

Grace and peace are you dear friends, from God our Father and our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen

The Gospel, the Good News of our life-together in Christ and in the world today has three images: faith, healing, and life. Faith where there was no hope, healing where there was no restoration, and life where there was no hope of restoration. Jesus comes to us as a promise, a fulfillment, and a reality of God's love and compassion for all humankind in the world.

This is exciting stuff my friends. You see, the message in our Gospel text is alive and well in the world today and is exemplified in our actions. Sure, we can see the destruction, distress, and disappointment, and even the death if that is what we *want* to look for. No one knows this better than those who serve. The generous and blessed people who protect us and ensure our future (both locally and nationally) see the decay in our world every day! And still, God is calling us to look at the world differently and see (with faith) the restoration and the life that is ours... through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

We were once bound to sin and Christ set us free to be the people of God; free to bring love, healing, and hope to a world that is desperately looking for a friend; people who are seeking that true and special friend that comes along once in a lifetime. A friend and friendship like Canada and the United States have shared since the beginning.

There are no coincidences my friends and the relationship between the US and Canada remains as strong today (between the people) as it was when it was forged. We share the longest common border of any two countries in the world, which continues to be un-militarized since 1814. We are also the largest trading partners on the world stage.¹

The peace we share is also a peace we celebrate in our actions and words. Since 1935, The Kiwanis Club International dedicated over forty-one International Peace Markers along the US/Canada Border with the words, "A Lesson Of Peace To All Nations." A host of other monuments, arches, bridges, and memorials have been dedicated by various individuals and organizations as a constant reminder and symbol of a friendship that extend far beyond the border we share.

My very dear friends, there is more to this friendship between Canada and the United States than meets the eye, because this is a relationship that was formed not from a conflict; but rather forged in peace. Our governments may differ with political positions and our leaders will come and go; but the bond between the people of our two counties will remain strong, secure, and stable; ensuring we will continue to stand - side by side and hand in hand with one another.

God's relationship in our life is also a friendship that is forged, not from conflict, but from peace and love for us. Even when we wandered away to a place of sin (far from the safety of our God) our Friend and Brother; Jesus Christ extended His hands and rescued us, restored our faith,

¹ http://peace.maripo.com/p_us_canada.htm

healed our fatal wound, and granted us new and everlasting life. We have been lifted to new life to be the healing and restoring force in the world by the grace of God through Jesus Christ. You see, because Christ restored our relationship with our Creator, God will use our hands for His work in the world. God uses our hands to feed the hungry, cloth the naked, comfort the grieving, heal the sick, shelter the homeless... and become the friends others are searching for.

God could solve all the problems of the world at once (as Jesus reveals by healing and restoring life to the dead). Instead, God is solving all the problems of the world through the hands, the hearts, and the minds of you, me, and all others who are willing to participate with Him.

Canada knows this as much as we do and just because we say “God’s Work, Our Hand’s”, it does not mean we act alone. In contrast, we are called to participate in the lives of one another, across cultures, across borders, across every division to accomplish what alone we cannot achieve. Canada knows this and has made a difference for America when we reached for the stars.

One of America’s greatest icons of this generation is the space shuttle. Living in Florida for the last 35 years I was honored to see this human marvel on many occasions; once in flight atop the modified 747; a truly remarkable image of American achievement.

When we behold the Space Shuttle, we often fail to see the Canadian involvement with this program; mostly because the Shuttle-doors are closed. But when you look inside, at the very heart of the vessel, the image of Canada’s essential contribution to the Shuttle becomes instantly clear. You see it was Canada that designed and implemented the arm, the hands of the Shuttle that launches satellites and lifts cargo out of the vehicle’s payload bay. Canada not only worked side by side with us on our dream, but also stayed with us... hand-in-hand past the boundary of our earthly home.

Our Lord Jesus Christ set our hands free from the bonds of sin so we can make the differences in the world. We have been granted the strength, authority, and commission to reach out and be the hands that extend help, assistance, care, and compassion to others that will in turn... lead to peace, freedom, and prosperity for ALL our neighbors in the world.

The United States of America is the greatest model of freedom in the world; a place where each and everyone one of her people are free to make a difference; if they so chose. People around the world still look to America as the place where dreams come true and the place where they might become more than they are. People still hold out their hand in friendship to America in search of a new neighbor, a new friend...a new brother or a sister.

People of God, fellow Americans, my dear Canadian friends, and all my brothers and sisters in Christ; life is not easy! Our individual life is full of challenges and life-together at the community and national level is not any easier. But we must continue to work ‘with one another’ and ‘for one another’...not as a burden, but out of genuine love and compassion for each other’s welfare! We need to care for each other as-if ‘our life depended upon it’ for the world is ever to become a better place.

We need to be willing to treat each other as more than neighbors and friends, but as brothers and sisters to truly see the value all life has (regardless of where we live).

Jesus Christ showed us what it means to be our brother. While He was us, healed us, fed us, clothed us in the Spirit, comforted us; and gave us all that is His! Today our Saviour, Brother, and Friend remain with us; united in death and eternal life. We share a bond with our Lord that allows us to become more than what we could ever be on our own. Jesus changed the world and gives us that same potential through Him.

The Peace Arch in British Columbia Canada (shown on the back of the bulletin) displays in text what I am sharing in words my friends. The monument dedicated to US and Canadian Peace declares (at the upper most pinnacle of the structure) on the US side; “Children of a Common Mother” and on the Canadian side; “Brethren Dwelling together in Unity.”

This is the lesson of peace to be taught my friends; we are not merely friends and neighbors but the very truth and essence of a union of brothers and sisters. This is the lesson that does not end here, but starts as example to follow, to share, and to expand. The friendship is open to all and is provided as the means to improve the future of life-together for all people in God’s Kingdom. This is the lesson that leads to the understanding that we are all brothers and sisters in the One Body of Christ.

The bond between the United States and Canada will remain secured because her peoples have allowed their God to use their hands, their hearts, and their words to make a difference in their neighborhoods, cities, and country. Canada and America honor their friendship as much as they honor their faith by leading the way for other individuals and communities to carry on a tradition of compassion (healing), hope, and promise; for their neighbors today that will become the families of a new generation tomorrow.

Our destiny together has already been written my friends. We are one holy people before One Almighty God. As one people across many nations, we moving down a long road together... towards a day of peace when we will ‘recognize and accept’ each other as the brothers and sisters we are created to be. Our differences will be celebrated and our divisions will be dissolved. And then, we will all walk side by side and hand in hand to the glory of God: the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; with a peace that never ends and passes all understanding to forever keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.