



How do we find

hope, peace, joy, and love
in a Weary World?



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Reflection by Rev Swee Ann Koh



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Reflection on Hope

We need more hope. We need more mercy. We need more justice.

If there's ever a time when people need hope, IT'S NOW!

It's when the world is darkest that hope shines the brightest.

The weary world needs hope. We all need hope.

But what's hope?

Hope means different things to different people, but hope is more than wishful thinking. But the question arises: Is there any real basis for hope? Can we be certain of hope?

One of my favourite Christmas carols is "O Holy Night."

I love the way the lyrics tell the story of Jesus' birth.

The first stanza paints a beautiful picture of a world waiting, longing until our Saviour was born and our "soul felt its worth"!

One line, in particular, stops my heart every time I hear it:

***"A thrill of hope – the weary world rejoices,
for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn."***

The world this song speaks of is the same world we see today.

The world into which Jesus came was a "weary world," experiencing countless trials, needs, weaknesses, and oppression. King Herod

ruled the land with a legacy of ruthlessness. Poverty and deprivation were pervasive. And yet, Jesus was born, bringing good news of great joy for all people. Having hope doesn't change anything, it makes us want to change it. Just saying, "*I hope things work out for you*", is a cop-out.

Recognize that hope in circumstances is not reliable. We often rest our hope in outcomes, tangibles, ideals of how we think they should turn out instead of in the mystery of God and things we will never truly know.

Yet you and I know that nothing is going to work out in the future without someone doing something different, something better, in the present.

Martin Luther King lived that dream: "We must accept finite disappointment," he said, "but we must never lose infinite hope... If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on despite it all."

Talking about hope it makes me think, **in what, in whom or what do I place my hope?** In the stock markets? Our investments? Our bank accounts?

Christian hope is not about the outcome but about God.

Christian hope is trusting that *“neither death nor life, neither angels nor demon, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ,neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
(Romans 8:38,39)

Concentrating on God provides a hopeful community in which people do not feel alone amid their problems. As God’s people, we believe in hope that defies all odds. A hope that speaks of new life amid death. A hope that reaches for justice amid inequity. A hope that knows the promise of God’s righteousness amid fear and despair.

We need to remember that we are a people of hope. We have a message of hope (God with us), and we are called to embody this hope.

And for me, my hope remains in one simple truth – *Emmanuel, God with us*. It’s my dominant belief that somehow, someday, God is indeed with me in the struggles and pains of my current weary realities. In the weary world with live in, let us live with hope. We wait. We watch. We hope.

Reflection on Peace

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (Isaiah 9:6)

“Peace on earth” is a phrase you see everywhere around Christmas time. For many of us, we must wonder where that peace is. Whether we're trying to find peace in the chaos of our own lives or trying to wrap our heads around hope for political peace, “peace on earth” certainly seems elusive.

A glance around will remind us that we live in a far-from-perfect world. In our own lives, some of us struggle to find peace with ourselves.

We regret past mistakes, struggle with our present weaknesses, and worry about the future. We try to “find ourselves” in different ways and search for our purpose in life through relationships, work, leisure, and travel pursuits.

Where is this “Peace of earth” that we all yearn for?

Violence increased significantly in ongoing conflicts and armed struggles in Ethiopia, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Mali, Ethiopia, Myanmar, and Ukraine. And now we add to the list, Israel, and Gaza.

As we draw to the end of another year, does it feel like the world is a peaceful place? Has it ever been a peaceful place? Peace appears to be as elusive as ever.

Pax Romana simply means “Peace of Rome” and refers to the tranquillity and security that the Roman Empire brought to the Mediterranean world. The *Pax Romana* lasted from the reign of Caesar Augustus (27 BC–AD 14) to that of Caesar Marcus Aurelius (AD 161–180). At the time of Christ and during the first generation of the church, much of the world was unified under Roman authority and enjoyed relative peace.

It is often argued that Christianity began under the Pax Romano, an unprecedented time of peace throughout the world! At what other time could the gospel has spread so quickly?

Certainly, the Pax Romana was a time of peace, prosperity, and justice for some – yet for others, the majority, it was a time of oppression, misery and suffering under the tyrant's whim. Peace was

the result of the application of power and control. In short, Pax Romano is peace through violence, dominance, and oppression.

