

Celebration of St Luke. 21 October 2018. Peace to this house. (Luke 10:1-9)

Peace to this house. AD 29. I wonder what the followers of Jesus thought when they heard those words to be spoken. I wonder what they thought and felt as they entered into the places they visited soon after. Peace to this house. In first century Palestine that was part of a common greeting, but this was offered as something more, a message and an invitation from Jesus, the starting point of a conversation about Jesus and being recalled into a renewed relationship with God.

October AD 84. Luke, who wrote these words about peace, who is patron of this building in which we gather, who we remember today, was (possibly) martyred for his faith in Jesus. What would his last words have been? Probably not a curse on those who were killing him. A modern saint who I have met was killed some years ago. A friend who was with him at the time told me that his last words were simple "Peace. Peace." I wonder if Luke, like Brother Roger of Taizé, like Jesus from the cross, would have prayed peace on those who were doing terrible things.

Early second century AD. A group of Christians entered a large building. Not quite a house. Actually a kind of theatre. An interesting place to visit, except that they were the entertainment. Peace to this house. I wonder if they prayed that as they entered the Coliseum in Rome. What would the desire and prayer for peace have meant at that time? Perhaps that the hearts of those who seemed so accustomed to violence would be turned to something more?

Early fourth century Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus, better known now as Saint Jerome, entered the house of peace and sat and wrote. Bethlehem, the House of Peace, was where Jerome translated the Bible into Latin from the available Hebrew and Greek manuscripts. I wonder if, when he got to this passage, sitting in the House of Peace, he said aloud those words, peace to this house. The church was about to enter a time of peace, the Roman Empire was about to be transformed into the house of Christendom. What did peace mean for Jerome and for the others of that time? Was it just for the persecutions to end or did they see more?

Leaping forward across the centuries, Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1549, sitting in his study writing and preparing the first version of the Book of Common Prayer, translating passages from Latin, choosing the passages which would be used on days like this when we remember the Saints, choosing this passage for the celebration of St Luke. Peace to this house. After so many years of turmoil in the church there was a hope for peace and an end to conflict. There was a lot more conflict to come though. Peace to this house would have been more than just remembering the words spoken by Jesus and by the early Christians and by others down the ages. Peace to this house would have been more than a desire for the present turmoil to stop. Peace to this house was and always is a prayer which looks forwards.

October 18 1857. The feast day of St Luke was a Sunday that year. Did the people who gathered in the first St Luke's celebrate with these same readings, remembering Luke, praying peace to this house on their new house of worship? Life in those days was hard, often not at all peaceful, full of anxiety and fragility. What would that prayer, peace to this house, have meant to the first people of St Luke's in this place? Peace came in having a secure and solid place to gather for worship, some stability for the life of the church. Peace to this house would also have been a prayer for this place to be and come to be seen as an oasis, a place of peace, a place to come and find peace whatever was happening in the world around. Peace to this house was a prayer for the life and ministry of the people of St Luke here in Toowoomba, peace as leaven mixed into the dough of community.

October 1914. Peace to this house. On that first St Luke's day after the outbreak of the First World War, and over each of the following four years, the prayer, peace to this house, would have been a prayer for the house of the nation, a prayer for peace for the community of nations, for the world, that peace would come, that war would cease. Even in 1918, close to the end of the war which was supposed to end all wars, there was still that fervent cry for peace. Many people were still killed in those weeks which remained of that war.

Did November 11 1918 bring peace? No. Not straight away. Not really for many decades because the seeds of the Second World War were sown in the type of enforced peace which was enacted in 1918. There was no peace on the household of nations. No peace, for there were still so many rumblings of violence. No peace in people's hearts because resentment and fear and hatred remained.

October 1945. Peace had come. The hostilities had ceased in Europe and across the Pacific. The waves of troops and destruction which swept into Germany from the east and West and South forced the beginnings of peace. The bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki brought such violence that peace was declared. Had peace really come? Not for many people. The reconstruction of the devastated countries, devastated lives, took many years. The reorganisation of international relations to try to ensure that such conflicts would not happen again continues to this day. Have those efforts brought peace? They have in a way, yet there has been warfare somewhere in the world continuously since 1945.

Peace to this house. It is a prayer offered in hope. What did peace mean at the end of the Second World War, and at any of these other times? Was it just the end of the outward signs of a lack of peace? Was it just a prayer for the end of violence?

Peace is never just the end of violence. Peace, as we find the theme throughout the Bible, is always about far more than smoothing over troubled waters. Peace, the peace of God, the peace offered and prayed and brought into each house, is something creative and hopeful. To bring peace, to offer peace, to pray for peace is to long for the presence of justice and mercy and love. Peace without these things is not real peace. That was a bit part of the problem at the end of the First World War. There was no justice or mercy in the Treaty of Versailles. And so there was no peace.

Peace to this house. This church and this community and each of our houses. Peace. What will that mean? What does that look like? What will be present in our houses when there is peace, God's peace, there? There may still be disagreements. None of us are perfect and we are not identical. We will still disagree. But honest and open disagreement need not destabilise peace. In houses of peace there will be commitment to one another. We will be hopeful, joyful, always looking to build one another up. There will be justice and mercy and love.

Peace to this house. Peace to you, and me, and us together. Peace, which will allow space to hope. Peace, so that we will be leaven in the community around us. Peace, offered to and with and through our being here.

Be recalled to these words, spoken by Jesus, written down by Luke, shared and offered by faithful people throughout the ages, offered as thanksgiving and as prayer, spoken here by us and among us. Peace to this house. May it remain, and flourish and grow!

Amen

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