# Reflection St.Andrew’s on The Terrace, 9 December 2018

***Part 1 – After the readings:***

*In the fifteenth year of the reign of Emperor Tiberius, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea,* etc. etc. etc.

 Luke puts the story in the political and social context of the day – probably around 60 years after the events described.

If we were writing about events 60 years ago as Luke did, we might just say “it was in 1958.’ Or we could say:

 “In the 6th year **of the reign of**  Queen Elizabeth II, when Harold McMillan was Prime Minister of Britain and Walter Nash Prime Minister of New Zealand. And The Right Rev. J.D Salmond was Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of NZ....

If we were old enough to remember back that far or had some knowledge of history, this would help us put the events into **context**. For this story is political – not so much about dwelling on the sin of **individuals,** but challenging systems of oppression, and structures which support injustice.

(Reference: As Rex Hunt\* writes “ SIN takes up residence in **systems of oppression.**
It is propagated by lies. It thrives on **structures of injustice** that would ‘deface’ all in its wake.”

And so Rex Hunt concludes “It is impossible to get to Christmas without first meeting up with John”.

So what do we make of John – the cuzzie-bro of Jesus? John got his ideas while out in the wilderness - the place of isolation and inspiration - did he? Raving on about sin and repentance?

John was the Baptiser – dunking people in the river Jordan – bypassing and challenging the religious authorities. Those cousins sure knew how to stir up trouble for themselves.

So what was the kind of repentance John was calling for? Repentance means *turning around and going in a new direction* – finding new ways of doing things**. And what sort of new direction would there be? And what preparation should be made?**

The writer of Luke picks up the theme of **reversals.** In Chapter 1, in Mary’s Song he writes “the proud will be scattered, mighty Kings will be brought down from their thrones.”

 In writing about John he uses the ***landscape*** as metaphor. Mountains will be flattened and valleys filled, crooked paths will be straightened. So John is the pathfinder – he shows the way. John’s father Zechariah prophesised after his birth that “he (will) guide our steps into the paths of peace”.

Peace – shalom – can only be attained when the established order is challenged and the power structures reversed.

How do we work for peace in the 21st Century?

**Part II**

My example of peace making comes from work as a Social Work Trainer, when employed by Child, Youth and Family (now Oranga Tamariki). My colleagues and I ran a course called Non-Violent Crisis Intervention. It was designed for people working with troubled families and damaged children and focussed on skills in managing potentially violent, escalating behaviour.

The first day focussed on reading body language, tone of voice, and our own responses to aggressive and angry behaviour. How do we notice the signs that someone is upset ***before*** they erupt verbally or physically? What are helpful ways of responding to and defusing upset behaviour, before it escalates into verbal or physical abuse?

I found it interesting as a parent of teenage kids at the time – learning to put positive consequences before negative, therefore pointing out the advantages first – for example “If you get your lunch box together in the next ten minutes, I will be able to give you a ride to school, ” instead of, “If you don’t get your lunch sorted, you will be walking to school”.

**Once when** delivering this course to foster parents, we talked about times when the children in their care were difficult to manage and what the signs were that they were getting upset. One of the foster parents said little at the time, but the next morning he told us he had been thinking of two children he and his wife had in their foster care.

These children had a parent who would make arrangements to see them on Saturdays, but did not always turn up. For the foster parents, Friday nights were a nightmare – the children became increasingly tense and worked up, rude and obstructive and would not go to sleep. He realised the children’s behaviour reflected their anxieties and stress, and changed the way he responded to their behaviour. He sat down with them and listened and gave assurance. Both foster parents were careful not to respond in ways that might wind the children up further. They provided support instead of engaging in the arguments and battles. He was delighted to report that it had worked!

