***Joy is the Measure
December 27 2015 Peace Sunday
Meadowvale Community Christian Reformed Church
Peter Noteboom***

**Colossians 3:12-17**

### Living as Those Made Alive in Christ

***12****Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.*

***13****Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

***14****And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*

***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.*

**Peace: How do we know we know?**

When Jeanette, Reuben, Jude and I first moved to Canada 20 years ago I was a student at the Institute for Christian Studies. Jeanette and I moved to Canada from West Africa where we had been “on the front lines” we thought, of peace and justice work: coordinating urgent relief responses to the war in Liberia, responding to the exploding hiv/aids crisis, and taking the long view on addressing poverty: community self-help work in Niger. What we were beginning to discover then was that the fingers pointing to the causes of poverty and war were directed North.

In Canada, on the hunt for a more robust learning approach and political philosophy, Jeanette and I both registered for graduate school programs. When preparing for the Sunday service today, I remembered “reading over the shoulder” of Bob Sweetman, Professor of the History of Christian Philosophy. The most memorable course for me was on Christian mysticism where we read texts from the 13th and 14th century Christian mystics who sought to experience God in an immediate, or an unmediated, or direct way, such as Meister Eckhart. When preparing for this service, phrases from Meister Eckhart’s Christmas sermon came to mind about Christ being reborn in us again and again.

Meister Eckhart

“What good is it to me if Mary gave birth to the son of God fourteen hundred years ago and I do not also give birth to God in my time and in my culture?”

“We are all meant to be mothers of God. For God is always needing to be born.”

What Meister Eckhart went on to write is that when God, in all God’s awesomeness and stillness, is reborn in us then that looks like true peace.

We know from Peter Reitsma’s dream, however, that what peace looks like can still be puzzling, it can still take some discernment, it can still take some experience to interpret and “read the signs of God’s kingdom,” or the signs of living in the world as those made alive in Christ, or articulating and expressing a faith in peace.

May invite you to return, with this brief introduction in mind, to Colossians and Paul’s articulation of a faith in peace, of living as those made alive in Christ?

* *Read* Colossians 3:12-17 and *underline* those words or phrases that tell us or show us, are signs, of living in the world as those made alive in Christ.
* Then *circle* two or three words or phrases that seem especially important for you personally when God is reborn in you in this time and in this culture.
* *Show* your neighbour what you’ve circled:
*Why were those two or three words or phrases so important for you personally at this time and in this culture?*
* We’ll hear and express gratitude for a few of those signs…

**Beware False Hopes, False Beliefs, False Gods Being Born In Us**In our culture today I see that there are two other prominent, competing belief systems (underground convictions or commitments we all carry around) vying for a place in our hearts: faith in security and faith in wealth.

*The faith in security through the projection of force and violence*In this belief system overwhelming force, the suppression of violence through whatever means necessary, brings about peace. Bomb them into submission (Vietnam), kill them off or remove them as a people (Indigenous Peoples in the Americas), a holocaust (gypsies, gay people, and Jewish people), shock and awe (Iraq). These are all expressions of a belief system that proposes that true peace arrives through the imposition of one system through force. This ideology often takes the shape of a naïve idealism that has fueled many conflicts, the production of ever more destructive weapons systems, the ideology of nuclear deterrence: a belief that gunpowder, or fuel bombs like daisy cutters, or even nuclear weapons, can bring peace. Despite the evident contradictions the belief persists.

In personal terms, I see this translates into a deadly serious belief in personal protection, the right to carry a gun, belligerent protests or the overwhelming use of unnecessary police force.

This is a faith, a belief system, we should be alert for: listen critically for its tones of simplicity, of force as the only solution, of a reliance on technology to project and bring about peace.

Remember: in the Garden of Gethsemane Jesus says, “put down your sword.”

*Faith in wealth and possession*The other prominent false belief system is a faith in wealth, that money can solve our problems, or that treasure can bring about peace and happiness rather than relationships of reconciliation and justice.

The faith in the possession of wealth holds out the promise of pleasure, of peace and prosperity through numbers and zeroes in a bank account, the thoughtless consumption of energy, the bling of luxury goods, the ownership and control of property, a Doctrine of Discovery. In public policy this can sound like an exclusive emphasis on numbers in the economy (rather than the rules of God’s household, the original meaning of economy), of an exclusive focus on job creation, an absolute claim on property and property rights including life forms, or a protection of extractive industries at all costs. Beware of the simple, apparently self-evident confidence of this faith: “there is no alternative,” “we have no choice,” or the careful critique of others as “unrealistic.”

Remember: Jesus says in the public square near the temple, “Give back to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”

**Peacemaking: Public Witness and Work**In 2002, as the drum beats for military intervention in Iraq were booming louder and louder, many church people organized with others to oppose Canada intervening militarily in Iraq. Later, we learned that the voice of people of faith in Canada was decisive for Prime Minister Chretien in deciding not to join the military intervention in Iraq in 2003.

