

WEEKLY SERMON

communicate@blackburn.anglican.org



Let me tell you about my friend, Bilal

We are all needing some peace in our lives.

As we approach Christmas it's a period of much happiness and joy for some, but it can also be a time of concern and worry for others for many reasons.

It could be the ongoing cost-of-living crisis means families are struggling to buy presents – or even just to put food – any food – on the table. Other families may be doing fine on the money front, but it could be the first Christmas since the death of a close loved one.

The troubles of life at this and other times of the year often get too much for us and we worry. The worry leads to unhappiness; lack of sleep; high blood pressure and depression.

And it manifests itself in many other different ways ... shortness of temper; unwillingness to listen to others; impatience; grumpiness – the list can on and on.

In the context of our Christian faith, we seek to bring peace in many different ways. In most of our churches we make a small but significant move in trying to bring God's blessing of peace onto others – when we ask God's blessing on them by saying: 'Peace be with you'.

Knowing the gift of peace that God can give is critical to our spiritual, physical and mental health.

It is no wonder that, in the Bible, the Epistles always start with a blessing: 'Grace and peace be to you.'

In the Bible, Paul's letter to the Philippians is a great reminder of this miraculous gift of peace. From chapter 4 v7: 'And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.'

This peace is a miracle. Amidst our mental turmoil we can find this wonderful, God given peace.

Let me tell you about my friend Bilal. Bilal is a Muslim and a senior manager in a Lancashire firm. One of his junior managers came to him one day and explained how he was depressed and troubled. The junior manager described how, despite having a loving wife and children, a secure home and a good job he was still unhappy.

Bilal asked him to get into his car and the two of them drove to Blackburn. They parked up and walked to the Cathedral. The junior manager said that he wasn't a Christian and hadn't been to church for years.

But Bilal continued and they entered the Cathedral. He explained to his colleague that people had prayed in this place for hundreds of years. It was a place to find peace. They sat down and Bilal said: 'Just feel the peace'.

If my Muslim friend can bring people to a church to find peace, may each one of us not only seek peace in our own lives but point others to the peace of God, which transcends all understanding.

Canon Andrew R Pratt MBE – Interfaith Advisor to the Bishop of Blackburn

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