\*Rex Hunt <http://www.rexaehuntprogressive.com/liturgies.html>

Maxine Cunningham

**Reflection 2**

Peacemaking is not something my family members would cite as one of my strengths. In fact, growing up as one of five children was a testing time, with dinner-table arguments a key feature of my Timaru upbringing in the 1960s, usually centering on whose turn it was to do the washing up and who was taking too long in the one bathroom that all 7 of us needed to use before school or work. My mother was a strong, some would say outspoken, defender of human rights, a women’s right to choose and a fierce opponent of the Vietnam War. Her best friend in the street had a husband who served there and came back with what we would now call PTSD, which manifested as a major drinking problem, and their two sons were in danger of being drafted into the war effort on the strength of a ballot process, so I learnt at an early age that war was not a noble cause but something to be avoided at all costs.

At Otago University I marched in various demonstrations, but it wasn’t until I lived in Germany for 4 years that I was able to gain a deeper understanding of what peace means. Easter 1980 at an international Taizé gathering under the Youth for Peace banner in Rome was a pivotal experience for me: silently reflective, musically meditative, ecumenical and extremely uplifting, but it was years later when I returned to Germany to work in the NZ tourist office in Frankfurt and was travelling around Europe with a Maori concert party as part of a New Zealand tourism promotion that I learnt peacemaking is not necessarily a passive thing. Keeping the peace does not mean staying silent or holding your tongue when conflict is brewing. Sometimes peacemaking requires courage, straight talking, structured turn-taking and active listening. The Maori tour party was a group of bubbly, hilarious and talented people ready to burst into song at any moment on the long German motorway stretches between events. But the youngest woman of the party – an attractive, yet shy individual – developed a close bond with the local German bus driver and it was soon apparent that the two had fallen madly in love. This created a huge amount of tension among the other members of the group, all of whom knew – or were related to – her husband back home and could not bear to watch the unfolding romance. Instead of just talking about them behind their backs, or taking her aside in private, one of the kuia in the group convened a hui to discuss the matter. My husband Rob was appointed the neutral observer to chair the meeting. Though he had said very little on the trip, he had clearly made an impression on the group in his quiet way and the older women saw qualities in him that I had not witnessed before. He handled the meeting perfectly. It was a very formal hui held in the boardroom of the hotel we were staying in, with each person seated around the table being invited by the chair to have their say in turn, before a heated discussion ensued and was finally brought to a close by Rob. It was hard to witness the tears that flowed on all sides as the whole thing was thrashed out, but once the air had been cleared, the matter was resolved and next morning the happy band was back singing together on the bus as if nothing had happened. I could not imagine a Pakeha group of people doing this, openly confronting someone about their behavior and discussing it in such a formal way. Most of us feel uncomfortable talking about matters of personal choice or ethical standards. When I later asked Rob how he knew what to do, he explained that when he worked for the Auckland Regional Council one of his jobs was to chair meetings held with various Maori stakeholders, so he was aware they had a preferred process for conflict resolution and sensed that the tour party wanted the same structure applied to this “raruraru” or “stoush”. It was on that same tour that Rob and I later promised the kuia that, if we ever had children, we would take them to kohanga reo and bring them up bilingual. She commented that if there was ever to be real peace in this land between Maori and Pakeha, more Pakeha needed to bridge the gap and language was the best tool for bringing us together. And so it came to pass that both of our children underwent 10 years of early childhood and primary education through the medium of the Maori language, and I think it did them no harm at all. In fact I am sure they are the richer for it.

Peacemaking to me is many things, but it is not the same thing as “being peaceful” or “keeping the peace” by staying silent. Jesus was not afraid to challenge the status quo and nor should we be. I guess it’s just a matter of finding a way to express ourselves in a respectful and non-confrontational manner and resolve our differences when we disagree on the way forward. And maybe we could learn something from the Maori way of handling conflict. Daring to speak out, airing our views honestly, caring about the world around us and repairing wounds when our words or actions cause hurt. Peacemaking in my view is the ultimate act of love.

Sue McRae

**Reflection 3**

***Peacemaking:***

When reflecting on peacemaking and me, I seemed to zero in on things to do with my links with children and young people, who are both our present and our future......

