Sermon   29 December 2019

Matthew 2:13-23

In my sermon on Christmas Day I talked about peace. I referred to one of the titles given to Jesus, 'The prince of peace', and how we live in a world where there peace is at a premium, but in the end we attempt to find that peace within ourselves.

This morning's gospel reading is about anything but peace. Herod was an interesting character, powerful but cruel and paranoid. Any perceived threats to his rule were dealt with by getting rid of them, permanently! This extended even to members of his family if he suspected them of plotting against him, which invariably they weren't. Interestingly, this paranoia is alive and well amongst many of our rulers today.

The political climate at the time of Jesus's birth was one fraught with division and conflict (what's new?). The Jews were frequently revolting against their Roman rulers, and their dissent was met with brutal force. Add to that Herod's paranoia when he heard from the three wise men that a new king had been born and his barbarous and over the top reaction, and you have a situation that is anything but peaceful. On the contrary, it was unstable and extremely dangerous.

The bottom line is that the situation then is no different to the situation today in so many parts of the world today. Herod was evil, but you don't have to look hard to find evil in our world today. Welcome to our world. So what is our role in all of this? We probably can't have a huge amount of influence on the powerful tyrants who are the perpetrators of this evil but we can make a difference in our own small way.

Last week I made the point that God's kingdom can be generated by you and me carrying out small acts of kindness. I want to share with you a story I came across a long time ago, but it is a story I always find very moving for its basic decency.

A trucker relates how he was travelling through North Carolina when a brown sedan merged on to the highway. It weaved back and forth between the lanes, causing the driver of the truck to shift into a lower gear. At first, he thought the driver was drunk, but when he came closer, he saw an old man shaking uncontrollably behind the wheel. He noticed a Citizen's Band aerial attached to the car, so he called on the radio, 'You in the brown Chevy, if you can hear me, pull over. Pull off the road. '

Amazingly, he did. The trucked pulled up behind the car and climbed from his cab. The elderly man staggered from his car and fell into the trucker's arms. He poured out a story of months of fear and pain because of the illness of his daughter, his only child. Now he was returning from the hospital where it was decided that she would cease any further treatment. In the hospital he remained strong and stoic for his daughter, but out on the road he fell apart.

The two men talked for the good part of an hour and then the father decided he was ok to continue driving. The men embraced and the trucker followed him for 50 miles. As they drove along, the two talked together on the radio.

The older man finally acknowledged that his exit was ahead and thanked his new friend again for his help. The trucker asked if he could make it home alright and suddenly, a third voice broke in on the conversation, 'Breaker 19, don't worry, good buddy. Go your way. I'll see him home.'

Glancing in his rear vision mirror, he saw a livestock truck move into the exit lane behind the brown Chevy.

Those truckies were special, not because of their status in the world, but simply because of their kindness and decency. We can all be like them. That's how we create God's kingdom here on earth. If enough people can come to a faith in Christ, and most importantly, live out that faith through kindness and service to their fellow human beings, then there will be no fertile ground for evil to grow and flourish.

Let me finish with a well-known quote from the 18 Century Anglo-Irish politician and philosopher, Edmund Burke, *'The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing.'*

Reverend Warner Wilder