



Carstairs-Bancroft United Church

January 5, 2021

**DAILY ENCOURAGEMENT
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

By Rev. Maria Szabo Berces



Source: Our Daily Bread

Beloved Carstairs Bancroft United Church Members,

At this very first daily encouragement of the New Year, allow me to **wish all of you a blessed and Happy New Year**, with the continuous presence of the God Almighty.

As 2020 passed by and we welcomed 2021, I heard stories of two very different experiences regarding the traditional fireworks of New Year's Eve. One was from my parents who happen to have a dog. If you have these four-legged friends as well, you know that dogs are not very fond of the noise and upheaval that comes with the loud celebrations on the night of December 31st. My parents' doggie turns into a scared, trembling creature that would hide in the smallest possible spots from the noise. On December 31, 2020 however, he didn't have to worry about the petrifying blasts. Due to the Hungarian curfew no one had a chance to frighten the canine population of my parents' town.

I heard the other story at the informal check-in time of our latest Sunday live ZOOM worship: one of the farmers in Carstairs area arranged social-distanced firework entertainment for his neighbors and friends. That must have been a spectacle! I have memories of gorgeous fireworks celebrating the founding of Hungary on August 20th; as well as of July 1st celebrations, here in Canada. When you can watch fireworks close by, it is a mesmerizing experience. We don't mind the noise and the smoke that comes with it. The amusement is worth those inconveniences.

The meditation below reminds us that fireworks were originally designed with a reason. If we look at up the history of fireworks on the Internet, we find the following information: *"Many historians believe that fireworks originally were developed in the second century B.C. in ancient Liuyang, China. It is believed that the first natural "firecrackers" were bamboo stalks that when thrown in a fire, would explode with a bang because of the overheating of the hollow air pockets in the bamboo. The Chinese believed these natural "firecrackers" would ward off evil spirits."* (<https://www.americanpyro.com/history-of-fireworks>)

Even if our reasons of initiating fireworks are different, and we just simply enjoy the show that comes with the modern, colorful fireworks at celebrations, it is good to remember something, especially at the beginning of a New Year. This is that we always have a divine company on each and every day of the year that has the power to give us peace, and to *"ward off evil spirits."* As we could hear Jesus' promise on Sunday: **"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)

May we perceive and remember this encouragement, and may it give us the hope, peace, joy and love that was promised during the Christmas Season, for the whole year to come.

Grace and Peace to You All,

Rev. Maria



Fireworks of Life

He himself is our peace.

Ephesians 2:14

READ EPHESIANS 2:12-18

On New Year's Eve, when high-powered fireworks detonate across cities and towns worldwide, the noise is loud on purpose. By their nature, say manufacturers, flashy fireworks are meant to split the atmosphere, literally. "Repeater" blasts can sound the loudest, especially when exploded near the ground.

Troubles, too, can boom through our hearts, minds, and homes. The "fireworks" of life—family struggles, relationship problems, work challenges, financial strain, even church division—can feel like explosions, rattling our emotional atmosphere.

Yet we know the One who lifts us over this uproar. Christ Himself "is our peace," Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:14. When we abide in His presence, His peace is greater than any disruption, quieting the noise of any worry, hurt, or disunity.

This would have been powerful assurance to Jews and gentiles alike. They'd once lived "without hope and without God in the world" (v. 12). Now they faced threats of persecution and internal threats of division. But in Christ, they'd been brought near to Him, and consequently to each other, by His blood. "For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (v. 14).

As we start a new year, with threats of unrest and division ever rumbling on the horizon, let's turn from life's noisy trials to seek our ever-present Peace. He quiets the booms, healing us. – By **Patricia Raybon**

REFLECT & PRAY

Comforting God, when life's fireworks shock and unsettle me, draw me to Your peace. Amen.

What "fireworks" are shattering the calm in your life? When you give them to God in prayer, what peace do you feel?

SCRIPTURE INSIGHT

The process of bringing people into the family of God is the work of all three persons of the Trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The book of Ephesians begins with high praises to God, "who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (1:3) and has sealed believers in Jesus with the Holy Spirit (vv. 13-14). The work of Jesus is featured in chapter 2. Ironically, His violent death on the cross is the means through which Jews and gentiles are reconciled and all of sinful humanity can be at peace with God: "Now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (v. 13). Note also that the mission of the Son includes bringing us to the Father through the work of the Holy Spirit: "For through him we . . . have access to the Father by one Spirit" (v. 18). – By **Arthur Jackson**

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