

## PEACE UNWRAPPED

Welcome to this reflection about the third fruit of the Spirit, peace.

What is peace? It can be a feeling. Most of us know what it is to feel peaceful. You might say it is a pleasant but neutral state - neither stressed in an angry way, nor excited in a happy way.

What makes us feel peaceful? The things that spring to mind in no particular order are relaxing on holiday, watching a sunset, going for a walk in the countryside, listening to gentle music, staring at the sea, stroking a cat etc.

Then there is the sort of peace that is not just a feeling, but a real, physical end to a real, physical stressful thing, like peace after a war.

You might say that peace, the fruit of the Spirit, like joy, the fruit of the Spirit, is not exactly a feeling, but more a spiritual state. It is strongly linked to the knowledge that in Jesus, all will be well in the end. Something like peace of mind.

Here is a quote from C S Lewis about peace.

"Life with God is not immunity from difficulties but peace in difficulties."

Having faith in Jesus does not make our difficulties go away, but does perhaps help us view them from a more eternal perspective. And therefore feel more relaxed.

Which parts of the Bible makes us feel peaceful? Some of the psalms do that. The best known is the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm. This psalm was written by King David, who committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged for her husband Uriah to die in battle. And yet God forgave him and loved him. He could never have written this psalm otherwise. And God's forgiveness gave him peace.

Even if we think we know it well, reading it always helps.

So find a Bible and **read the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm.....**

And then think about it.

For David, the shepherd was God. For us the shepherd is Jesus, who identified completely with God when he called himself "the good shepherd".

Green pastures and quiet waters make me think about the River Meon in our garden and the meadow with sheep behind the river.

A path of righteousness is the best path I can imagine walking on because if we are righteous, then God will be happy with us. Try walking along a path in the countryside round here, and imagining that it is a path of righteousness. The other day as we walked across the fields, I imagined that the countryside was the Creator, the sun was Jesus and the wind was the Holy Spirit. I felt immersed in God.

Not fearing evil is reassuring when one is feeling a bit afraid.

God gives us a massive welcome into his kingdom. ("You prepare a table before me" etc.). And we will be with him forever.

I challenge anyone not to feel a deep sense of peace after reading that!

One good quote about peace is from the Book of Numbers. The Book of Numbers was probably written by Moses about 1,400 years before Jesus. It is about how the Israelites prepared to enter the promised land, sinned and were punished. This part is God telling Moses and Aaron how they should bless the Israelites. We say it in church to bless each other.

"The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you, and be gracious to you. The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace." (Numbers 6 v 24-26)

Doesn't that make you feel peaceful!

One of Jesus's most famous sayings is,

"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword", (Matthew 10 v 34)

This meant that there would be arguments between followers of Jesus and others, and wars in his name, like the Crusades. So there would not be physical peace.

But there would be spiritual peace.

"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 v 27)

This peace is there for everyone who follows Jesus and it is not only for when things are going well, but also when they are not. We know that ultimately all will be well.

Many people draw parallels between the situation we are in now and the Second World War. There are similarities and differences. As we are focussing on peace, one encouraging thought I had is that in the **peace** that followed the war, people were able to claim social security, council houses were built and the NHS was founded. Much of this would probably not have happened without the war. So in the **peace** that followed the war, some good things happened.

If we draw a parallel between the situation we are in now and something in the Bible, again focussing on peace, we might think of the story in Exodus when God sent plagues upon the Egyptians to persuade them to set the Israelites free. You could say it was a sort of battle with God fighting against Pharaoh. God won the battle and in the **peace** after the battle, the Israelites were freed. So in the **peace** that followed the battle something good happened.

When our battle with the virus is over, in the peace that follows, let us pray that something very good will happen to this world.

Dear Lord

Thank you for this world. Thank you for all the birds and animals and plants.

Thank you for those we love.

Please comfort those who are suffering.

We pray for wisdom for our politicians, scientists and doctors.

We pray that we will find your route out of all this and will be able to adjust to living differently.

And above all we pray that something very good will eventually come out of all this.

May we be at peace.

Through Jesus Christ

Amen