

## **Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> December 2021 – Second Sunday of Advent: PEACE (Isaiah 9:2,6-7, John 14:22-27)**

As a child, one of my favourite TV programmes was Doctor Who. Early evening on Saturday there was only one place I would be – in front of the telly, transfixed by Delia Darbyshire's extraordinary theme music, quite literally from another world. I must confess that my love of the Doctor hasn't lasted into my adult years, though I know many of you will be watching the current series. But probably my favourite part of the show was the idea of the Tardis. I love the idea of something that looks small from the outside, but is actually *way bigger* when you step inside it.

The closest example I can dredge from my own experience is holidaying in a static caravan. When our kids were little we had several great holidays in exotic locations like Walton-on-the-Naze, Paignton and Shanklin on the Isle of Wight, and I was always amazed by the design of these caravans. It was astonishing to step inside the door and find 3 bedrooms, a kitchen, bathroom and lounge-diner fitted into what seemed from the outside like a large box. Everything was designed to maximise the space available. I have to say our kids absolutely loved this accommodation and we had some of the best holidays we've ever had. A thunderstorm sat inside a static is one experience everyone should have in life!

And **this idea of something being much bigger than it looked from the outside goes to the heart of our theme today.** In the Second Sunday of Advent we look at the little word 'Peace': a word most of us love, but one we've domesticated into something warm and cosy, like 'peace and quiet'. The Hebrew word used in our first reading is 'Shalom', and again you may think of that as nothing more than a nice greeting.

But the video we've just watched reminds us that this little word 'peace' – or 'shalom' to use the original biblical word – is **much bigger than we imagine. It means wholeness, completeness, restoration, a renewal of wellbeing.** It involves the cessation of conflict but goes beyond it to putting something better in its place. Like 'hope' last week, it is a noun but can also be used as a verb – in other words shalom is a desired state but also a process of creating restoration – in our lives, in our relationships and in our world.

So when Jesus comes as the Prince of Shalom, this is big stuff! It is the announcement of a global revolution, a new kingdom coming into the world. Under the rule of this prince there will eventually be no end of shalom. It will be a reign of justice and righteousness which eventually extends into eternity. So when hear these familiar words: and 'he will be called... the Prince of Peace', it's not just a natty title: it is **nothing less than an invitation to participate in the renewal of all things.**

And as we look forward to the coming of Christ, let's see that promise of true shalom echoing through the pages of the nativity. Zechariah prophesies that this new messiah will 'guide our feet into the path of *peace*.' The angels over Bethlehem declare: 'on earth *peace* to those on whom his favour rests.' And old Simeon takes baby Jesus in his arms and declares: 'Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in *peace*.' Shalom for ourselves, shalom for our community, shalom for the world.

Nearly all of us hardly ever stop to think what we mean when we use the word 'goodbye' – a shortened version of 'God be with you', and how amazing is that, that Almighty God might be *with us*, close to us, an ever present help and friend: what a declaration of blessing – so when we use 'Shalom' as a greeting what a powerful thing we are declaring: that the Prince of Shalom, of the restoration of all things, has come!

And this Prince of Shalom leaves us his shalom, his peace: 'my peace (the peace I have as the prince of peace) I give to you,' Jesus says in our gospel reading. Again, this is not just an invitation to personal peace: this peace invites us to be shalom-bringers to those around us, because that is what the reign of the peace-bringer is here to do.

There's a lot of headlines around at the moment: Christmas might be cancelled (boo), Christmas is saved (hooray), cancelled (boo), saved (hooray) – day after day. What a lot of rot. Yes, it's convenient shorthand for the social activities we put around the season of 25<sup>th</sup> December. But Christmas itself, the message that the prince of shalom has come and invites us into the renewal of all things: that will happen regardless. Like you, I really hope we get to enjoy some of the usual traditions: but as we face another winter of uncertainty, let's cling like never before to the bigger picture, to what's inside this Tardis of a word: **the Prince of Shalom has come, and this prince gives us, and all who seek him, his peace.**

How silently, how silently, the wondrous gift is given:

so God imparts to human hearts the blessings of his heaven.

No ear may hear his coming, but in this world of sin,

where meek souls will receive him, *still* the dear Christ enters in. Amen.