

A Meditation for PeaceWeek

As we enter PeaceWeek we have to guard our hopes and aspirations for Peace from being derided as Utopian. A dictionary definition of Utopia states: '**Utopia** An ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects.'¹ Many will think and some will suggest that what we are hoping for, praying for and working towards is idealistic, unrealistic and unachievable.

We do have to guard against that and more importantly we have to guard against having our reasonable hopes and aspirations crushed by the faithless and those with ulterior motives.

Francis Turner Palgrave in his Poem 'Utopia' writes about an imaginary place:

Utopia
There is a garden where lilies
And roses are side by side;
And all day between them in silence
The silken butterflies glide.
I may not enter the garden,
Though I know the road thereto;
And morn by morn to the gateway
I see the children go.
They bring back light on their faces;
But they cannot bring back to me
What the lilies say to the roses,
Or the songs of the butterflies be.

Francis Turner Palgrave (1824–97)

What he appears to be talking about is something that is lost with the passing of childhood or a state that children appear (to adults) to have; such thoughts often come from nostalgia and romanticising our past. *[Insert personal reflection here: e.g. Longing for the magic of childhood is not hard for me to understand as a fairly new grandparent. Being a bit older it is easy for me to be nostalgic and to observe the wonder on my granddaughter Kyra's face from even splashing in a puddle! Her excitement at seeing me always appears to be beyond the occasion!]* Magic, wonder, excitement. Unfortunately some children never experience this and for others it is cut short.

What Francis Turner Palgrave writes about is something that we may have experienced but it is unreal and regaining it is unachievable.

The Psalmist writes of a place that was real and he expresses desires that were achievable. Jerusalem² the 'City of Peace', now often seen as a city of tension but in the Psalmists time it is more than a City with buildings, it is a concept of the best in life.

¹ u-to-pi·a *n.* 1. a. often Utopia An ideally perfect place, especially in its social, political, and moral aspects. b. A work of fiction describing a utopia. 2. An impractical, idealistic scheme for social and political reform. <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?r=2&q=Utopia>

² Jerusalem means "teaching of peace" Strongs (Online Bible) IVP Bible Dictionary suggests the first part 'Jeru' probably means 'possession' or 'foundation', 'saalem' meaning peace. "The cognat Assyr. language would give a meaning 'city of peace'." *Jerusalem The New Bible Dictictionary* (IVP: London, 1962), 614

Psalm 122

A song of ascents. Of David.

1 I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the LORD." 2 Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem.

3 Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. 4 That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to praise the name of the LORD according to the statute given to Israel. 5 There the thrones for judgment stand, the thrones of the house of David.

6 Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May those who love you be secure. 7 May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels." 8 For the sake of my brothers and friends, I will say, "Peace be within you." 9 For the sake of the house of the LORD our God, I will seek your prosperity. (NIV)

So what does the Psalmist say of this place:

1. It is where the presence of God is.
2. It is a real place, I can stand there and before I arrive there it is real in me.
3. It is a place of close community.
4. It is a place of unity.
5. It is a place of justice.
6. It is a place that is in transition and still needs prayer. Those who work for it's good are to be blessed.
7. It is a place to be blessed.
8. Bringing peace to the City blesses everyone.
9. God and his people are blessed by the good in the City.

This is a Psalm about 'Peace'. The Hebrew word for peace is Shalom³ and means wholeness and wellbeing and much more than just the absence of violence and strife. As we all meditate on this Psalm let us think of our city and our own community.

Let us meditate on one thought from each of the verses in that Psalm:

1. Living in the City we can make people more aware of Gods presence.
2. Consider how real to you is the peace you seek in the City?
3. How close is my community? How could it be closer?
4. What would unity look like in your community and our City?
5. Who do you want justice for and from whom?
6. Pray for peace, unity and justice in your community; be specific.
7. Bless your community with peace, unity and justice – write statements for each to pronounce over your community.
8. Confess where you have brought strife instead of peace.
9. Praise God for all the good things in your community.

³ MwlV shalom {shaw-lome'} meaning completeness, soundness, safety, welfare, prosperity, health, peace. Strongs Hebrew Online Bible (07965)

Something to do:

Have your own peace walk in the community:

Pronounce your blessings as you walk around your community (7). Go to the place where you were involved in strife, whether you were at fault or not, and do something to bring peace (8). Praise God for all the good things in your community as you walk around (9).

What is peace about?

Often when people talk about peace on the Radio or Television they play John Lennon's 'Give peace a chance' or 'Imagine'⁴. I believe his desire for peace was good and genuine but it lacked reality. The most positive thing in the song 'Give peace a chance' is that very refrain and one we can echo. 'Imagine' speaks of the absence of things, "...no heaven ...no hell ...nothing to kill or die for and no religion too ...No need for greed or hunger...." These are mainly things he didn't like but peace doesn't exist in a vacuum. Peace is not the absence of something like war or violence, it is the presence of something. To properly eradicate the negative we have to replace it with something. If we deal with greed we have to replace it with generosity.

Francis of Assisi understood this, many years ago. A well known prayer is attributed to him; it's truth prevails and has proved the test of time - almost a thousand years!

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace:
where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

- attributed to St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226)

⁴ <http://www.bagism.com/lyrics/lennon-collection-lyrics.html>

Conclusion:

This is a meditation so you have to write the conclusions...

What are you going to do now?

Action:

1. Tell two Christians in your community who were not involved in PeaceWeek about the two best things you have gained from this meditation.
2. Tell two unchurched people from your community something encouraging for them from this meditation.

Discussion questions for small groups. The following questions numbers relate to the verses in Psalm 122 and the meditation.

1. How real is the challenge for you to live in the City? Why are you there or why are you not living in the City if you have a concern?
2. What sort of peace do you seek for the City?
3. What can I do to bring people closer? What can my church do to bring people closer?
4. What is the difference between justice and vengeance? Why should we only seek justice?
5. Name the things that need to change in your community?
6. Where is there disunity what can we do about it?
7. What are the blessings you can bring (not words)?
8. How can we bring peace?
9. Name the good things in your community. How can these affect other things?

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