

7th December 2020

Peace

“Lord, make me an instrument of your Peace.”

Prayer of St Francis

It came upon a midnight clear is a Christmas Carol written in 1849 by Edmund Hamilton Sears, a Unitarian pastor from Wayland, Massachusetts, USA. Sears composed his poem while he was going through a difficult period in his life. He'd suffered a breakdown and had only been able to return to work part time as a preacher and pastor. He was also distressed by news of revolution in Europe and the United States' war with Mexico.

Living with his own troubles, and all too aware of the troubles of his world, Sears didn't focus on Bethlehem, nor seek to draw meaning from the Incarnation. Instead, his words, born out of his response to the reality of his day, give their focus to issues of war and peace. Most hymnaries include only four verses of the complete piece, omitting the penultimate verse. But why, when this stanza points us to both the inner peace *and* the hope for universal peace that lie at the heart of the Christmas message?

*And ye, beneath life's crushing load, whose forms are bending low,
Who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow,
Look now! for glad and golden hours come swiftly on the wing.
O rest beside the weary road, and hear the angels sing!*

As we are weighed down by the burdens of our lives, especially our times of troubles ... when the journey forward seems to be uphill all the way ... when the steps to justice, equity and freedom from wars are too painful and too slow ... we have the promise of peace. We have angels who bring their message to us once more: "Peace on Earth".

This "glorious song of old" is as new, relevant and necessary now as it was for Edmund Sears in the 19th century. This is our message of hope. This is our search for wholeness. This is the dawning of "the Age of Gold".

*When peace shall over all the earth its ancient splendour fling,
And all the world gives back the song which now the angels sing.*

A prayer for today

*Loving God, give me peace for today, peace for the journey,
peace for my home, peace for my world,
peace to work for, peace to know, peace to share. Amen*

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