



DIAKONIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES

“COME, PRINCE OF PEACE”

SERMON DELIVERED AT ADVENT CELEBRATION - 27 NOVEMBER 2012 By Revd Ian Booth, Diakonia Chairperson

The theme selected for this year’s Advent Celebration is “Come, Prince of Peace” – appropriate as a theme in the Christmas season as we celebrate the Prince of Peace, but one that appears to be elusive in our society at this time.

It has been disturbing to read of reports of elected officials and party employees being shot dead in politically motivated violence. It appears that while most of it is the work of parties in opposition to the one the victim represented, at times this has been intra-party violence as violence has taken root between varying factions within the same party. We had hoped that these days had come to an end, and that sufficient political maturity would have taken root so that we can address our differences through the ballot box, and not with bullets. But alas it appears that this is not so. The darkness of political violence hangs over the land, and we are not sure whether the ANC Conference in Mangaung will bring light or further darkness.

The 16 Days of Activism against Violence on Women and Children once again highlights the scourge of domestic violence, where women and children suffer at the hands of the husbands and dads they should be able to trust, and at the hands of the many men who form casual relationships with multiple partners and abuse them and

the children they bear. This is an ongoing struggle in this country and throughout the world, and is in part a consequence of the emasculation of men by the apartheid era, and the increasing independence of women. This is not an excuse, but offers a possible avenue to work on in addressing this scourge. This is always highlighted during this time of the year, and we are more shocked at acts of violence at this time than at any other time during the year. This is delusional, as the setting aside of this period is meant to serve as a reminder of how to live and behave throughout the year, not just for 16 days each year. It is the same as expecting greater peace at Christmas time, or greater forgiveness during Lent, instead of seeing these seasons as reminders of how we are meant to be always. The darkness of domestic violence hangs over the land and we are not sure how far away the dawn is.

The violent nature of the industrial actions over this past year has shocked us all. It is disturbing to see marching strikers overturn litter bins in the streets, overturn vehicles, attack those who want to work, and intimidate all. It has been disturbing to see the Metro Police close down the inner city and cause chaos on the streets. It has been disturbing to learn that the common belief among communities throughout the land is that it is only violent action that brings response from the authorities. It is disturbing to see striking farm workers set fire to the crops they have planted and tended for a pittance. And perhaps most disturbing of all was to see the level of violence in the response to these events by those in authority, most particularly the Marikana incident, which stands out as a shameful moment in the history of this democratic era, for we all thought the images of the police shooting people in their numbers belonged in the past. These images are scary, and alert us to the intense levels of anger that are prevalent in our society and to the speed at which violence is engaged in by those in authority as well as those who are seeking justice. We must

find other ways of addressing social injustice that do not involve violence and adversity. We must find the ways of Mahatma Ghandi and Martin Luther King Jr and Albert Luthuli. We must find again the way of self-denial and the cross that are in our call to follow Christ. The darkness of social injustice and its accompanying violence hangs over the land, and we seem unable to find dignified and peaceful means to address this.

The victims of violence will for ever be reminded of the cost of choosing this method to resolve our differences as a society, for they will bear the scars of grief or handicap or fear or loss of self-confidence for the rest of their days. They will struggle to overcome hatred and the seeking of revenge and retribution. They will be hard to convince that things could change if they could change. The darkness of the lack of peace in our society will hang over the majority of these who have been victims of violence.

There is darkness that hangs over our land, deep darkness that it sometimes seems is impossible to penetrate. And so let us find hope in the prophecy of Isaiah: "The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of darkness a light has dawned And his name will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Prince of Peace" If we believe that these words are spoken of Jesus the Christ, and if we believe that these words are fulfilled in Jesus the Christ, then why on earth are we not living like we believe it? We should see the hope beyond the fear. We should see the light in the darkness, knowing that the darkness will never extinguish the light. We should see the alternative ways of living and relating and loving and caring that will peel back the violence and show another path. We should be the ones building community with those who are different, the "other", and in that community finding hope and healing. We should be the ones who carry the light into the

darkness, engaging with the forces of darkness and showing that we are without fear for we have seen the light, and we carry within us the one who is the light.

The violent methods are not our way. The demeaning of human life through abuse is not our way. The exploitation of others through under paying them for the value of the work they do is not our way. The use of violence to solve differences in policy and affiliation are not our way.

Our way is the way of peace, the road travelled by the Prince of Peace. Our way is the way of self-denial and the cross, following the one who came to serve and not be served. Our way is the alternative way of peace, walking in the light of God and in the conviction that there must be a way to address these matters that does not involve violence and intimidation and the diminishing of the value of another because it makes be look better.

There is another way. There is light in the land. There is a way of peace and not violence. It is the way of Jesus. I urge you to follow that way, to walk in the light, and be peacemakers.