

Grace and Peace

Revelation 1:4-8

The book of Revelation can be a bit scary. The imagery of Revelation is often uncomfortable and even terrifying: there are the horsemen of the apocalypse, the dragon and the lake of fire and all the rest.

But today's reading isn't terrifying – and in fact it starts John greeting the seven churches in the province of Asia with the words “Grace and peace to you”. Grace. Peace.

And if I were challenged to sum up the Christian faith in two words, I reckon grace and peace would be the pick. There are others, of course: Love, reconciliation, forgiveness, sacrifice and so on.

But for me, the essence is grace and peace.

Grace is the love of God, shown for us in Jesus. Not for anything we did or will do, but because he loves us. Paul tells us in his letter to the Romans that “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23), but even when we were far off – as the old prayer goes – God sent his son to save us. An act of grace.

And the result of that grace, is peace. Not a temporary ceasefire or a negotiated settlement, but true peace. The end of conflict – ultimately the end of conflict between each other, and the end of the conflict between us – all people – and God.

Today is Christ the King Sunday, and we honour Jesus, the Christ – which is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word “Messiah” which literally means “The anointed one”. So today we especially remember that Jesus, the one anointed has been made king. The king of kings and the Lord of lords.

And while we do celebrate that joyfully, we realise that there is so much in the world which isn't joyful. As we look around the world, we can see that things aren't right. It seems there is no escaping conflict.

It seems there is no hope for peace. No hope for the world.

But as we approach Christmas we will read and hear again the words from Luke's gospel: “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favours!” (Luke 2:14)

That is what the arrival of Jesus signifies – peace on earth. The incarnation of Christ, the birth of Jesus, was necessary for his death and resurrection.

John writes “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne,”

John was writing to Christians who were facing persecution because of their faith in Jesus. He was writing to Christians facing imprisonment, death, temptation and trials. He was writing to Christians who were being pressured to compromise their faith.

Our persecution today may not be so severe - in Australia we are not facing death or imprisonment because of our faith - but we face the temptations of the world, the superficial

security of wealth, and sometimes the pressure to compromise our faith. Let's face it: the Church and Christians in general, are often looked down on in modern society.

But John sends a greeting of grace and peace to the readers of Revelation.

The grace and peace come from God - from him who is and who was and who is to come – God the father – the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of Moses, the father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And from the God the Holy Spirit, the seven – and seven is symbolic of perfection – spirits who are before his throne.

And from God the Son – Jesus.

John identifies Jesus with three titles: the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead,.... and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

And then John tells us what Jesus has done for us:

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! (Rev 1:5b-6)

The blessing of grace and peace that John passes on to his readers is a not a mere greeting. Not simply some nice words to open his letter. But grace and peace are gifts bestowed by God, and the effect of God's grace and peace is to make us to be a kingdom and priests to serve God.

As recipients of God's grace, we are not merely forgiven, but we as God's people participate in the reign of Christ.

Next, John looks to what is to come:

“Look, he is coming with the clouds,” and “every eye will see him, even those who pierced him”; and all peoples on earth “will mourn because of him.” So shall it be! Amen.

We know that Jesus died and rose again and ascended into heaven. And quite often that's where our thoughts of Jesus' actions end. And we often think about people who die going to heaven to be with Jesus. But Jesus has not gone to heaven to stay there. We learn from the scriptures that he will return.

Christians often avoid talking of such things. It's all a bit supernatural, isn't it? Probably a bit embarrassing. People joke about it, dispute it, mock it, or ignore it. But the return of Jesus should be a great comfort to us all. No matter how bad things are, how much conflict and suffering there is in the world, Jesus will return to put all this right.

And every eye will see him, and we read that even those who pierced him will see him. There are those who have mocked Jesus and rejected him – and they will see him clearly.

And all the tribes of the earth will wail. They will mourn their rejection of Jesus.

That can be a terrible thing to contemplate: But for everything to be made right, something must be done about everything that is wrong.

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth, and in the end, God will bring about the new heavens and the new earth.

The final images of the bible are not people going up to heaven, but heaven coming down to earth.

And that's the story that John brings us in the book of Revelation. It gives us a hope. And not simply a vague hope that things will get better. But the certain hope that things will be put right.

Since the beginning, even though we have turned away from God, he has never abandoned us. He has reached out to us in his son – as we read in John's gospel that "God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."

We, as followers of Jesus, are blessed with grace and peace.

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty."

On Christ the king Sunday, this is something we need to remember: We often remember Jesus as the teacher, as the healer, as the meek and mild servant, and as the one who died a criminal's death on the cross.

But as well as that, let us not forget that Jesus is also the one who conquered death – for all of us – and who rose victoriously from the grave. And that he ascended to heaven, and that he will come again, in glory and majesty to put all things right.

Jesus Christ – the anointed one – has been made king.

King of kings. And Lord of lords.

Glory. Hallelujah.

Amen.