

Peace to *All* People....

[Text - Luke 2:8-14]

Pastor Dave Shackle
December 24, 2016

Glory, glory, glory! Glory to God in the highest!
Glory, glory, glory! Glory to God in the highest!
And on earth be peace to all people, with whom God is pleased.
And on earth be peace to all people....with whom God is pleased.

These wonderful words which the angels proclaim on the night of Jesus' birth, are sung here every Sunday as part of our opening liturgy. It's a catchy tune, with a beautiful and clear message - that is, unless you look closely at the last 5 words.... A couple weeks ago, Kathy Pastor sent me an e-mail, which said in part: "I feel awkward every time I read these words in our service, and wonder if anyone else finds them troublesome:

'And on earth be peace to all people *with whom God is pleased.*'

Kathy goes-on to write, "That sounds kind of judgmental! Plus, God may not be all that pleased with any of us! When you're not busy, please let me know your thoughts on this." Well, I got busy and started thinking about it. I wrote Kathy back, "You raise an excellent [and profound] point! There are several *lengthy* sermons that could be crafted, just from that final phrase...."

Now, don't worry; tonight I'm going to focus on only *one* fairly simple, yet truly transformative concept that this angelic proclamation raises. On that glorious Holy Night, that Divine proclamation of Peace is declared to a group of humble shepherds - apparently "with whom God is pleased!" Let's think about that for a moment.... Down through the centuries, we've come to romanticize the image of those shepherds - with their cute and cuddly lambs. But in reality, shepherding was a crude

and rough, dirty and smelly job. And any shepherd stuck working the night shift [especially on Christmas Eve!] would likely be on the lowest end of the social spectrum. Nevertheless, it is precisely to these lowly working-class stiffs that the Holy One chooses to announce “Good News of a great joy!

Throughout Luke's Gospel account, there are numerous contrasts drawn between the "high and mighty" and the "meek and lowly". And throughout his life, Jesus consistently challenges the former, and champions the latter. In *Luke* chapter 4, Jesus launches his ministry by declaring that ‘The Holy Spirit has anointed him to bring good news to the poor, and release to the captive; to open blind eyes, and to set-free the oppressed.’ By Luke’s account, Jesus says more about the perils and pitfalls of power and wealth, than about any other subject. And in doing so, he raises-up a profound Divine Truth: That those who constantly strive for power and riches rarely engender genuine peace - for themselves, or for those around them.

So, as I responded to Kathy, “Perhaps the phrase, ‘Peace to all people, with whom God is pleased’ is less of a judgement, and more of a naturally occurring reality.” Whenever people dedicate their lives to the purpose of amassing wealth and power for themselves, regardless of the welfare, health, or safety of others, “Peace on Earth” remains an elusive quality. To the contrary, the more you and I live our lives in ways that are in line with - and pleasing to - the Loving Source from which we come, the closer we come to experiencing *shalom* - true and lasting peace and wholeness. That’s why it’s so important for us to ensure that all people be treated with kindness and justice, compassion and respect - especially those on the lower end of the social spectrum. That’s also why, in the midst of political and social uncertainty and upheaval, it’s critically important for us to remember the words of those heavenly messengers: “Do not be afraid! For unto *you* is born this day a savior, who is Christ the Lord!”

The Good News we celebrate on Christmas day, and every day, is that the Holy One comes among us in the person of Jesus Christ - to inspire and empower us to be genuine children of our Heavenly Parent. And as you and I allow that Christ-like love to be born in our hearts, and to guide our lives, we discover a Divine peace and serenity that can never be shaken. Jesus Christ, our Good Shepherd, comes to show us that when we take care of “the least of these, our sisters and brothers” we are doing what truly pleases God! And when the hungry are fed, the oppressed set-free, the outcast welcomed, and the lowly raised-up, then “Peace to all people” becomes a down-to-earth, unstoppable reality!

This is the Good News of Jesus Christ!
This is the true joy of Christmas!