

Homily – 8 am service
St Mary's Kerrisdale
The Rev'd Michael Shapcott
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Our friends at Corrymeela, the longest-serving centre for reconciliation in Northern Ireland, begin their morning prayer with these words, and so I offer them this morning:

We begin our day with trust, knowing that we are created for loving encounter.

We resolve to live life in its fullness: We will welcome the people who will be part of this day.
We will greet God in ordinary and hidden moments. We will live the life we are living.

May we find the wisdom we need... God be with us.

May we hear the needs of those we meet... God be with us.

May we love the life we are given... God be with us.

Amen, and amen again.

Peace. We read in today's Gospel reading that Jesus came to give us peace. Not just any old peace, but what Jesus calls "my peace".

So, what, exactly, is the peace of Jesus? Well, one of the most lively and engaging parts of most Anglican services is the exchange of the peace. At the parish in Toronto where I was raised up and served as a deacon – Holy Trinity Trinity Square – the peace would go on and on. It was animated. People shook hands, hugged, kissed and were boundless in expressing the peace of Christ. Sometimes, the peace would go on for so long the organist would have to summon people back to order with booming notes.

The peace of Christ.

The time of peace – Jesus's peace – is a time when we get a glimpse, however imperfect, of the wonderful and life-sustaining harmony that God's desires for all of us.

John, in one of his wonderful dreams recounted in the Book of Revelation that we heard a few moment ago, sees the peace of Christ as bright, robust and healing. At Revelation 21:4, we read that in the time of great peace: "death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more..."

In a world in which wars cause huge levels of death and the largest flow of refugees since the Second World War, we seek to live into the words of Jesus: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.

In a world in which human-induced climate change cause untold, perhaps irreversible damage to our beloved earth, generating wildfires and flooding, we seek to lean into the words of Jesus: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you."

In a world in which men, yes it is almost always men, enter into churches, mosques, synagogues and temples to kill others in acts of extreme hatred, we yearn to realize the words of Jesus: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”

So let’s get technical for a moment.

The word “peace” that Jesus says in today’s Gospel reading is rendered, in the original Biblical Greek, as *eirene*. It is a feminine noun and has its roots in the Greek word that means “to join”.

Peace is definitely meant to be understood as an absence of violence. But the word has so much more meaning. The Greek word, scholars tell us, stretches to include such words in English as: Concord, harmony, tranquility, security, prosperity, felicity.

Felicity – that’s a bit of an old-fashioned word – but it means intense happiness.

When you think of the peace of Jesus, think of another word that is in widespread use these days: reconciliation. It’s no surprise that peace and reconciliation often are spoken in the same sentence. Peace and reconciliation are two facets of the same big and important truth.

Now, I feel the need to remind you that Jesus didn’t speak English (it wasn’t around as a language when Jesus walked on earth), so he never said the actual word peace.

Biblical scholars argue – except, of course, during the time of the exchange of peace – about what language or languages Jesus spoke. Perhaps Hebrew (he did spend time in synagogues). Almost certainly a form of common Greek called *koine*. Most agree Jesus spoke Aramaic – perhaps with a Galilean accent that distinguished him from Aramaic speakers in Jerusalem or other communities.

And here is where the word peace gets really interesting. The Aramaic word for peace is “*shlama*”, which is pretty close to the Arabic word “*salam*” that our Muslim siblings use to greet each other, and also very close to the Hebrew word “*shalom*” that our Jewish siblings use as their basic greeting.

For millennia, the people of the Middle East knew that greeting each other, building relationships, begins with a mutual acknowledgement of peace.

In the beautitudes, Jesus tells us that peacemakers are blessed. That word “peacemaker”, in Jesus’s language of Aramaic, is *lahwvday*. That word has its roots in agricultural practice of planting: tilling the ground, labouring regularly, remaining committed, bringing forth an abundance of produce and celebrating.

