

Peace has deep roots

Isaiah 40 1-11; 2 Peter 3:8-9; Mark 1:1-8

Rev Jean Shannon

A woman was planning a spring garden party. She wanted her garden to be a perfect field of tulips and daffodils to impress her neighbours. She planted all her bulbs well ahead and tended them as you would, but that winter, it snowed and snowed. As the date of the party crept closer there was no sign of flowers. The garden began to green up, things sprouted but no daffodils or tulips as yet...but on the day of the party, the garden was lovely. It was festooned in a sea of beautiful colour – even though her neighbour’s yards had yet to ripen. That evening when the flowers had drooped, her daughter saw her out the window bringing in the flowers. The flowers had been bought from the florist and held up in the garden beds with chopsticks and twisty ties.

The daffodils weren’t fake, they were just short-lived and flimsy. They didn’t have a bulb underneath to give them strength and hold them up – so they wilted. They looked pretty on top but there was nothing underneath to sustain them.

This is a story that Lillian Daniels tells in her book, *Tired of apologizing to a church I don’t belong to*.¹

She uses it to talk about people who are spiritual but not religious – in that there is much in spirituality that is attractive and deeply impactful but without something underneath, it is not sustaining. That something underneath that she describes may be church but most importantly, it is community. Worshiping alone is just not enough. It is in sharing and supporting that we deepen our relationship with God.

I had to laugh because my mother was not a gardener. She was a great set designer and artist but getting dirt under her nails was never going to happen. When we moved from a big old house to a modern suburban house with picture windows ...something was clearly missing. So off she went to Woolies. Every spring she would fill the gardens with plastic flowers (that honestly looked real from the windows) and every autumn, she would bring them in, wash them in the kitchen sink and put them on the top shelf of a closet. Tellingly, my mother did not have a spirituality or even a faith and ultimately had nothing to sustain her. Her’s was not an easy death. She had nothing to cling to and nothing to look forward to. She went screaming into the night.

Peace is more than the absence of conflict. Connection is what brings us peace. No one said it was easy and it’s certainly not for the lazy. To commit yourself to not just

¹ Lillian Daniels, 2017, *Tired of apologizing to a church I don’t belong to*, Faithwords a division of the Hachette Book Group

sit next to... but to love and care for people you may have had nothing in common with other than being in the same place every Sunday worshipping the same God.

Take John the Baptist for example. He is an unlikely candidate to be the chosen person to herald peace each Advent.² His job is to proclaim the coming of the Lord. Even in his wild unsightly existence...it's his job. His calling is to tell us the Messiah is coming, peace will be ours. Look at him! He looks strange. He smells of like a camel³ and urine-cured leather. He dresses in rags and eats locusts and honey. He wildly proclaims outrageous things. He has no fixed address. Hardly the trappings of what peace looks like.

“John offers a peace that turns upside down our expectations and points us back to God’s holy love of radical acceptance.”⁴

John the dipper. People immerse themselves to be clean. John did something different. His immersion was an opportunity to be up to your neck in God’s forgiveness. But being washed clean, being forgiven for our own imperfections was not enough. It was a good start. It was time to attend to the powers that destroy people. Repent doesn’t mean put the past behind you – it means change. He announced the time to begin restoration and reconciliation. These are root problems – deeper issues.

The point is, if the misfit, John the Baptist, is our harbinger of peace, surely there is room to accept the irritations and shortcomings of each other. John’s message is all over our faces. “Peace be with you”...”and also with you”.

It is easy to create a God in your own image and then follow her. It is much harder to work with the God who created us and did not seek our input at our own creation. A god who made each of us different for a purpose. It is profoundly counter-cultural to take an hour each week to worship something other than yourself...and even stranger to do it with other people, in community, over time and in a tradition older than us.⁵

Those are deep roots, sustaining roots.

It is time to be immersed in God’s forgiveness. Get set! Open yourself to God’s spirit as born anew into God’s family.

Loving each other is a big ask and yet, that is where we find peace. It is in the connection – in how we touch and are touched by community.

² Liz Miller, *And also with you*, from **Glow**, 2023 Advent devotional, Stillspeaking writers Group

³ Have you ever smelled a camel? Don’t! not nice.

⁴ Ibid

⁵ Adapted from Lillian Daniels, 2017, *Tired of apologizing to a church I don’t belong to*, Faithwords a division of the Hachette Book Group

And may peace go with you.

Amen