

## Peace On Earth

*preached by Rev. Paul Sakasov on July 1, 2018*

Luke 2:8-14

8 In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see - I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: 11 to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger.” 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!”

During the tumultuous years of World War One, the parliament buildings in Ottawa were rebuilt, having been the victim of a great fire. In the rebuilding process the 55 meter Victoria Tower was replaced with the 98 meter Peace Tower. Sitting at the center of Parliament Hill, the Peace Tower, is the gateway to the halls of power in our nation’s capital.

As one enters the parliament buildings, the first message they are supposed to notice are the words etched into the stone wall of the Peace Tower, just above the main entrance, which reads, “He shall have dominion also from sea to sea.” Taken from Psalm 72, these words reflect the vision that undergirded the formation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867.

Immediately above the main entrance is the Memorial Chamber, which was built in memory of the soldiers who lost their lives in the Great War. The theme of this room is summarized by the Scripture verse taken from Ephesians 6 that is written on the altar, “take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day.”

Near the top of the Peace Tower is a 53 bell carillon. These bells range in weight from 2.5 kg to 10,160 kg, which is the weight of a city bus. Of special note, the biggest bell in the carillon rings every hour on the hour, three hundred and sixty five days a year. Inscribed on this bell is the last verse from today’s Scripture reading, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will to men.”

These familiar words, which we read every Christmas, were part of an exuberant act of worship initiated by the heavenly host immediately after the announcement was made to the shepherds that Christ the Lord was born in a manger.

Given this reality, we may ask ourselves, why are these words of worship from the heavenly host written on the weightiest bell in the Peace Tower? Why does the bell with these words of worship written on them ring every hour on the hour from the center of power in Canada? As we give glory to God this morning through our time of worship together, and as we give thanks to God for this beautiful country of ours on Canada Day, let us consider these questions.

As we do so, let us begin by looking at the meaning of Luke 2:14 in the context of God's Word. In doing so, the first question that we need to ask is, "what is the glory of God?"

Responding to this question, the Greek word for "glory" includes such thoughts as splendor, brightness, shining, radiance, brilliance, amazing might, power, praise, honour, status, greatness, wonder, glorious being, benevolent supernatural power, and heaven. All these things comprise the glory of God. Furthermore, putting all of these attributes together, they convey the full weightiness of God.

Having said this, it should be noted that the glory of God is not the product of our theological reflection upon the nature of God. Rather, the glory of God is part of God's essence, and can be experienced by an encounter with the living God who manifests Himself to those upon whom His favour rests. In other words, the glory of God is the full manifestation of God's greatness, grandeur, majesty, and excellence. Furthermore, we experience the glory of God whenever we encounter the person or the actions of the Living God. This is what the Scriptures mean when it refers to the glory of God.

Next question. What does it mean when the angels declared, "Glory to God in the highest?" In responding to this question it will be helpful to re-emphasize that God's glory is not something that is given to Him by human beings or angels. It was already His and will always be His eternally. No one can add to God's glory. It is not possible. For how can anyone add more power to someone who is all powerful? How can anyone add more radiance to someone who is most radiant?

How can anyone add more excellency to someone who is most excellent?

This means that when we give glory to God, and when the angels give glory to God, we are simply giving a public acknowledgment of the weight of God's glory in an act of worship. At the same time we are also celebrating the fact that God's glory is the sun around which all creation finds its orbit. It is this truth that is the source of our freedom, and our life. And when we give glory to God, we express genuine gratitude that this is the state of affairs. For unlike Satan, and all those who walk in his path, who seek to place themselves at the center of their universe, and to ascribe for themselves the glory that belongs to God alone, when we give glory to God we openly celebrate the plainly evident

order in creation and we celebrate the goodness that we receive because of this unshakable foundation.

Adding a little further insight into our pondering of what the Bible means when we encounter the expression “glory to God in the highest,” it will be helpful to note that among Greeks and Romans, the term, “the highest” was a title that would be associated with the Greek gods, and it was a title claimed by Caesar. Thus, when the angels declared “glory to God in the highest” they affirmed the words of Scripture spoken by the prophet Isaiah, who declared that God will not share His glory with anyone. When they spoke these words they declared that all glory belongs to God, not Zeus, and not Caesar. As Jesus taught us to pray, “For Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory.” Forever, and ever. Amen.

Turning our attention to the second phrase of Luke 2:14, after giving glory to God in the highest, the angels pronounced the consequence of God’s glory being acknowledged, which is peace on earth on those whom God favours. Again, we need to ask, what is being stated here?

As we reflect on this question, we should note that in the days of Caesar Augustus, when Jesus was born, the world was experiencing a time of relative peace that was unprecedented. In history books, this forced peace that was created by the overpowering might of the Roman military is known as the “Pax Romana.” At the time, it was quite a feat. However, this peace that Rome created had some problems.

As Epictetus, a leading first century philosopher wrote: “while the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief, and envy. He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace.” In this most critical area, Epictetus declared that “Pax Romana” is nothing more than a cheap substitute for the real peace that human beings desire to possess.

So what is true peace and where does it come from? As we have already stated, true peace is the experience of beholding the glory of God when one encounters the person or the works of God. Furthermore, this peace remains with us as we live our lives in a state of gratitude because we recognize that all honour, glory and power belongs to God. Indeed this is the most life giving and empowering truth we can discover.

Unfortunately, we run into trouble in our lives because our fallen nature is busy trying to establish our personal throne rather than acknowledge God’s throne. We run into trouble because our fallen nature is busy trying to take some of God’s glory for ourselves. As a result of our trying to be God, and as a result of trying to take some of God’s glory for

ourselves in the name of freedom, passion, and self love, we abandon the world of God's order and descend into chaos, condemning ourselves to a life of slavery and unrest.

In such a state, the peace of God that the angels proclaimed will never be ours. For in such a state, we will not be among those whom God favours. This leads us to the last question that Luke 2:14 raises. Upon whom does God's favour rest?

To answer this question, we need to consider the entire passage that we read this morning. Without spending too much time going through all the sentences, and phrases and how they are connected to each other, from the text, the answer to this question is clear.

Those whom God favours, in today's reading from the Gospel of Luke, are people like the shepherds. People who can recognize that the glory of God is most perfectly displayed when God comes to our aid as a helpless baby in a dirty feed trough and not in the power and hubris of mighty Rome and its legions. God's favour rests upon those who recognize the perils of pride and the hope of humility. God's favour rests upon those who not only see how God models this perfect way for us through Christ our Lord, but, who then follow in the footsteps of their Master. God's favour, God's peace, rests upon those who seek to give glory to God for all things in their lives, because all honour, and glory and power belong to God alone.

This is what it means in Luke 2:14 when the angels in worship declared, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" And this is what is meant by the words that are written on the largest bell in the Peace Tower, which rings every hour on the hour from the center of power in our great nation.

And this is why these words of worship were written on this special bell. Because the guns of Europe shattered the false sense of confidence many of the world's elite had placed in progress, reason, science, and education. At this time many people recognized the global pride and arrogance that had resulted in so much loss and suffering. In this moment of devastation, the ancient gospel words were heard afresh and their wisdom recognized.

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors!" This morning as we continue to give glory to God through our time of worship together, and as we continue to give thanks to God for this beautiful country of ours on Canada Day, may we never forget the hard learned lessons of history. And may we as individuals, may we as families, may we as a community of faith, and may we as a country give God all the glory in our lives, and in doing so may the favour of the Lord rest upon us, and may He pour upon us lasting peace.