

The Canberra Rotary Peace Bell in Nara Peace park on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin hosts a number of events. Recently there was Remembrance of Hiroshima & Nagasaki. The one I find really significant, and one I have participated in a number of times as a member of the choir, A Chorus of Women, is the UN International Day of Peace, held in September; on that one day all 27 World Peace Bells are struck.

Part of the ceremony involves individuals striking the bell, interspersed with one verse at a time of the poem - or prayer - by the Chinese philosopher Lao-tse, writing in C6 BCE. This poem runs as follows:

*If there is to be peace in the world,
there must be peace in the nations.*

*If there is to be peace in the nations,
there must be peace in the cities.*

*If there is to be peace in the cities,
there must be peace between neighbours.*

*If there is to be peace between neighbours,
there must be peace in the home.*

*If there is to be peace in the home,
there must be peace in the heart.*

That last line, *there must be peace in the heart*, is echoed in the reading from James ch 3, which also points out where this peaceable nature comes from. That reading contrasts 2 kinds of wisdom: worldly or selfish wisdom vs. wisdom from God. The wisdom from God is described as (and I'm using the JB Phillips translation here) pure, peaceable, gentle,, willing to listen, full of tolerant thoughts and kindly actions, with no breath of favouritism or hint of hypocrisy. The concluding verse (v18) is a kind of summary (and -I'm reading again from JB Phillips' translation): *And the wise are peacemakers who go quietly sowing for a harvest of righteousness - in other people and themselves.*

So creating peace is a process, it takes more than having a peaceable attitude.

I think we've all heard the phrase, The price of peace (or the price of Freedom) is eternal vigilance, a phrase spuriously attributed to Thomas Jefferson, which has been misquoted, or misused, since then.. The idea has merit, in the context safeguarding liberties, but that's a different context..

We need a different kind of vigilance:

- seeking truth and justice
- respect for others' views, and
- looking for voices that aren't being heard, and for alternative points of view or readings of the situation.

The theme for today references a violent world. But we could also describe it as a divided world, where we aren't hearing or respecting others' views.

How did we get to this point? A prime cause has been the erosion of truth and the emergence of a post-truth culture. There's a plethora of competing truth claims, fuelled by social media, enabling fake news and conspiracy theories to spread. (We were reminded of this this week with the shooting of 2 police officers in Porepunkah by someone who identified as a conspiracy theorist) Confirmation bias leads people to ready acceptance of claims confirming their beliefs, and there is the echo chamber effect of only going to sources that fit their beliefs or world view.

Disinformation and misinformation have become more widespread.

Disinformation is information which is false and the person or organisation disseminating it knows it to be untrue. I imagine some of us would put statements by Netanyahu justifying the bombing of hospitals, in this category. Misinformation is also false, but those disseminating it believe it to be true.

With the power of so-called influencers, helped by data analytics and algorithms, disinformation and misinformation proliferate - and in the process, the risk of conflict increases. And if there is no such thing as truth, there is no such thing as a lie - there's only your truth and my truth - and truth can be manufactured or manipulated any way you choose. In his 1980 message for the World Day of Peace, Pope John Paul II, who had seen the worst of both Fascism and Communism, said:

Violence flourishes in lies and needs lies. It seeks to gain respectability in the world by pretexts that nothing to do with its reality and are often contradictory.'

A crisis of truth in turn creates a crisis of trust. Without trust there can be no peace and certainly no reconciliation. Speaking truth builds trust, and is the beginning of peacemaking. We saw that in South Africa, in the working of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission, and was one of the core elements in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

A key element here is dialogue - genuine dialogue, an open encounter. At a personal level this means meeting with and listening to people who may be very different and have very different views, making sure we aren't just in our little bubble, and welcoming opportunities to listen to others and understand what they think and why.

Peace flourishes when we recognise the inherent dignity of every human being. If we want to put that in theology-speak, we would say that means recognising that every person is created in the image of God.

If you are a supporter of Act 4 Peace, the international humanitarian agency of the National Council of Churches (some of us will remember it being once known as Force Ten, referencing the force of a Force 10 cyclone in terms of potential effect on communities,) last month you

would have received your summary of donations. With it was a leaflet, 'Thank you for being a Peacemaker' (with a capital P). I hadn't thought of myself as a peacemaker.

The text of this leaflet affirmed the actions of individuals, inspired by the Gospel.

As a Peacemaker, you are part of a global movement of compassion, solidarity and peace.

However there was more. Overleaf were instructions for making an origami dove. Now origami and me are not a good fit, so I haven't made a dove. But the words of the instructions spoke to me and so I would like to read them, as closing remarks.

As a small token of our gratitude, we hope you enjoy this dove origami - a humble symbol with a powerful meaning. May it serve as a daily reminder of your commitment to acting for peace in the world. As you gently fold this paper dove, consider those who long for peace in the world. As you shape it, may you be reminded that even small acts of kindness ripple out to bring healing and light.

When your dove is complete, hold it in your hands and offer a prayer or reflection for those in need around the world. May it serve as a reminder that peace begins with us, and that through our collective efforts, we can bring hope to the world.