

The Prince of Peace

Born in Bethlehem is a familiar phrase for Christians. We know that this points us to that moment in time, the fullness of time as St. Paul wrote in Galatians 4:4, when Jesus entered into this world in the most natural of all ways. He was born, born in Bethlehem. Many Christians love to hear Phillip Brooks, O Little Town of Bethlehem. In a world torn by crisis and conflict, it is comforting to remember the promise of God's messiah who will deliver us from our bondage. For me as a believer, the birth of Jesus, was the Word (of God) become flesh, living among us.

I have come to understand that the path to peace is a righteous path as Isaiah 32:17-18 declares: *And the work of righteousness will be peace; And the service of righteousness, quietness and confidence forever. Then my people will live in a peaceful habitation, And in secure dwellings and in undisturbed resting places....*

The Hebrew for righteousness is the word tzedaka (הַדָּקָדוּקָה...אֱדָקָה), the root for which may be translated just, just cause, fairly, what is right.

The way the twelve disciples understood the Messiah prior to the Day of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit was for a powerful ruler to reestablish the land of Israel by force. The cross, the resurrection and Pentecost changed their hearts and opened both their eyes and their minds. Yet, did those events really change anything or did Jesus fully demonstrate all that God had been telling us through the prophets?

I believe that Jesus both made clear and fulfilled all that the prophets had said. Consider Deut. 10:18: *He executes justice for the*

orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. Or, Deut. 24:17: You shall not pervert the justice due an alien or an orphan, nor take a widow's garment in pledge. The prophet Amos spoke vehemently about just and ethical treatment for all people, especially the most vulnerable in our midst. The words of Jesus call us to *turn the other cheek, go the second mile, pray for our enemy*, and in many other ways to return good for evil. Jesus even tells us to *take up our cross and follow him as the way.*

It struck me one day, as I read in the book of Acts where the disciples of Jesus became known as the followers of the way, that they were hearing this in a very Jewish manner. Were they referring to Jesus as the Halakha which is often used to refer to Jewish Law but actually means "the path." If you purchase a book that is the Halakha for the Passover, it gives you the instructions for daily life during Passover. If Jesus was the Halakha, it meant that he was the path to follow -- it means to use his example as the lens to view life.

Jesus way was a just path. Jer. 22:3 states: *Thus says the LORD, "Do justice and righteousness, and deliver the one who has been robbed from the power of his oppressor. Also do not mistreat or do violence to the stranger, the orphan, or the widow; and do not shed innocent blood in this place.*

Could it be that the Prince of Peace comes to show us a way to peace as a just path? To me, following the Prince of Peace means crossing the chasms that divide us and taking the steps toward a justice whose fruit is peace. Perhaps the echo of this idea is found in the American pledge of allegiance as it states *with liberty and justice for all.*

