

**Peacemakers**

Today is the day each year when we celebrate that Christ is King, when we celebrate that God reigns and that God's reign in and through Jesus Christ brings in a kingdom ... a reign like no other ... the Kingdom of God.

Today is a day when we give thanks to God for God's life in, through and dare I say it sometimes despite us ... this past year.

Today is the day when we give thanks to God ... when we celebrate God's life and love through those who have offered leadership across our six ministry areas in 2013; areas of ministry that are worth being reminded of:

Youth & Children's Ministry  
 Pastoral Care  
 Worship  
 Education & Transformation  
 Mission, Outreach & Evangelism  
 Resources

All of these require leadership and almost without exception, each one of you has offered leadership ... in often many of these ministry areas. Well done, good and faithful servants.

Today's lectionary offers us two gospel readings; one of them is from Luke 23 – in it we find Jesus on the cross – offering a leadership in stark contrast to that experienced in the Roman world. A leadership of surrender to God, of sacrifice, of servanthood, of love and mercy, forgiveness and peace – through the scandal of the cross, through the wonder of an empty tomb.

The other is from Luke 1:68-79. It's a passage often known as the Benedictus. It's one of three 'psalms' early in Luke's gospel. The other two are from Mary – as she learns that she will bear the Christ, and Simeon when he sees the baby Jesus in the temple.

This Benedictus finds Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer, mute since learning of his fatherhood, presenting John in the temple and offering this wonderful song of praise – proclaiming that God is God who is active in all history – past, present and future.

**READ LUKE 1:68-79**

Zechariah proclaims a message of God's faithfulness ... a message of God's way of salvation ... that God's way is a way of peace.

Here, in the midst of a period of extreme Roman domination, Zechariah announces a different way ... a different salvation ... a different sort of

leadership ... the way of peace.

In various guises, the Roman way, the domination way has continued ever since – down through the scars and pain of history.

[SCREEN IMAGES]

We despair – has anything changed?

Yes, it has! Dehumanizing and corrupt regimes have toppled.

Alongside the acts of violence and oppression (give examples) we can list countless acts of compassion, of reconciliation, of mercy ... many done in the name of Christ, the prince of peace. That's the sort of leadership this benedictus calls us to.

In a world of consumerism, cynicism, narcissism and every other possible "ism" we must celebrate God's way of compassion, reconciliation and mercy.

We must live our lives as peacemakers.

There's always more to do.

Our National Council of Churches here in Australia has a program called Act for Peace. It's behind the Christmas Bowl each year.

It works with the Thailand Burma Border Consortium who seeks to bring aid, dignity and justice to people from Burma/Myanmar now taking refuge from ethnic persecution. Act for Peace has not only given material aid but over the past two years noted significant steps towards achieving a negotiated 60 years of conflict.

The world rejoiced a few years back when Aung San Suu Kyi was released ... evidence of a softening in the government's resolve. We pray this will continue.

Old Zechariah proclaims,

And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Most High; for you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the forgiveness of their sins. By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

As followers of Christ, we are called to be in solidarity not with those who maintain that "might is right", that "big is beautiful", but with those who seek the way of peace and reconciliation ... without violence ... with those who practice mercy and compassion ... especially with those most in need.

We stand with Jesus ... like John the Baptizer long, along ago in our lives and in our prayers, you and I – servant leaders together – we point to Christ Jesus; Christ who not only proclaims, but lives out the values of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus who says to God's people throughout the pages of history as he says to us this night:

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy. “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

May that be our lives ... may that be our kingdom story ... as disciples of the welcoming, dying, rising Jesus Christ.

And may we know

the tender mercy of our God

May we who in some way sit in darkness and the shadow of death know

the light of God

and may God guide our feet into the way of peace.”