

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

In the second chapter of the Gospel according to Luke, we are given the traditional Christmas story. And after the description of the birth of our Lord, we are told that the angels told the shepherds that peace was to come by a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Further, the angels predicted this peace will come when we give glory to God in the highest. Peace does not come when the arms race ends. Peace certainly does not come from having the most or the best toys or an abundance of material things. Peace does not even come when a general glow of good will wells up and we all feel good about our neighbors. The angels give us the precondition for peace -- that we give glory to God in the highest.

As powerful as this message is, it is just as important TO WHOM this message of peace was given. It was given to shepherds. They were outcasts from all respectable society. Because of their life in the fields, they were unable to keep all the Jewish laws of ritual cleanliness. Now these particular shepherds were probably pious Jews, but they were still part of an outcast class. It was through these outcasts that God chose to reveal the meaning of Christ's birth. There is an old saying that "war is too important to be left to the general." I suggest that peace is too important to be left to the diplomats. The professionals have messed it up again and again. In giving this message to the shepherds, God bypassed the professional peacemakers. He gave the message and its interpretation to amateurs. We need amateur peacemakers. We need TO BE amateur peacemakers. The great diplomats and ambassadors of two thousand years ago, the councils that met and the peace treaties that were signed are mostly forgotten. But the world still reverberates with the peacemaking message of a group of amateur preachers and peacemakers like the Apostle Paul and Luke himself.

The lesson God has for us is that we need to make peace, first of all, with God. That is where peace begins. We may be running because we are afraid of God. "Fear not," the angel says. The next step is to make peace with our neighbor. We are called to reconciliation in families, between husbands and wives, between parents and children. We are called to political reconciliation between right and left, radical and conservative, the minority and the majority. Finally we need to find that inner peace that comes from being in harmony with ourselves. One dimension of peace is that head and heart and all our conflicting emotions come together.

Finally, in Luke 2:20, we are told that after the shepherds had seen the angels and gone to see the new born baby that was Christ, they returned to their fields. After they had seen such wondrous things, they went back to the commonplace. That is true for us each year at Christmas as we celebrate these events. Where will we be when the excitement and fun are over? How do these events change the lives we lead back on our jobs, our homes, our schools? If we believe the message of the angels, we go back to the ordinary as peacemakers. We begin to bear the message out and become peacemakers.

The Rev. Bert Eaton is Rector of St. Peter's by-the-Sea Episcopal Church, located at 53 W. Broad St. in Swansboro.