Throughout the Gospel of Luke and the second volume of Acts, the author sets up a distinct contrast between the kin-dom of God and the kingdoms of this world. He specifically sets up this contrast between the kingdom of Rome, the primary political entity in Israel and the greater Mediterranean region, and the kingdom brought about through the coming of the Messiah. What's God's solution for 'peace on earth'? What? A baby? Are you serious?

God came to live among us to bring about peace on earth for all people. Truth is the kingdoms of this world and loyalty to those kingdoms will never bring about God's peace. Peace through violence is NOT the solution.

Violence begets more violence; suppressing violence with violence and applying the "a tooth for a tooth" approach will only serve to perpetuate conflicts, leaving no way of resolution.

Those of us who claim to follow Jesus must discover how to live in an alternative manner. Rather than adopting the patterns of the kingdoms of this world — kingdoms like Rome that rule through

division, oppression, and militarism —we need to adopt the patterns lived out and declared by Emmanuel, God with us.

Peace through non-violence and mutual respect.

Peace through forgiveness.

Peace through justice.

Peace through reconciliation.

Peace through dialogue.

Peace through serving.

Peace through love.

The late guitarist Jimi Hendrix, the rockstar said, *“When the power of love overcomes the love of power, then the world will know peace.”*

And may God’s Peace go with you.

Reflection on Joy

*“We need **Joy** as we need air. We need **Love** as we need water. We need **each other** as we need **the earth we share**.” - Maya Angelou*

I don't know about you, but I sure need some joy in my life these days. I suspect many people would like to have some joy in their lives too. The weary world needs joy.

The word joy is inseparably connected to Christmas and the biblical account of the birth of Jesus Christ.

The angel brought “good tidings of great joy” to the shepherds (Luke 2:10). The wise men when they saw the star, “rejoiced with exceeding great joy” (Matthew 2:10). Elizabeth, when she heard Mary's voice said that her baby “leapt in my womb for joy” (Luke 1:44).

Christmas somehow makes us aware of the distinction between “happiness” and “joy.” None of the Christmas scriptures or greetings feel quite right with the word happiness substituted for the word joy.

What is joy? Joy might be difficult to define, but you know it when you see it and you certainly know it when you feel it. Joy is a feeling, though it is not simply that.

Feelings tend to be fleeting. Joy, on the contrary, is a steady disposition about life. We might say that joy is a hopeful and peaceful outlook on life, a deep-seated sense of well-being. Unlike happiness, joy is not dependent on circumstances or chance. We can experience joy even in times of trouble and hardship. However, too often we are searching for joy in all the wrong places.

We think we find joy in owning a big house or having the latest gadgets or devices for example. Truly is all the chasing bringing us joy that God created us to experience? Pope Francis calls this the feverish pursuit of the frivolous.

In April 2015, His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Archbishop Desmond Tutu met in Dharamsala for a historic conversation about joy. The Book of Joy chronicles the week-long discussion. On the final day, co-author Douglas Abrams asked the two great spiritual giants about the importance of joy in the world today. On that occasion at the Tibetan Children's Village, the Archbishop answered one of the children's questions by saying, *"If we think we want to get joy for ourselves, we realize that it's very short-sighted, short-lived. Joy is the reward, really, of seeking to give joy to others. When you show compassion, when you show caring, when you show love to others, do things for others, in a wonderful way you have a deep joy that you can get in no other way."*

You can't buy it with money. You can be the richest person on Earth, but if you care only about yourself, I can bet my bottom dollar you will not be happy and joyful. But when you are caring, compassionate, more concerned about the welfare of others than about your own, wonderfully, wonderfully, you suddenly feel a warm glow in your heart, because you have, in fact, wiped the tears from the eyes of another."

Some of you might disagree with me but I believe Emmanuel, the undeniable, inescapable, unavoidable God with us, wants to fill us with joy.

According to Pope Francis. *"The Joy of the Gospel is a deeply personal invitation to reflect on the gap between the life we are living, and the life God calls us to live. It is an invitation to love both God and our neighbour more fully. It is an invitation to live more fully amid the opportunities and challenges that each day presents."*

I remember many moons years ago, I learned in Sunday School in Singapore that **J.O.Y.** means **Jesus (first), Others (second) and You (last)**. Joy is God's gracious gift to us, One of the fruits of the Spirit. We are called to be joyful communities in a world desperately in need of abundant, flourishing life.

