down one small step you could take.

Finish by praying