



**"We are so confused, so full of uncertainty. Day-to-day life in Cameroon is a nightmare."**

**How are we called to be enactors of peace?**

*I felt like it was a dream, I told myself 'you are not seeing this, this is not happening.'*

*When I was coming back there was a confrontation between the armed people and the military and I saw eight people lying dead by the side of the road, and I had to stay there for about an hour to wait for a ceasefire before I could go.*

*As the days went by I started seeing more of those things. And it is very common to see corpses on the streets. You are somewhere, and before you know it, somebody is shot. So these days it is commonplace to see killings, even in the streets. You don't even feel it anymore, you just tell yourself, 'okay, let me run from here before it becomes my turn. Let me run from here before what is happening to others comes to me.' It's becoming the normal lifestyle for us to see things like that.*

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- A member on the staff of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon

As Christmas approaches, the nativity story promises a familiar message of peace. Nativity scenes depict a company of angels appearing to shepherds praising God and proclaiming 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests'. It's hard to move through the Christmas season without encountering a card or Facebook post with 'Peace on earth and goodwill to all men' splashed across it.

This message isn't without good reason. In Isaiah 9:6, God's people are promised a '**Prince of Peace**': not merely a peace-bringer but the royalty of peace. In the Christmas story we witness the incarnation of such a promise: the prince of peace not found in an army general, national leader or world diplomat, but in a baby, born to bring unity to a world at war.

It's easy to forget that Jesus was born to such a world, amidst turmoil and persecution. Our nativity iconography often fails to depict Jesus' family fleeing hostile forces and living under a colonial power. And yet, in Jesus we find a beacon of hope for a lasting and just peace – through his birth, his teaching, his death and resurrection.

Throughout the teaching of the Bible, Jesus places a huge emphasis on peace. He warns against anger (Matthew 5), puts peace at the centre of the beatitudes (Matthew 5), and shows that human need overtakes conflict, such as in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). He even brings peace to the waves and the wind (Matthew 8).

Christ's death and resurrection serves as a fix to every broken relationship and every source of conflict, should we choose to engage with it, and his whole life lead up to this. Killed by a colonial power and yet forever resisting violence, when Jesus bids farewell to the disciples, the message he chooses to leave with them is one of peace:

**'Peace** I leave with you; my **peace** I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

 (John 14:27)

This message of peace can be a difficult one to carry in a time when war and violence are so normalised. Two thousand years down the line, we might still find it hard to locate this peace in the world today. We live amidst conflict – some seeming endless, some normalised for communities who have known nothing else.

In Cameroon, conflict has become a more present reality in 2020. Stories such as this from the Presbyterian Church are disturbingly commonplace. So, for people like the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon, what hope might we find in the Prince of Peace?

If Jesus is the Prince of peace, then are we, as followers of Christ, subjects of peace? If we are, it's important not to interpret that as something passive. In this difficult and violent world, we aren't just called to bask in the light of the peace which Christ brings, but to actively work to show it to more people around the world – just like Jesus did so many years ago.

The Presbyterian Church in Cameroon certainly treats the peace-making theme of the Bible as a mandate for actively seeking change. Cameroon is a country that's grappled with colonialism and war, violence and oppression. The message of peace which the Church aims to bring to the Anglophone region is not an easy or popular one. But the Church is working tirelessly to pursue peace in their area, however difficult a mission that might be.

They have coordinated ecumenical work on dialogue, calling for a ceasefire, [including a call from the women of Cameroon for peace in the region.](#)

On International Day of Peace, the sermon given in the service they held was based around Psalm 34:14:

**"Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it."**

This is more than a wish for peace: it is a call to action. And it's what Jesus did, bringing a challenging message to a place which had grown accustomed to the day-to-day violence of colonialism and oppression.

A God of Peace is a God of Justice. Justice can never be obtained without the space for dialogue created by peace, and peace will not be true and lasting without a just foundation.

As God's people, we are called to follow that commandment from Psalm 34: seek peace and pursue it. In Cameroon, the Church is active calling for a ceasefire and a dialogue. Even from overseas, we can fully support that call, through prayer and through advocacy. But peace comes in many forms. We can start in our local communities, our families, and our lives. Where would you like to see peace this Christmas? How can you recognise the Prince of Peace in the God that you worship?

## Questions

- How could you create peace in your community this Christmas?
- How can we build space for prayers for peace into our routines?
- How can the church support those living in conflict worldwide?

## Prayer

God of Justice and Prince of Peace

You ask us to seek after peace and pursue it.

We thank you that you are the source of all peace,

And that you bring peace where there is conflict, safety where there is danger.

Help us to create space for peace in our own lives,

And comfort those who have lost loved ones to violence.

We pray for the churches in Cameroon,

That you might bring your peace and justice to that place.

Remind us that we must be active in our search for peace.

Amen

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