Reflection on Love

There are surveys for almost anything and everything.

Recently I came across an unusual survey. Participants were asked this question... what three-word sentence would you most like to hear?

The top three answers, in reverse order, were:

3) *Supper is ready*

2) *I forgive you*

1) *I love you.*

People want to hear, “I love you.” People need to hear, “I love you”! Is love a noun, a verb, or a feeling? I believe it’s all three.

Love is a noun: *“He bent and kissed his newborn daughter on the brow, his heart full of love and gratitude.”*

Love is a feeling: *“She has an intense feeling of deep affection.”*

Love is a verb: *“Love your neighbour — even the one you don’t like.”*

Yes, Love is a noun, a feeling, and a verb. What I call the tripartite of love!

However, you and I know that love is more than a feeling. The feeling comes and goes. To love is to feel and act lovingly.

Too many women have told us, bruises visible on their faces, that the partners who struck them love them. Since they see love as a feeling, the word hides the truth, which is that you do not love someone whom you repeatedly beat and abuse. You may have very strong feelings about them, you may even believe you cannot live without them, but you do not love them.

We all know in our bones that love is not a feeling alone, but a feeling that flows into the world in action.

I love the musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. When Tevye asks Golde whether she loves him. After her 25 years of washing, cooking, bearing children and labouring beside her husband, Golde answers Tevye, "I suppose I do." It was a well-thought-out response.

With no stars in her eyes, Golde's greying hair and calloused hands, her constant awareness of him and their children served as the evidence that verified her answer.

Of course, it is possible to perform all sorts of duties for someone and feel little or nothing for them. Love is not about being a hired help. Love is not an obligation done with a cold soul. But neither is it a passion that expresses itself in cruelty, or one that does not express itself at all. But the feeling must be wedded to the deed.

What we feel must be reflected in what we do. However, I believe love is ultimately a choice.

Psychiatrist, Scott Peck's classic self-help book, *The Road Less Travelled*, first published in 1978, defines love as "the will to extend oneself to nurture one's own or another's spiritual growth."

Explaining further, he continues: *"Love is as love does. Love is an act of will—namely, both an intention and an action. Will also implies choice. We do not have to love. We choose to love."*

Since the choice must be made to nurture growth, this definition counters the more widely accepted assumption that we love instinctually.

Love is a choice. For example, choosing to lean in and work through conflict with your partner may show that you are choosing to love rather than abandon the relationship. While the intensity of your feelings toward your partner may change over time, you can still choose to love that person day after day.

Love is a verb. Love may take a lot of work, but many couples find their efforts worthwhile.

Love in Action

Of all the Christmas carols, as I have stated, I like “O Holy Night” the most. My favourite lines in “O Holy Night” are these:

*“Truly He taught us to love one another;
His law is Love and His gospel is Peace;
Chains shall he break, for the slave is our brother,
And in his name all oppression shall cease.”*

Yes, my faith has shifted, and deconstructed, but I still hold on to these deeper truths: He taught us to love one another. His law is love. His gospel is peace. For me, ‘love came down at Christmas’ so that chains shall he break, and all oppression shall cease.

Love is not just a noun. Love is more than feelings. Love is a verb. And love in action gives me hope. And in a weary world, we need hope, peace, and joy but above all we need love.

I don’t know about you, but I love the wild way God chose to enter the world — a human baby born to unlikely parents in chaos and simplicity. God was born in a smelly stable to an unwed mother and her faithful fiancé. Pagans were strangely drawn to him like a moth to a flame. Shepherds, the lowest of the low, get the news first. God, in the flesh.

Showing us the ways of love and how utterly contrary they are to the ways of the world, to the ways of Jesus.

“And they shall name him Emmanuel,” which means, “God is with us.” (Matthew 1:23b)

Finally, whatever gifts you may have, love always means that you come down.

It means that you use those gifts for the good of others, not to make yourself feel good.

It means that you are willing to do things that are uncomfortable or inconvenient for you, or that you go unnoticed. ...

Real love always comes down.

We know that because *Love came down at Christmas*.