Around this time, several meetings were organized in the CRCNA community. Those meetings led to the formation of a synod study committee on peace and war that was received and adopted by synod in 2006. My favorite paragraph in that Peace and War report is a quotation from an earlier statement made in 1977 and expresses well for me what it means to be peacemakers (every generation or so our witness needs to be born again in our culture):

*CRC members are exhorted to be peacemakers: We who claim his [Christ’s] name must live peaceably ourselves, furnishing to the world conspicuous examples of peace-loving, harmonious living, and must also privately and publicly denounce war and strive to prevent it by prayer, by redressing the grievances of oppressed people, by prophetic calls to peace, by urging the faithful exercise of diplomacy, by entering the political arena ourselves, and by strong appeals to all in high places to resolve tensions by peaceful means. Christians must be reconcilers.* (Acts of Synod 1977, p. 558)

At The Canadian Council of Churches where I am the Deputy General Secretary, I have the responsibility and privilege to facilitate and coordinate the efforts of the 25 member churches working together on the peace and justice issues of the day. That means I draw on Christian traditions of human rights, reconciliation, peacebuilding, intercultural ministry, dialogue, diversity, the role of government, diplomacy, responsibility to God and others for one another (my brother’s keeper), creation care, human dignity of all, respect for life, and the ultimate sovereignty of God. Christians and all humanity have a wealth of peacebuilding traditions at our fingertips to employ to the challenges of our culture today.

*Two prominent examples from 2015*When the question was reopened regarding Canada’s military response to the killings of religious minorities in Northern Iraq and the rise of ISIS, Canadian churches came together to write Prime Minister Stephen Harper in Easter this year. Copies of the letter are available for your review and discernment.

In preparation for the two major United Nations events of 2015 - The Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September and the Climate Change Conference in Paris in December, The Canadian Council of Churches wrote to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau together with the leaders of many other faith communities on promoting climate justice and ending poverty in Canada, and reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Copies of the letter and statement are available for your review and discernment.

**Peace in Meadowvale Community Christian Reformed Church:
A Garden of Joy and Delight**

Let me suggest the visual of the Garden of Eden as the Biblical vision of peace, of Shalom.

Nicholas Wolterstorff, another giant in the Reformed tradition of Christian peacemaking, writes that a community of shalom is a responsible community: where shalom exists we enact our responsibilities to one another, to God, to nature. But shalom is fully present only where there is delight and joy in those relationships (Until Justice and Peace Embrace).

Nick wrote that this means the delight in the physical world (colours, shapes, lines, beauty), is a sign of God’s Kingdom of shalom, is like a Garden of Eden where the Lord God made to grow every three that is *pleasant* to the sight and good for food. Beauty is a measure of peace.

[Meister Eckhart](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/73092.Meister_Eckhart)
“When the Soul wants to experience something she throws out an image in front of her and then steps into it.”

Could it be that one of your charisma’s as a congregation, one of your gifts and callings, is to throw out an image of peace so we can step into it?

Could it be that one of your charisma’s as a congregation, one of your gifts and callings, is to throw out an image of peace (of God reborn in us, in our time, in our culture) so we can step into it?

**Joy is the Measure**Let me also suggest that alongside delight, joy is also the measure, the way we know true peace is present, that God is being reborn.

How do you know you are right on, doing what folks truly need for their life and yours?

Jane Vella, another of my inspiring teachers wrote that “joy” is the measure, the way we know. Paraphrased here:

*I* *feel and realize deep joy in learning and teaching - seeing groups of adults awakening, challenging one another, arguing an issue, sharing very diverse perspectives.  When this happens, my heart leaps with joy.  And indeed, I know.*

It is not enough to simply believe in peace or peacebuilding practices: we test them daily in our life and work.   We are like scientists, on the cutting edge of research and practice.  How do we know?

*Chosen*

*holy*

*dearly loved*

 *compassion*

*kindness*

*humility*

*gentleness*

*patience.*

*Bear with each other*

 *forgive one another*

*Forgive as the Lord forgave you*

*Love*

*perfect unity*

*peace of Christ*

*one body*

*peace*

*thankful*

*message of Christ dwells*

*teach*

*admonish one another*

*wisdom*

*psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit*

*singing to God*

*gratitude in your hearts*

*do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus*

 *giving thanks to God*

I propose:  Joy is the measure.

**Prayers of Gratitude**When have you experienced joy lately? How is joy a measure of peace, a way to know that true peace is present**?**

[Meister Eckhart](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/73092.Meister_Eckhart)
“If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank you," that would suffice.”

I invite you to spend time now, in 2 x 2 prayer in prayers of gratitude, of “thank you,” for God reborn in us again and again, for peace shining through our lives personally and together, and for the signs of peace present, acknowledged and practiced, for joy.

**Psalm 148**

***1****Praise the Lord.*

*Praise the Lord from the heavens;
    praise him in the heights above.****2****Praise him, all his angels;
    praise him, all his heavenly hosts.****3****Praise him, sun and moon;
    praise him, all you shining stars.****4****Praise him, you highest heavens
    and you waters above the skies.*

***5****Let them praise the name of the Lord,
    for at his command they were created,****6****and he established them for ever and ever—
    he issued a decree that will never pass away.*

***7****Praise the Lord from the earth,
    you great sea creatures and all ocean depths,****8****lightning and hail, snow and clouds,
    stormy winds that do his bidding,****9****you mountains and all hills,
    fruit trees and all cedars,****10****wild animals and all cattle,
    small creatures and flying birds,****11****kings of the earth and all nations,
    you princes and all rulers on earth,****12****young men and women,
    old men and children.*

***13****Let them praise the name of the Lord,
    for his name alone is exalted;
    his splendor is above the earth and the heavens.****14****And he has raised up for his people a horn,
    the praise of all his faithful servants,
    of Israel, the people close to his heart.*

*Praise the Lord.*