When I was ordained as a deacon, a dear friend gave me the gift of a book by Neil Douglas-Klotz called “Prayers of the Cosmos: Reflections on the Original Meaning of Jesus’s Words”. Neil’s ideas and words bring a fresh and exciting life to the Aramaic words of Jesus.

He points out that farm labourers – the very image that Jesus evoked as he spoke of peacemakers – assume a position of prayer as they lean over, or sometimes kneel, to plant seedlings and care for crops. He points out that when we bend over, our heart is positioned in a central way – right over the soil and plants that we are stewarding.

Please remember this about the peace of Jesus.

We are not meant to sit passively waiting for the peace to come upon us. We are meant to be active agents of peace, reaching out to others, seeking reconciliation in a divided world. Peacemaking, Jesus reminds us, is like farming. There is some pretty hard work involved in preparing the soil, managing the nutrients and water, seeding, planting and then harvesting.

I work in a job that one of my predecessors has called “the best job in the Anglican Church of Canada”. As the Sorrento Centre, it is my happy task, along with the rest of our staff, to welcome more than three thousand people to our 24-acre main campus in the beautiful South Shuswap Region of the interior of BC. Just a short distance away, we have an eight-acre natural farm. Our aspiration is that we deliver an abundance of food from the farm to our kitchen, where we serve more than 10,000 meals annually, and also into the community.

Our interim farm manager is the delightful fellow that I like to call Farmer Dan. Dan might be known to some of you as Dan Meakes. He served as a youth pastor many years ago here at St Mary’s Kerrisdale. He spent a lifetime of service as an Anglican priest, and he also managed a farm.

Here’s what I have learned from Farmer Dan – a lesson that can also be applied to peacemaking. Good farming requires careful planning, a good understanding of the conditions necessary for healthy growth and lots of hard work.

We started the planning back in the late fall – well before Christmas. We sat with the Sorrento Centre kitchen manager to identify the best produce – tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, lettuce and so on. We ordered the seeds – and, thanks to a grant from a local organization, secured the money for the seeds.

We knew that we needed to upgrade the water system for the farm. Our staff set out the plans, engaged a contractor, laid the pipes. Thanks to a grant from the Shuswap Community Foundation, we have upgraded water.

One big project for us at the farm is to build a big, new greenhouse so that we can seed earlier, and seed longer, thus increasing the bounty of food. We made sure, with our new water system, to have a connection to the new greenhouse. We are seeking funds for this wonderful new project. Part of the plans include a high-efficiency wood-burning furnace that will not only heat the greenhouse in the cold seasons, but will also deliver warmth to the nearby farmhouse that is my year-round home.

Another big project for us at the farm is to restore a century-old barn. It is, according to the local historical society, the oldest structure in Sorrento. We’d like it to become a community learning centre for people from near and far to come and get their hands dirty as they learn about farming. We also want people to experience the healing spiritual properties of farming.

The Benedictines have taught us the phrase: ora et labora – which means prayer and work. Being in the field, working to nurture growth from God’s good earth, this is calming work. This is work that nourishes the human spirit. This is work that brings us closer to God.

People who visit the Sorrento Centre often say that it is a “thin” space, a liminal space. The Christian mystic Richard Rohr calls places like the Sorrento Centre “God’s waiting room”.

God's waiting room. A place where we encounter the divine, and each other, and engage deeply with the world around us.

That, truly, is the peace of Jesus at least partially realized in our time.

I invite you to explore the peace of Christ as you engage with the Sorrento Centre. If you are already a friend or an Associate of the Centre, please know that you are welcome to enter an even deeper engagement.

The Sorrento Centre is a holy place of transformation for learning, healing and belonging. We aspire to be a gathering place for all – and you are welcome.

The Christian mystic Julian of Norwich said it best, so I end with her words:

Be a gardener.

Dig a ditch, toil and sweat and turn the earth upside down
and seek the deepness and water the plants in time.

Continue this labor and make sweet floods to run and noble and abundant fruits to spring.

Take this food and drink and carry it to God as your true worship.

May we truly live into the peace of Christ in our hearts, in our minds and in our lives.

Amen.