

Peacemakers

Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us only sky

Imagine all the people

Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope someday you'll join us

And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions

I wonder if you can

No need for greed or hunger

A brotherhood of man

Imagine all the people

Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer

But I'm not the only one

I hope someday you'll join us

And the world will live as one

John Lennon asked us to imagine living in a utopia on earth, where all the people share the entire world and its resources, to live equally and peacefully as one. Peace is understood as the lack of relational conflict/war/violence, as absence of worries/anxieties/tension/stress/trouble, as economic equality, socio-political harmony.

But every day we witness and hear about frictions between nations, between family members, between husbands and wives, between siblings, between relatives, between neighbours, between Protestants and Catholics, between different Christian denominations and missions agencies, between friends and colleagues, between males and females, between the rich and the poor, between the oppressed and the oppressors; we have conflicts and rivalries of all kinds everywhere.

The biblical concept of peace denotes the absence of quarrel, a sense of security, tranquility or serenity, the acts of reconciliation and forgiveness; peace includes individual and community wholeness or well-being that is grounded upon God's expectation of His creation; it points to the proper ordering of society.

Such peace cannot be generated by man alone; it takes supernatural works of God. And the prophet Isaiah, 700 yrs. Before the birth of Christ, pointed to God's grand story of the restoration of such world of peace in the coming of the messiah, Jesus the Prince of Peace.

Is.9⁶ For to us a child is born ... and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called ... Prince of Peace.
^{11:1}A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse ...⁶ The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. ⁷ The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ The infant will play near the cobra's den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest. ⁹ They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

As we continue to look at Paul's teaching on how God's people participate in this grand story of cosmic restoration, we are reminded that this Prince of Peace who had brought God's tomorrow today, and His people are entrusted with a peace mission as Peacemakers.

Paul writes, ^{Col. 3:15} Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace ...

The state of shalom is the state of flourishing in all dimensions of one's existence. [**Nicholas Wolterstorff**]

Shalom/peace is God's vision of how His whole creation ought to be and a call to individual life or character-transformation, social or community-transformation, and cosmic or world-transformation.

No human being can produce or engineer this peace; the bible teaching on 'salvation' or 'redemption' is about God's initiative to restore the whole cosmos to its wholeness, "the state of flourishing in all dimensions of one's existence" – a cosmos of peace.

This sense of shalom "rules" our hearts [the core of our being where decisions are made according to what we value most], i.e., the umpire who tells us what and how we ought to live life that reflects the original intent and example of the Triune God, Father, Son, & Holy Spirit living in peace!

^{Col. 3:15} Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace ... ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts" is parallel to "let the message [logos] of Christ dwell among you". Here

we reminded by what Jesus taught about peace in the last days before His ascension recorded in the Gospel of John:

Peace ignites our intrinsic HOPE for a better future in the midst of fear and adversity.

Jn. 14:27 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 ... ^{16:33} I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Jesus' words touch the core of our being and ignite the hope for a better future that only He can bring – "I have overcome the world [i.e., anything that rejects or is against God]", as the disciples would soon experience the cosmic power of the resurrected Jesus.

On the first Good Friday, in the face of the death of their leader, the desertion of close friends and families, and the disappearance of his body, the disciples were *drowning in the downward spiral of FEAR fueled by a relentless sense of despair and hopelessness!* Their hope was crushed, their aspiration vanished, their vitality zapped, their purpose and goal in life blurred – until the risen Jesus appeared to them.

The message of peace Jesus gives to the band of disciples is loaded with significance for his followers! It is equally significant to us today, especially when we are daily

reminded by the media that we are constantly living in the midst of unrest and confusion, in the absence of socio-political as well as personal peace!

We can live without air for a few minutes, without water for a week, without food for six weeks, but we can't live without hope for a lifetime! We are constantly looking for clues, hoping to get something to hang on to, some solutions or answers to life's mysteries. The resurrection-peace of Jesus offers hope for a better future, a peace of mind, for HOPE is "an anchor of the soul" (Heb. 6:19) – knowing that "in all things God works for the good of those who love him", and that "in an these things we are more than conquerors" – that is, having that confidence and certainty that nothing fazes us.

Other men see only a hopeless end, but the Christian rejoices in an endless hope. [Gilbert Beenken]

Would people in Markham see Cornerstone as a shalom-community of hope?

to Jesus' message of peace to the disciples: The disciples were acted like "freedom fighters" gone AWOL, deserters who were totally demoralized, dejected, and disgraced because of their cowardice and denials of their own leader/master!

In light of their cowardice, desertion, guilt and shame for what they'd done, when Jesus appeared to them the first

question that might come to their minds would be, “What will Jesus do to us?” The fear of the authorities, of death, is now compounded by the confrontation of their once crucified but now risen Master-Leader!

Peace generates an exuberant JOY of God’s acceptance and forgiveness.

Jn. 20:19 Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” ...²⁰ he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.

Jesus’ message – twice emphasized in the passage – “Peace be with you!” This breaks the ice with the disciples and communicates grace and mercy, relieves their anguish souls, re-establishes a tender and caring relationship.

It shouts *a message of acceptance and forgiveness; Jesus’ resurrection presents second chances – a NEW beginning for even the worse of humanity!* It is time for rejoicing!! Jesus’ resurrection-peace causes us to rejoice in a new beginning with the world restoring Prince of Peace – not a dead religious leader or great moral teacher-philosopher.

Would people in Markham see Cornerstone as a shalom-community of joy – people who are freed from guilt & shame, from slavery to voices other than God’s, from self-centeredness, and “back into the game” (cf. Pastor Jeremy)?

