

“Peace”
Isaiah 9:6 – 7; John 14:27

How are we all going on December 8th, 2019?

I think at this time of year many of us are almost ‘done’.
Anyone feeling a bit ‘done’ this morning?

So this morning’s message is will probably be a little bit shorter than usual.

To kick things off, what are the most stressful aspects of Christmas?
Tell the person next to you.

A survey asked about the most stressful aspects of Christmas.
Here are the top 10 – see any resonate with you:

Having to be nice:	15%
Having to attend holiday parties or events:	16%
Disappointing gifts:	19%
Seasonal music:	23%
Seeing certain relatives:	24%
Travelling:	25%
Gift shopping:	28%
Getting into debt:	37%
Gaining weight:	37%
Crowds and long queues:	68%

For many Christmas is one of the worst times of the year.

Suicide rates go up; more people die from ‘natural causes’; long term relationships fall apart; psychiatrists’ patients suffer regressions and family feuds begin [or resume].

One poll suggested in the UK there are 3 million family fights each Christmas, ranging from verbal to the physical altercations.

A psychiatrist wrote a newspaper article entitled, 'Cheer up, it will soon all be over.' He has this final piece of advice: 'Remember that Christmas, although recurrent, doesn't last forever.'¹

Into to this we hear, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given... and he will be called Prince of Peace."

It is far from many people's experiences.

So how do people respond, particularly this time of year, but not exclusively?

Well, what I think many people have are coping mechanisms.

What coping mechanisms really are, is ways of trying to find peace.

"What are the coping mechanisms, the ways people look for peace today?"

Have a chat and tell the person next to you.

If you don't want to talk about this, talk about where you're Christmas shopping is up to... 😊

People engage in retail therapy.

As of September this year New Zealanders were carrying \$7.34b in credit card debt.

Last weekend alone, \$652 million went through shopping tills and eftpos terminals.

We self-medicate:

One man quipped, "My therapist told me the way to achieve true inner peace is to finish what I start. So far today, I have finished 2 bags of chips and a chocolate cake. I feel better already."²

Friends of ours worked with substance abusers for many years. They wrote of an insight they received from one the people they were working with.

Our friends wrote:

"Most of the people we met during our years there were practising some sort of substance abuse which caused their lives to be filled with chaos and violence. It was tempting to just keep reacting to the outward behaviour of this chaos.

¹ Nicky Gumbel, *Why Christmas? The Christmas Edition of Why Jesus?* (London: Holy Trinity Brompton, 2004), 2 – 3.

² <http://www.cybersalt.org/cleanlaugh>

But a particular person, after overdosing one day, enlightened us with their simple response, “I don’t take this stuff because it makes me warm and fuzzy. I take it because it helps me forget.”³

All of these and more is the kind of peace that the world offer; a peace that is fleeting , that is temporary, that often leaves us with greater anxiety than before.

Yet the promise of Christmas is the promise of genuine peace – God’s peace found in Jesus Christ.

Our English word doesn’t do justice to the peace mentioned so often in the Bible. For us it means the absence of hostility; the end of strife or peace of mind. Peace in Scripture can refer to these but it also talks of something better in its place.

The Hebrew word is *Shalom*.

Shalom means means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*.

It all our relationships – with God, with family, with our community, with our environment – everything is in alignment, everything is as it should be.

It’s rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed.

It’s like those times in your life when – perhaps in a time of change – where all your plans fall into place, everything just lines as it should; it all kind of unfurls before you.

It means:

- Strong marriages, families and neighbourhoods,
- Nations and races treasuring differences,
- Governmental officials telling the truth,
- Employees rejoicing in another’s promotion

This was how it was in the beginning.

There was no conflict, no disruption.

God and humanity and the world in perfect union.

But human beings became profoundly disloyal to their God.

And this disloyalty continued down through the generations.

³ “Creating a safe place for healing” by Gregg & Bronwyn Morris, March 2002, 2.

And ever since the world has a way being out of joint.
The world has become disjointed – with God, ourselves, each other and the world around us.

In fact, Christmas stresses are a miniature of the out of jointness all around us.

Yet God's intention for the world is shalom.

Jesus came *bringing* shalom.

His shalom says where something is broken, it can be healed.
Where something has gone to pieces, it is restored.
Where something is lacking, it is made complete.
Where there is hurt, there is comfort.
Where there is need and lack, there is fullness.

Jesus came and made peace between messed up humans and their Creator; He didn't simply end our hostility toward God.

Jesus died for your sins and rose again to bring you and I shalom – he brought us back into intimate, personal relationship with God.

Caesar and Rome made peace by destroying their enemies.
Jesus destroys his enemies by making them His friends.

And that shalom, that peace, He wants to bring into the world.

Agents of Shalom.

Peace is central to Paul's letters when he begins by saying "Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

Churches – communities of faith where Jesus is Lord – are meant to be islands of peace, shalom.

So Paul isn't simply moralising when he tells churches to be kind, to be gentle, to be compassionate, and refrain from certain actions.
He is not lining up a new set of rules.

He is saying, as communities of Christ-followers, you are now agents of His shalom; you are to embody that to the world.

Which is easier said than done.

The story is told of a man who was shipwrecked on a deserted island. He was an industrious, hard-working sort of man, so by the time he was rescued, 15 years later, he had managed to build and construct a number of dwellings on the island.

Upon setting foot on the island the captain and crew who rescued him were amazed at his accomplishments and asked for a tour of the island. He was more than happy to oblige.

The captain asked, "What's that beautiful building over there?"
The man answered, "That's my house. I built it myself."

That went on and the survivor described each building: "That building over there is the store where I do my grocery shopping. Next to it is my bank, and across the street is the gym where I exercise."

There were two buildings left and so the rescuers inquired, "That building over there, what's that?"
"The man said, "I'm a very, very committed Christian so I wanted a place of worship and so there's my church."

And then the captain asked, "And that other building over there that looks similar to the last, what's that building?"
And the man said, "Oh, that's where I *used* to go to church."

We have become agents of Shalom.

Personal Peace

But I know that some of you here this morning are probably thinking, "I *not* enjoying shalom in my life at the moment."

This is not the state I expected to find my life in on December 8th, 2019.

So what then; what is this peace that Jesus offers?

It's not found in a technique.

It's not in a formula.

Peace is not found in a Christian programme no matter how good it is.
It's not found in being as good as we can or as bad.
It's not found in wealth, a relationship, a career, a substance.
It's not found in religion.

Peace (*and you know this*) Peace is a *Person*; Jesus said my peace I give to you, which is His own self.

Peace doesn't come from finding a lake with no storms; peace is that Jesus is in the boat.

Peace is found in knowing Jesus whatever we face.

Today Jesus would say, I think:

“You will get through this, not because of and even in spite of your resources but because I'm with you.

You'll get through whatever you're facing because you have full and open access to the Father – your prayers will always be heard because I have made the way.

You'll get through this because I have given you the Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit, who dwells within you, an ever-present, 24/ 7 help in time of need.”

And this peace in Jesus, is pure gift.

For someone in our lives who doesn't have peace, shalom, the best thing we could do is introduce them to Jesus.

And wonder if for many of us sometimes we work so hard to change our circumstances or over-think our problems or try to make everything fall into place, and just won't work.

I think it's not about trying so drive our struggles out but it's about inviting someone in.

Jesus came into the world that He might come into our lives.

Some of us haven't done that for a very long time.

It might begin again this morning with the most common of prayers and the simplest – “Help! Please be my peace.”