Not long before I retired from secondary school teaching, a friend shared a really positive, affirming quote with me

**I touch the future**

**I teach !**

Since retiring, I still have this quote in mind, but have adapted it slightly to

**I touch the future**

**I am a grandparent!**

So, what I have done, and what I will do towards peacemaking, *will touch the future* .... !

Let me share 3 personal reflections

1. The first relates to a professional course where it was pointed out that too often as teachers and adults, when there is 'agro' going on between young people, we just automatically step in to solve their problems and conflicts .... it's the quick and easy thing to do. But is that really bringing resolution and 'peace' into the situation? We were encouraged, instead, to practice 'third party facilitation' where the two parties in the conflict were brought together to talk face to face. As the third party, it would be my role to facilitate each in turn saying directly to the other (NOT through me!) firstly what they saw as the problem, then how they each felt, and then each to suggest and decide on how the conflict could be resolved. A report back time would be arranged to see if things had resolved satisfactorily. It was always a challenge to get the two parties to talk directly to each other rather than deferring to me by saying 'he did this' or 'she said da-da-di-da'. This is a really respectful win-win peace-making method! It works in the school setting, within the family, and with adults in general. (Incidentally, I can also recommend a 'no moaning' rule for peacekeeping! The two 2 week long school trips I organised for a mix of teenagers and adults travelling south to north through the centre of Australia had the rule of 'no moaning' .... it really contributed to a peaceful, positive time!)
2. A second reflection is to do with how much I appreciated teaching the subjects I did ... Social Studies and Geography ... because there were many opportunities \* to raise students' awareness about differing perspectives and perceptions on issues ***and*** \*to help develop the skill of putting oneself into the shoes of others. It seems to me these are particularly important elements in peacemaking. An example:- A favourite DVD of mine was shown for several years to Year 10 Social Studies classes ... it was to do with an experiment over some months that brought Israeli and Palestinian 11-12 year old children together in a play-chat-eat situation. The DVD documented the changes **from** defensive, 'you-are-the-enemy' attitudes (that obviously reflected the attitudes of their significant adults!) **to** accepting attitudes and realisations that, as children, they had similar interests, desires and values like wanting peace and that they actually liked each other! I could tell that this DVD impacted on my students. (This Israeli-Palestinian example of setting up situations amongst young people to foster peace and reconciliation is reminding me also of my own experience as a late teenager. I went overseas for a year on a programme called International Christian Youth Exchange which was a post WWII scheme set up to help foster peace in the future). I'm a strong believer in the value of people meeting and getting to know each other as a process for peacemaking.
3. My third reflection comes from a memory from attending the 6th WCC Assembly in Vancouver in 1983. Children of delegates participated in the International Children's Camp and they released balloons to all the children around the world with the message: "Let us not be enemies when we grow up. Peace is possible" The same children were invited to bring a greeting to the Assembly delegates. It was short and very relevant **:-** they called out in unison ***"Shalom"***. ... 'Shalom' - an Old Testament Hebrew word often *simply* translated as meaning 'peace'. At its root is **'well-being'**... in all spheres of life. It results in things like having the means to produce food, having shelter, having access to good health care, not being anxious or afraid, having security,..... Shalom/well being/ peace is built on justice ... (We look forward to the 'well-being' Budget coming out next year in NZ!) .... Shalom/ peacemaking includes building good relationships at all levels from personal to international .... Jesus' concept of peace would have been firmly rooted in the Old Testament concept of shalom/well being. And, for me, peacemaking is about shalom ... it is behind me taking part in justice issues as I am best able to .... physically taking part in protest activities .... petition signing .... signing submissions ... donating money to support 'well-being' projects (like the Christian World Service Christmas Appeal) .......

**PEACEMAKING -----**

**I'm only one, but I am one.**

**I can't do everything, but I can do something.**

**I touch the future ..... I teach, I'm a parent, I'm a grandparent, I'm a citizen of NZ, I'm ...... (you fill it in for you)**