Now the hope of a better future is combined with the joy of being accepted, forgiven, and given a fresh start. If you were there as one of them, wouldn’t you think that it would be “as good as it gets”? As we shall see, the best is yet to come. For if that is “as good as it gets” it’d be overly individualistic and consumerist, like receiving an eternal life insurance policy for present enjoyment. The gifts of hope and joy are not for private and personal consumption but for a mission!

Peace affirms Christ’s indwelling presence to enable our LIFE MISSION.

²¹Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.”

When their hope was crushed and their leader defeated – so they thought - they abandoned their cause and mission, they lost their purpose of living, they were in a rut, moping around aimlessly and even returning to their former trade – they were dying inside and out! Jesus’ resurrection reassures them of their calling, their life mission! *On Easter Sunday, from a band of zombies they were commissioned [i.e., sent out] to be a legion of peace, proclaiming the power and demonstrating life living in the full because of what their once dead but now Risen Christ had accomplished.*

But just as the eternal, invisible God the Father sent His Son from heaven to earth, *Jesus now sends all his followers into the world*. In Jn. 20:21 we read: “Again Jesus said, ‘Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.’” *We are made for a mission patterned after the peace mission of Jesus!* How can the church – God’s people – live out their identity and calling as peacemakers? This is a daring adventure!!

Col. 3:17 *And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*

The answer is simple – whatever we do, in word or deed, do it in His name! Everything is about peacemaking – contributing to the state of flourishing in all of life.

Paul actually helps us to move from the general to the specifics in this passage – and here we get to four life applications side of the message:

A vibrant corporate worship.

Col. 3:15 *Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the*

name of the Lord Jesus, *giving thanks* to God the Father through him.

Here the language of corporate worship is clear: God-focused thanksgiving prayers, Christ-centered words/teaching, mutual admonishing, Spirit-inspired songs and praises. But this kind of vibrant worship is also an expression of “evangelism” – peacemaking outreach – when guests attend and experience the dynamics of Christian gathering.

Cf. A weekly “snoozing parishioner”; recent critique of a couple who was disturbed by what he witnessed during our worship service.

There’s a mutual responsibility for those at the front, on the seats, and behind the scene!

Our corporate gathering is not first of all about getting what we want but bringing the best to worship God, drawing each other closer to Him, being challenging by His word, and encouraging one another to scatter so to take God’s peace we received in or gathering to wherever we go and whatever we do during the rest of the week.

This leads to Paul’s second application:

A wholesome family atmosphere.

Col. 3:18 *Wives, submit yourselves to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord.*¹⁹ *Husbands, love your wives and do not*

be harsh with them.²⁰ Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.²¹ Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged.

Here the roles of father, mother, and children are crucial for testing of our Christian faith, especially when our homes sometimes are like war zones than peace zones – a wholesome family atmosphere generates, nourishes, and sustains faith and obedience, growth toward Jesus-like maturity. While we don't want to undermine the importance of regular corporate gathering of God's people, much of our life is forged in the context of our family, i.e., the primary context in which the dynamics of faith is seen in character formation and community transformation.

Cf. Reg Bibby's diachronic survey of church retention of youth, approx. 25% at best.

I would like to encourage you to sign up for the Love & Respect seminar, no matter how long you have been married, or if you have children or not.

Paul's third application concerns our vocational calling:

A God-honouring vocational testimony

Col.3:22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.

²³ Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as

working for the Lord, not for human masters,²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

We “work” for different reasons, good and bad; but ultimately we must keep in mind that in our vocation or life calling we are testifying before the watching world how we are stewarding God-given talents and abilities to contribute toward “the state of flourishing” in our workplace; next to our family context is our offices/schools/homes where we spend most of the day. That's our peace mission field!

Sign up for Living Your Strength workshop. Last year we had 90+ took this workshop and a small group to further explore how they could maximize their strengths in their life callings. We would like to get everyone to participate and provide opportunities to do the same this year.

The fourth application is our prayerful posture toward our neighbours – “outsiders”:

A prayerful attention to our neighbours.

Col. 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful ...⁵ Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.⁶ Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.

Paul emphasizes the important of prayer, esp. for opportunity, wisdom, and sensitivity as we engage our neighbours [a presupposition, since we're not called to a peace mission to nowhere].

Pray for Easter Family Fun Fair and the upcoming 40 Days Join God in the Neighbourhood Campaign

Conclusion: Cf. Rev. Douglass M. Bailey about a story of some Catholic nuns in Cleveland, Ohio, who were given a free vacation to the Rocky Mountains. They were awed by the glory of the mountains. They would stop, ponder and behold the majesty of the scenery. However, every time the group stopped, they observed that Sister Margaret would move to the edge of the group, disappear for a while, and then return sometime later. So one time they decided to follow her. They watched her as she bent down and reached under a sizable rock, and then turned the rock upside down. When she looked up, the entire Order of nuns was watching her. "Margaret, what are you doing?" they asked. "I'm turning over a rock." she replied. "Why?" they asked. "Do you do that every time?" She answered, "Yes." "Why do you do that?" And she replied: "Because I will never pass this way again, and **it's my intent to have made a difference while I was here. So I turn some rocks over so that this place is different because I passed here.**" (Cf. Rev. Douglass M. Bailey, Sermon: Hard Truth for Advent)

What rocks does Cornerstone have to turn over in the city of Markham for the good of this community and for the world?

What rocks do each one of us need to turn over inside of our hearts in order for God to make a difference in our lives?

God's love and forgiveness; *neither is it sufficient* to avoid personal sin and bad habits. ***We must do something – something pro-active and positive – to demonstrate God's love in Markham and to make this world a better place!***