

Sunday 26th December 2021
Glynde Lutheran Church
Sermon on Colossians 3:12-17
Theme: “Christmas changes everything!”
“Go on letting Christ change you!”

Introduction:

I want to begin by sharing with you a story entitled *Court Martial*. It's a made up story about the court martial of a soldier for letting a young couple and their baby escape from Bethlehem when the king, Herod, had explicitly commanded that *all* children under two years of age were to be killed....

Let me read to you the end of the story:

One of the officers interrogating him said to him, “We should be interested to know why you allowed all three of them to go. Had you done your duty..., there would have been no further trouble for you. Were they friends of yours? Did you know them? Or were you tempted by the amount of the bribe?”

The prisoner shook his head, and the perspiration temporarily held by his eyebrows trickled to his chin. “They offered no bribe, sir. I did not know them”.

“Then why did you let them through?”

“I thought it was – just”.

“What do you know of justice?”, the officer asked.

The prisoner closed his eyes. Once again the picture of those three weary travellers came to his mind. They were fleeing from a terror which he represented. He had not harmed them because they looked so desperately tired, or perhaps it had been that heart-searching appeal in the young woman's eyes, or perhaps it was because of the child, so helpless in a world gone mad....

Whatever the reason, his orders had suddenly appeared monstrously evil.

He opened his eyes. “I am a soldier”, he said firmly. “I will not become an assassin”.

And then the guard behind him struck him at the base of the neck and he slumped to the ground. He was vaguely conscious of being kicked, but it did not hurt anymore....

Some time later he found himself on his feet again.... *He* was under no illusion. He knew that in a few moments he would be dead. Yet he had no regrets. Perhaps it would be better to leave this world of injustice and suffering.

Vaguely, he wondered if it would always be like this. That could hardly be possible. Men must one day realize the futility of bloodshed. Perhaps, in a thousand or two thousand years, men, *human beings*, would have at last learnt to live in peace and there would be no more greed, nor wars, nor murder.

He stood erect. He did not feel afraid. He was filled with a strange, new hope. He thought of those three travel-stained refugees. He hoped they got through to Egypt. Once there, the child would be safe from Herod’s barbarous assassins...
(*Court Martial* by Charles C. O’Connell).

Part 1: “You’ve got to be kidding!?”

It’s an interesting story. I’ve read it to you, because I want to highlight the hope that we human beings have for a better world. What does the soldier in this story say to himself:

Perhaps, in a thousand or two thousand years, *human beings* will at last learn to live in peace and there will be no more greed, nor wars, nor murder....

Or we could add, perhaps then there will be no more hatred or injustice or suffering, no more self-centredness, anger, or envy....

This soldier expresses the longing of many in our society that things in our world will change for the better in the future.

Our theme for today is: “Christmas changes everything!”. At first sight, or at first hearing, this seems to be a ridiculous theme to have for our message today. Imagine what would happen if I wrote a letter to *The Advertiser* with this as my main thought....

There would be an avalanche of letters back to the paper telling me how stupid I was to make such a statement. The general drift of the letters would be:

You’ve got to be kidding!? **Open your eyes, man, and look around you!** **Sure people might give to others at Christmas, but the moment Christmas is over, self-interest and greed come to the fore, that’s if they ever went off the stage. Have a look at the paper you’re reading, and open your eyes....**

And if I *had* a good look at the paper I was reading what would I see: everywhere I would read of people living their life for themselves, of people focusing on what they can get for themselves.

Yes, even the Christmas season itself, “the time of peace and goodwill towards others”, is a time of materialism, self-centeredness, and self-indulgence.

Listen, too, to how an editor of a Newspaper that I have in my Christmas files describes the Christmas season:

As Australia winds down for its annual Christmas break, the traditional season of good cheer and family gatherings, the original significance of Christmas as a holy day will be eclipsed by its popular celebration as a holiday.

Santa Claus, the jovial old fellow with the white whiskers, red tunic and bulging sack, has replaced the new-born babe in the crib as the dominant symbol of the day that marks the birthday of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem 2000 years ago.

And so, as the Christian churches celebrate 25th December in reverent thanksgiving, as they have over the centuries, their sense of joy will be clouded by the realisation that their

flocks of true believers are diminishing. As we report today, leaders of the mainstream churches concede that they are losing the struggle to captivate the hearts, inspire the minds and secure the souls of more than a dwindling minority of Australians....

Welcomed though it may be by...*some*, this trend has had some corrosive social consequences....

As a community, we have become more materialistic, egocentric and self-indulgent, and less caring, sharing, and concerned for others. And for all the mutual exchange of greetings and gifts, Christmas is characterised more by conspicuous consumption than *by* faith, hope, and charity (*The Sunday Age*, 22 Dec., '96).

