

## Trinity 13 2024 – That Peace Which the World Cannot Give

Joshua 24 vv 1-18 p240, Ephesians 6 vv 10-20 p1177, John 6 vv 56-69 p1071

I don't often read a book more than once, not deliberately anyway. You know the story and the characters and how the plot is going to unfold. There are, however, some books which are worth reading again, even several times, because they are so good. Some books I re-read by accident, having not realized I'd read them before when I picked them up at the library or on the church bookstall and sometimes they turn out to be better the second time round. Sometimes I re-read because I haven't got anything else to read as in CoViD when the libraries & bookshops were closed. I must have something to read, if it's only the ingredients on the cornflakes packet. Some books, like school textbooks, I had to read several times to get them firmly imprinted on my brain. I had one book called, I think, *Calculus Made Simple* – a misleading title if ever there was one. I don't think I ever made any progress with that. Re-reading would have been pointless.

The Bible and the Prayer Book are different somehow from all other books. I don't know how often I have read them, but there is always more to discover; they are always worth re-reading, especially in the context of worship. The Bible is the Word of God and He quite definitely speaks to us in its pages, the passages we find congenial and those we find more challenging. The services of the Church, the liturgy, the Book of Common Prayer, Common Worship and the service books of other Christian denominations obviously do not have the same authority as the Bible, but God uses them to speak to us as we use them to speak to Him. The more firmly our prayers are grounded in the Bible, the more authentic they are. As you know, I am a great fan of the Book of Common Prayer, which I do believe to be deeply rooted in scriptural truth (although the Bible is infinitely broader than any purely human composition could possibly be), but Common Worship and the liturgies and styles of worship of other churches all have something to teach us, so long as we attend to them in the Light shed by the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ Himself and His written Word.

All this by way of preamble. I was sitting in my garden just before 10.00 a few evenings ago thinking about & praying the Second Collect at Evening Prayer, the one called the Collect for Peace. I have been doing that a lot lately as I have been trying to come to terms with the perturbations brought on by the prospect of my imminent retirement: what should I do with my time and talents when I am no longer Rector of Cuxton and Halling; what does God want me to do with my life; where shall I live; what should be my attitude towards those whose decisions have precipitated this crisis and also towards my friends in the parish and in the wider world; how ought a Christian to think, speak & act? I am well aware that many people face far worse problems than anything I have ever had to contemplate. This Collect for Peace has been for me, nevertheless, a great solace (as have the prayers which precede and follow it) and I believe it is a prayer that anyone might find helpful in any kind of trouble or danger. At that time of night it's dark and I haven't got my books with me anyway. It is good to know these prayers by heart, which one does if one says them regularly. That particular evening I felt that God spoke to me afresh as I spoke to Him in these familiar words.

**O GOD,** from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey

thy commandments, and also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Amen.

*O GOD, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed.* It all comes from God. It is by His grace that we are what we are. All the good within us is His gift to us. I don't have to pull myself up by my own bootstraps. What I have to do is to let go & let God.

*Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give.* It is obvious that an imperfect world cannot give us perfect peace. Only the Prince of Peace can do that. But what is peace? It is health and wealth in the original meaning of those words: wholeness, integrity, well-being. It is the *perfect love* [which] *casteth out fear*. It is that eternal Sabbath rest which *remaineth for the people of God*. It is *the peace of God which passeth all understanding* [which] *shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus*.

The peace which God gives, *the peace which the world cannot give*, is threefold. It is peace with God. It is peace with oneself. It is peace with other people.

We have peace with God because we are at one with Him in Jesus Christ. *Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ*. No ifs or buts. There is no doubt. There is no fear. *Perfect love casteth out fear*. God loves us perfectly and the only logical response is to love Him, if not yet perfectly, at least to the uttermost of which we are capable as mere human beings.

St Augustine wrote, "You have made us for Yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless till they find their rest in You." *There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God. Where shall wisdom be found? Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.* As we grow closer to God, holy fear is swallowed up in holy love. To be at peace with God is to be at peace with ourselves. Peace with God is our health, our wealth, our integrity, our well-being. We are made whole through faith in Him, through the faith which is His gift to us.

To be at peace with God and with ourselves is to be at peace with other people. *Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.* How we treat other people is the way we treat Jesus. The closer we grow to Jesus, the more like Him we become. As we grow more like Jesus, so we love other people in the way in which we know from our own experience that He loves us.

*That our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments.* We have seen that, at peace with God, we will quite naturally keep His commandments. God is love. *Owe no man anything, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.*

*That both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies.* At its most basic, we think of peace as the absence of strife. Who or what are our enemies? Perhaps there are human beings who actively hate us or, at any rate, dislike us. Millions of people live in countries which are at war. Some people might seem like enemies to us because they thwart our desires or because they are our rivals for what we want. Other enemies are sin, the world & the devil, temptation, selfishness, greed, an unforgiving spirit, lust maybe, an inferiority complex, pride, irrational fears, laziness, a propensity to anger, dishonesty and so on and so forth.

*And also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness.* We can't always expect to be free of mortal enemies or of what St Paul calls the *lusts of the flesh*, those ordinary human desires which we shall not finally overcome *till all of life is over and our work on earth is done*, but we need not fear our enemies so long as we have faith that *God is faithful who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able.*

*Through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour.* It all comes from God. It is by His grace that we are what we are. Thankfully my dwelling in the peace of God doesn't depend on my merits, either here on earth or in eternity. I wouldn't know much peace if it did. *There is no peace, saith the LORD, for the wicked.* My peace doesn't depend on my merits. Peace with God depends on the merits of Jesus Christ alone. And that's Good News, isn't it? You don't have to deserve Christ's peace. Whoever you are, what you need to do in order to experience that *peace which the world cannot give* is simply to entrust your life to Jesus Christ.

*Amen.*