

Sunday Thought

26th December 2021 First Sunday of Christmas

Readings

1 Samuel 2: 18 – 20, 26

Psalm 1480

Colossians 3: 12 – 17

Luke 2: 41 – 52

Christmas Unwrapped

Boxing Day! People ask why the day has that name. I am assured it has little to do with fights and fists. Most likely 'boxing' refers to the practice of remembering the poor and contributing to the alms boxes in church porches. It would be good to resume the practice. We use boxing day now for sport and family walks. For some it may be the day after we have unwrapped our gifts and now have time to think about what was in those 'boxes' and about the people who gave them. Often there is a gift which raises the question, *What shall we do with this? Use it? Live with it? Work with it? Enjoy it?*



Most common among Christmas card greetings is the wish for peace. That is right for God's gift we remember at this season is Jesus, the Prince of Peace. He is the only true hope for peace in our personal lives and in every broken relationship all over the world. How greatly that is needed just now, between nations, races, religions, neighbours. Peace is the gift which unlocks the prisons of war, hatred, hunger, fear, ignorance, homelessness That brings us to the boxing day question again, *What shall we do with the gift? Use it? Live with it? Work with it? Enjoy it?* Those questions give me an excitement far greater than childhood memories of exploring a stocking or was it a pillowcase? Peace for all the world!

Paul, in today's excerpt from his letter to the Church in Colossae – a church divided about beliefs and practices – gives answers to the Boxing Day question about peace. *'You are God's people'*, he reminds the church members. *'You are Christ's people, loved and chosen by God. For you Jesus is the Father's gift of peace. SO then **live the gift**, unwrap the love, become people of unity, compassion, kindness, humility, patience, gentleness. Be tolerant of one another and forgiving, just as Jesus forgives you.*

Paul continues, **share the gift**. *God has called you together to make a united witness to the peace which Christ gives. Share Jesus with all the world, breaking down division and enmity of all kinds. But first of all **enjoy the gift**. Let all the love of Jesus, all his wisdom, joy and gratitude live in your hearts.* Paul's words are still a challenge to every Christian: Live the life of Jesus; share the life of Jesus; enjoy the life of Jesus.

Luke's memory about Jesus in the Temple is an illustration of how God was unwrapping his Christmas gift. It is one of those stories which many of us heard first in Sunday School about a naughty twelve-year-old getting himself lost on a family trip to Jerusalem. There is much more to it. It is a beautiful account of a theological prodigy and his anxious, bewildered parents who are secretly, humbly so proud of their son. They found him that time with others in the Temple courts, among notable Jewish scholars who marvelled at his intellect and were possibly embarrassed and aggrieved by his youthful outspokenness on issues of faith and religious practice. It was likely that some of these same teachers were there two decades later still debating the same issues with Jesus and setting up arguments by which they could convict him of blasphemy and condemn him to death.

Luke balances the scene by telling how Jesus returned to Nazareth where he was obedient to his earthly parents as he was to his heavenly Father. In the intervening years before he called women and men to share his Peace Mission, God was unwrapping the gift of his Son, getting Jesus ready to be used by him, to live his life in those who believed in him, to be enjoyed by them and bring a way of peace to the whole world. So, we are left with Paul's challenge as we start another year. *If you really are the people of God, take the gift of Christmas, unwrap the Prince of Peace; live with him; share him; enjoy him.* He is still the hope of the world – our world, which so desperately needs him.

[A Prayer \(with Psalm 148 and Francis of Assisi in mind\)](#)

Christ has come! Heaven is on earth!
The Prince of Peace is in the world!
All earth and heaven unite
in a harmony of praise to God.
Heavenly choirs and earth's carollers,
Sun and moon and myriad galaxies of stars.
Trees in the woods
and sheep in their pastures.
Creatures of the ocean
and birds singing in the hedgerows.
All creatures rejoice in praise of God's glory.
And we too with voice and life
witness to the glorious Kingdom of God.



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