He uses some big words, but what he is saying is what most people who really open their eyes are saying. They are saying that they and the world around them are seriously flawed, that there is something mighty wrong in this world, *that things aren't as they would have them be*, and that instead of love and mercy and generosity in the world, there is self-centredness, self-indulgence, and greed!!

Part 2: "Fair dinkum! It does, because Christ changes everything.

Back to our theme: "Christmas changes everything!!" How can I have this as our theme, given the fact that it doesn't *seem* to be true?

Well, it all depends on *how* you see Christmas.

I want to say to you this morning that "Christmas *does* change everything, *because Christ changes everything!*" Christmas is all about the birth of Jesus Christ, and Jesus is changing and will change *everything* in your life, if you let him.... And through you and me and others like you and me, Jesus *is* changing the world!

Let me explain. The birth of Jesus, God's Son, began a revolution, God's revolution. Jesus came to set up God's Kingdom, God's new world where people's hearts and minds would be ruled by God's Spirit (*cf. Mark 1:1; Luke 2:10-11 re Jesus, the "Christ", God's Messiah and King*).

Jesus rescued us from "the wages of *our* sin" by suffering and dying on a cross for us. There he took on himself the blame and the punishment that we deserve from God. There he made it possible for us to be forgiven by God, and to live in God's family as His forgiven children (*Gal. 4:4-7*). There he made it possible for us to know "the peace and joy of sins forgiven" (*cf. The Christmas tract, 'A gift for you'*).

But that's only half of the story of what Jesus did for us. When he was leaving his followers, Jesus said to them that he would send the Holy Spirit to them (*Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4,8*). And that's what he did! (*Acts 2:1-4*). And the Holy Spirit in them empowered them to love others as Jesus had, to give themselves to others just like Jesus had done.

And Jesus gives the Holy Spirit also to us.... He gave the Holy Spirit to us when we were united with him and all that he has done for us, *when we were baptised* (*Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13; John 3:5; Titus 3:5*). The Holy Spirit in us changes us and makes us more and more like Jesus. Paul writes in one of his letters:

The fruit of the Spirit *in you* is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control (*Gal. 5:22-23*).

Sure, that doesn't mean that we are automatically like Jesus. It is a struggle against our human nature, our self-centred nature. That's why Paul writes in that same passage:

What I say is this: let the Spirit direct your lives, and you will not satisfy the desires of the human nature. For what our human nature wants is opposed to what the Spirit wants, and what the Spirit wants is opposed to what our human nature wants (*Gal.5:16f*)

And that's why Paul writes the way he does in our Bible reading for today.... That's why he urges them on in the way that he does:

You are the people of God; he loved you and chose you for his own. So then, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Be tolerant with one another and forgive one another whenever any of you has a complaint against someone else. You must forgive one another just as the Lord himself has forgiven you. And to all these qualities add love... (Col. 3:12-14).

As we allow the Holy Spirit, *the same Spirit that was in Jesus*, to work in us, Jesus changes us from being materialistic, self-centred, and self-indulgent people into people who are living for others as he did. In short, as we allow God's Spirit to work in us, we become more and more like Jesus, and more and more like our Father in heaven (*Rom. 8:29; Eph. 5:2*). Jesus changes us, and *through us* he changes the world around us.

Sure, this world will never completely be under God's rule.... Evil, sin, and injustice will always be present, but as we allow God to rule in our life, we point ahead to the future that God has in store for all His people: a new earth where God will rule completely and utterly, because everyone there will want to love as He loves, and everyone there will be empowered to love as He loves (*Rev. 21:1-5*).

Conclusion:

Christmas changes everything, *because Christ changes everything*. He changes people. He gives us "the peace and joy of sins forgiven", and he gives us his life-changing Spirit, who empowers us to live our life for others: loving them and giving our life for them, *just like Jesus did*.

So, as this year comes to a close, and as the new year is peeping over the horizon, *so to speak*, let's go on letting Christ change us, and let's go on letting Christ change the world around *through us*. That's the way God wants you and me to live our life!!

Addendum:

* Lyrics of "Love changes everything":

**Love, love changes everything
Hands and faces, earth and sky
Love, love changes everything
How you live and how you die
Love, can make the summer fly
Or a night seem like a lifetime
Yes love, love changes everything**

**Now I tremble at your name
Nothing in the world will ever be the same
Love, love changes everything
Days are longer, words mean more
Love, love changes everything
Pain is deeper than before
Love will turn your world around
And that world will last forever**

**Yes love, love changes everything
Brings you glory, brings you shame
Nothing in the world will ever be the same
Off into the world we go
Planning futures, shaping years
Love (comes in) and suddenly all our wisdom
disappears**

**Love makes fools of everyone
All the rules we made are broken
Yes love, love changes everyone
Live or perish in its flame
Love will never never let you be the same
Love will never never let you be the same**