

Peace: *a reflection in covid lockdown*

St George's Anglican Church

7 Nov 2021

A while ago Doreen and I were on an excursion up the coast of Norway. One morning we were to go on a sightseeing bus tour of a little village called Alesund. This village was apparently as pretty as a picture and offered lots of scenic gems for tourists. The tour was to end after a steep climb many hundreds of metres to a viewing station above the village so that people could get a bird's eye view of this little gem of a place. The problem was that this particular morning the weather was shabby – a thick fog and mist with constant drizzle had descended and visibility was no more than a few metres. Our expectations for a scenic treat were not high.

Our guide was a handsome man who looked about 40. He stood at the front of the bus and introduced himself – “Good morning. My name is Jesus.” He explained that he was Portuguese and in that country Jesus was quite a common name. He had married a Norwegian woman and they had settled in Norway and he had become a tour guide. He told us a bit about where we would be going and that we would finish with morning tea at the viewing kiosk high in the hills behind the village. He finished with a flourish – puffing his chest out and with a mischievous look on his face said – “So - you may call me Jesus. Good people - come – follow me.”

Off we went. And for the next couple of hours, we drove through the mist following Jesus and seeing nothing.

At the end we wound up the road to the lookout. There was a large viewing platform seriously constructed out of rock from which people could safely look down upon beautiful Alesund as if on eagles' wings – except today – nothing!! Then, spectacularly the mist lifted in mere seconds, as if someone was rolling up a curtain of a theatre stage and there as if on cue – the village below – bathed in sun, was there for all to see in perfect colour and clarity. Our guide jumped up in the seating ledge and for the second time puffed his chest out and with the same mischievous look said “.....see. Tis a miracle !!!”

We might feel as though we're in something of a fog or a mist right now. We are looking for some direction, a signpost to settle us down, a break in the fog to give us a glimpse of what's ahead. It is in our human nature to want some control over our direction or at least some understanding of what is happening to us so that we can feel as if we have control. If we are lost – we get fearful and panicky. Sometimes fear will freeze us and so we do nothing, having no confidence and feeling afraid about everything. On the other hand panic is likely to make us over active, desperately embracing competing ideas – listening to and swapping one voice for another – running around in the mist in one direction and then another and getting nowhere.

We can become quite different people because our desperation makes us self-centred. We can blame others for the situation. We can spill out accusations and judgements and because of that we can threaten precious relationships. It is so very important that we as a family of faith, as people who love the way of Jesus, who seek to grow in the

life of the Holy Spirit with us and who would commit to living out the fruit of the Spirit, identify these negative traits before they change us. *It is for a time such as this* that we have been being nurtured and deepened in our call to be disciples of Jesus. In a time such as this Josh asks –

What difference does our faith make...

What is the deeper response from our faith that we need to call forth...?

How do we respond in this time as Jesus followers?

Fear and panic breeds confusion and confusion is the antithesis of peace. In another context St Paul wrote to the Corinthian church telling them God is not the author of confusion (or disorder) but of peace (1Cor 14:33).

Throughout the scriptures peace from God is the promised gift of God for his people.

- In the OT – way back - the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:22-24) ends with *The Lord turn His face towards you and give you peace.*
- Before Jesus came it was prophesied about him that He would be the *Prince of Peace* (see Is 9:6)

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Peace I leave with you; my peace I give 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

Jesus promised peace, a different peace than the world can give and in promising this he said that we should not be troubled or afraid – very pertinent for us today.

- After His resurrection Jesus greeted his confused and fearful disciples with the blessing “*Peace be with you – do not be afraid*” (John 20:19)
- Paul began all his letters with a blessing of peace and sometimes described God as the *God of peace* (1 Thess 5:23).

And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:7

- Remember Jesus promised a different peace than the world would give. Paul expresses this as peace that *passes (or transcends) understanding* (Phil 4:7). So it is a peace that does not require us to see our way or understand what’s happening or why. This is because it is peace that is anchored in a relationship and not in information and data. It is peace that comes from trusting in the non-anxious presence of God’s Spirit.
- What is this peace then? In circumstances that confuse us, cause us fear and anxiety, circumstances that we don’t understand, we must not let our faith wobble. And so in this same blessing St Paul makes it clear that it is the peace of God which will keep us anchored. It is God’s peace that will *guard our hearts and minds* –those parts that we call our personalities, our emotional propensities, our moods and impulses, those areas of our makeup that can be manipulated and invaded by fears and anxiety. In other words it is God’s peace that will dissipate our fears and anxieties and keep us alive in the Spirit led relationship of His non anxious presence.

If confusion and fear are holding you to ransom, step back, be prayerful, bring someone alongside who knows how you are feeling and drill down to penetrate

beneath the confusion and fear and identify exactly what it is that is making you feel this way. Name it.

Fear is no problem for God, for God's love casts out fear (1 John 4:18).

Let God's peace flow into the space where you are harbouring confusion and fear. God's peace can deal with that too.

Let us conclude now by seeking this peace not just for ourselves but also for our brothers and sisters.

It is a tradition in our gatherings to pass the peace. We say to each other – “*The peace of Christ be always with you*”. I don't think we realise what a sacramental thing we are doing in this practice. We are calling upon God's protection to keep the faith of our friend whose heart and mind is being impacted by their circumstances - safe. Think of it as a short but penetrating prayer of intercession from you for them, that they may be covered by God's peace that can make their worries and fears evaporate. This is the mark of difference *for a time such as this*, that we are people who hold the other person in our hearts. Think of someone you know right now who is having their struggles in the present circumstances. Say aloud to them – even if they are not with you *the peace of Christ be always with you*.

The passing of the peace in our liturgy is immediately followed by 2 more core reminders of who we are to be to each other in a time such as this (it is found on p 419).

Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

Amen we are bound by the love of Christ

The hallmark of difference of the deeper response *for a time such as this* is when we are authentic in truly coveting for us all, the unity that there is in the shared peace of God. God's peace transcends understanding and so transcends our differences. Remember Josh' question *What is the deeper response from our faith that we need to call forth....?* It is in this peace we share when we love each other with that special love that binds us together.

Remember that in the foggy times, Jesus is our guide. We can do this. As Chris Clarke said to us last week – *God has got this!*

Stan Thorburn