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PEACE BEYOND REASON

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Remember the days before mobile phones? It's actually not too long ago, but it feels like we've had them forever. Remember when they first came out? They were about the size and shape of a house brick. And they were mainly a status symbol; they were enormously expensive, and few people could afford them.

One of my friends got on the bandwagon; he made a balsa wood model, painted it black, and used it at the traffic lights in his old ute just to impress the blokes in the Jags and Mercs.

The story I'm about to tell you wouldn't have happened if I'd had a mobile phone.

I needed to make a call, and travelling in a strange country for the first time, also needed the correct coins to put in the slot. I only had notes, so when I arrived at the train station I went to a kiosk to buy a paper and get some change. The queue was long, as they nearly always were, so I took my place. Pretty soon there were people lined up behind me. The line moved at glacial pace towards the counter, or perhaps slower.

To this day, I don't know what triggered it, but the lady in front of me blew her stack. Like, completely lost it. Not just generally, but at me, standing behind her.

It took me a while to realise that I was in the frame. But when I awoke from my daydream, she was shouting. At me. Loudly.

The gist of her rant was this, "What gives you the right? You lousy scumbag! My life's going down the toilet and you're standing there at peace! How dare you? What gives you the right to be at peace? I hate it!"

With that, she turned on her heel, pushed her way through the crowd and disappeared.

Now, the interesting thing is this. I didn't particularly feel that peaceful just then. I was travelling alone in a strange country for the first time, my wife and family were 12,000 miles away, and I was about to make a call to people I'd never met to say I'd arrived and then go stay with them for the rest of the week. Perhaps the lady just needed to let off steam. Maybe I was the only bloke within range, or perhaps I reminded her of someone. But I think there was more going on.

Just like there was more going on when, many years later, my wife died from breast cancer. I've never seen such peace. Not in me, but in her! She was upheld in a miraculous way all the way through: from her diagnosis and treatment to her eventual decline and death.

That's not to say there weren't plenty of tears. And I wouldn't want you to think she was all icy resolve and stiff upper lip Stoicism. No, there was plenty of grief and plenty of emotion, not least when the rest of the world was shut out and it was just the two of us, alone. But the peace was like a deep foundation. It supported every part of what she went through, especially in the last months, and even more in the last days. I've often said that in her last days she was more in heaven than on the earth.

Not simply was she at peace within herself, but that peace radiated out. It affected people who came to see her. Time and again friends—who thought they might bring some comfort and consolation—went away knowing they'd been on the receiving end! It was indeed, as Jesus said, "Peace that passes all understanding".

I sat with her as she took her last breath, and can testify that it was real. It was real all the way through, to the very end.

But if she were listening to us just now, she'd be saying: "No, you're getting the wrong idea. It wasn't me! It didn't come from me! It was just what Jesus said... "Peace I give to you, my peace I leave with you." It was peace that passed human understanding, because it didn't come from me! It came from him."

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy...peace. This peace isn't natural to us. It's the peace that comes from heaven. It's not just beyond us to understand, it's beyond us to reproduce, or create.

Perhaps the lady at the train station picked up on something like that. Maybe—at a much lesser level and much lower frequency—she picked up on something beyond her own frame of reference. And perhaps that troubled her.

Can peace be disturbing? Can it unsettle our ordered world? Or unmask our disordered one?

Jesus was called the "Prince of Peace". He came from heaven, bringing the peace of God to earth. But that peace was too real for us. We didn't like it intruding into our settled little kingdoms. He showed us that peace isn't a warm and fluffy feeling; nor just a worthy sentiment; but a settled and established relationship.

When Jesus spoke about peace, he had in mind something we could never bring about. He had in mind ending our hatred of God, our distrust of his care, and our self-directed ways of living. He had in mind ending the hostility we have towards God, bringing us to love him and trust him.

It cost Jesus his life to do it. But he did it gladly and freely. Why? Because, he wanted us to know the peace that he himself has.

"Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you." What's his peace?

It's to share in his own relationship with God our Father. To rest in God's care, no matter what. To know that you are loved by God, no matter what. To know that you're held in his arms and carried all the way to heaven, even as you take your last breath. To be settled in the fact that no one or nothing can separate you from the love of God. Ever.

That's the peace that Jesus knew. That's the peace he came to leave with us. That peace re-digs our foundations. And thank God that it happens now, before it's too late. Better to have our foundations re-laid now, than find the one's we've trusted in have crumbled to dust.

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