

Let's get humming

Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9, 12-13; Matthew 3:1-3

Rev J Shannon

Before I start, I want you to try something with me. I'm going to hum a note and I'd like you to join me. This little experiment is going to take a while so stick with me – and eventually, you'll understand.

HMM (Ed's note for those not in the room: when a person hums a single note and people join in, they normally try to match the note but as they run out of breath, take another breath & re-join, they naturally fall to their own pitch. This creates harmonies no one is expecting. When that happens, as people become aware of what is happening and re-join after another breath, they instinctively add to the harmonies. The longer this exercise is runs, the more harmonies appear and then the sound begins to take shape in rhythm and undulating volume and eventually becomes spontaneously musical. Getting to the musical point usually takes about 7 minutes which is probably longer than the patience of the congregation so I will stop after about 2 minutes)

Thank you for joining me. Now to explain: None of us doubt that God's plan is the reconciliation of all things. Harmony is in our DNA. It lies there, dormant until we bring it out. You just heard our souls embracing one another.

Advent 2 is about peace. Harmony is the horse that carries peace.

I say that because I am reading a book about a race horse and the relationship between the groom and the horse is of one mind. I know a little about horses. Like many young girls, I was fascinated and would do anything to be around them. I volunteered to muck out stalls at the Arabian shows and grew up with friends with quarter horses. Geoff and I give money to Pegasus every year. It is a charity that runs riding therapy for disabled kids in Canberra.

For those of you who know horses, you may know why. A horse can read your insides. They know you almost as God does. If you are afraid, they sense it. If you are sad, angry, lonely, arrogant – they know it. But just like humans, they have their own personalities, problems, experiences and sins and will respond accordingly. If you are at peace – the horse will sense that and settle down.

Peace has to be on the inside before it can be externalised.

No doubt, you've heard the stories of peace-keepers and I am sure you are aware of the difference between peace keepers, peace makers and peace builders. But just to

be clear, I'll describe the difference in our terms and our times. Then we will look back towards the Gospel.

Peace is more than the absence of war.

Peace keepers are an army you send in to stand between the two sides. Often, they are armed to protect themselves but their job is to stop physical hostilities and protect civilians. We have a history of successes and failures. It didn't work in Timor or Kosovo but has held back the war on the Korean Peninsula for nearly 70 years. Peace keepers can stop a war but they do not stop hostilities. Korea is a perfect example.

Peace-keepers are important because the first priority has to be to protect innocent people. It is the only hope for the Ukraine right now.

Peace-makers are the ones who move in and broker solutions. This is a technical response to a technical problem. We negotiate this-over-that and how we will accommodate different scenarios, They facilitate shared responsibilities and agreed responses but it does nothing to change the hearts and minds that created the conflict. It just gives us a civilised way of dealing with it.

Peace builders work with people, not things, rules or laws. It is what Jesus taught when he said love has to be more important than rules; that mercy has to reign over tradition. It is what he meant when he was willing to sacrifice himself so that others could be saved with a deeper understanding of God.

As I said before, harmony is the horse that carries peace. When people do things together in sync, harmony follows. We do it on Sunday when we sing and share bread. People might come into church with their hassles and sadness but the very act of worshipping together settles the soul. It doesn't cure us – but it begins a process.

We look for ways to act in harmony. Events like carols by candle light; spontaneous memorials and so on. Humans crave and have an in-built, God-given ability which seeks expression. Yet we deny it.

You know from your own experience, if you are agitated, people respond to your needs differently. Go into a shop with a smile on your face and what service you get usually reflects your inner state...and amplifies it. Go into a shop angry – and what do you get?

Finding our inner peace; finding our peace with God creates the essential foundation for peace. You wouldn't plant your vegetables without preparing the garden bed

first. How can we expect the world to come to some sort of sanity without preparing ourselves?

That's why the psycho-social services (which is a fancy words for chaplains and counsellors) provided in war zones and natural disasters are so important. We have to tend the inner person as well as make sure they have food, clothing and shelter are available. We have to help them find their inner peace.

Advent is the time to prepare. Just as Isaiah says the shoot will come from the stump. A stump is the remnants of a traumatic event. But he says from the stump of Jesse roots and branches will bear fruit...we have to prepare the garden for Christ to happen. It is time to think about our relationship with God. It is never God who is distant but us, who are too busy to be close. Advent is always an invitation to slow down and listen...and wait. To use the waiting time to till our souls. It is the garden of peace.

Let's get humming – (together can we say this mantra twice and then have a moment of silence. I'll say it first and then you join me for #2)

Be still

And know I am God

Be still and know I am

Be still and know

Be still.

(Silence)

Find the inner harmony that you can project into the world. Like a horse, the world will read you and respond. It is the most important step. So, I leave you with Paul's words:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.¹

Amen

¹ Romans 15:5=6