

SECOND WEEK IN LENT

## Shalom: The Way to the Promise of Peace

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**R**eflect: Jesus gives us the promise of peace, but not as the world would define peace. Peace is not the absence of trouble or conflict, but the certainty that in life's storms, we have a Savior to calm the seas. Where in your life can you recall the stormy seas being calmed? How did it feel to know that amid trouble you were being held safe and secure? Where is this peace that passes all understanding needed right now in your home, community, church or country?

### Add to your peace prayer "tree"

This past week, the Rev. Jimmie R. Hawkins lifted up

prayers for peace in several parts of the world. Take strips of fabric and add to your peace "tree" — or railing or fence — the word for "peace" in the various languages that Hawkins shared. After writing each word out, close your eyes, hold the fabric and pray for God's peace to be felt by those in that region. The words for peace highlighted in the first week of Lenten devotionals are: *shalom* (Hebrew), *salam* (Arabic), *dohiyi* (Cherokee), *paz* (Spanish), *udo* (Igbo/Nigeria), *wolakota* (Lakota), *pyonghwa* (Korean) and *nye* (Ntomba/Congo). Now think about those close to you who are feeling restless or scared this Lenten season. Write their names down and pray for peace to wash over them.

## Second Sunday in Lent, February 28

### Peace appears in the strangest of places

*In that region there were shepherds living in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid; for see — I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord. — Luke 2:8–11 (NRSV)*

*Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; and he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” Jesus said to him, “Away with you, Satan! for it is written, ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him.’” Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him. — Matthew 4:8–11 (NRSV)*

How desperately the children of the world need peace. We wander looking for peace, yet God proclaims peace in the strangest places. It isn't heard from brass bands or symphonies, or seen in military parades, stock market exchanges or super bowls, but rather among the silence of shepherds on a cold mountain top as we heard a few months ago in Luke's telling of the nativity story. And then we have the Lenten Scripture that reminds us in the moments when we need it the most — in our desert suffering — peace comes. We are not left alone. The peace of healing appears just as it did with the angel tending to a tempted and tried — and victorious — Jesus.

A friend described visiting a refugee camp in the Middle East, full of people desperately seeking food as famine ravaged their country. And with all those people, especially young babies and children, there was no crying. There was the silence of hunger. As we seek peace, maybe we should try to center ourselves in silence. The noise of war, the noise of political demonstrations in the streets and the noise of political rallies can distract from the deep needs around us. We should pay attention to the quiet suffering and hear the angels tell us where God's peace is needed in the world.

*In this time of Lent, Lord God, help us hear the proclamation of peace among your beloved children. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

## Monday, March 1

### Do not be afraid

*If you love me; you will keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate to be with you forever. . . . Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. — John 14:15-16, 27*

The world seems to have gone awry. There is no place that is not filled with anger, hatred, food insecurity, war, viruses, corruption and violence. It seems that all we have is fear itself. If all we have in the world is fear, what do we do to overcome that fear? The statement of Jesus in John's Gospel is simple. What we desire, what we need to hold on to, what gives meaning to our lives is to fill our whole life with the peace that God gives us through the Holy Spirit. If our lives are filled with the Spirit, all the products of fear — worry, angst, insomnia — and fear itself, have no power. In his book “Lost in the Cosmos,” Walker Percy suggests that we should look at the evil that is going on in the world as an “I Love Lucy” comedy, with no power and little meaning. What has meaning is a life whose advocate fills us with the wisdom and the power of the Holy Spirit. The battle with fear can only be won by the power of God. And we do not need to be afraid, for God will defeat evil.

*Lord God, in this time of Lent, let us strive to fill our whole selves with the power of the Holy Spirit to give us the peace that enables us not to be afraid of evil. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

## Tuesday, March 2

### Moving closer to God

*Since all these things are to be dissolved in this way, what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set ablaze and dissolved, and the elements will melt with fire? But, in accordance with his promises, we wait for new heavens and a new earth, where righteousness is at home. Therefore, beloved, while you are waiting for these things, strive to be found by him at peace, without spot or blemish. — 2 Peter 3:11–14*

All people of faith — be it Christian, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, etc. — offer greetings of peace. Peter suggests that as we live in the violence and destruction of the coming of the day of the Lord that we all live in peace and let God deal with sin. Yet how does one wait in peace? Interestingly, in Islam, the way one deals with Satan is not

by any battle or violence. Instead, it is seeking God and not letting struggling with Satan disrupt our seeking God. In the battle for good, the Reformed faith of Presbyterians knows it is about being faithful in moving closer to God. We cannot defeat evil — only God can. We are to seek God and understand the precious struggle of the divine Son on the cross.

*Lord God, in this time of Lent, help us to focus on the love you have shown us in the struggle and the victory of your Son on the cross. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Wednesday, March 3**

#### ***Peace doesn't come with power***

*Hannah was praying silently; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard; therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, "How long will you make a drunken spectacle of yourself? Put away your wine." But Hannah answered, "No, my lord, I am a woman deeply troubled; I have drunk neither wine nor strong drink, but I have been pouring out my soul before the Lord. Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman, for I have been speaking out of my great anxiety and vexation all this time." Then Eli answered, "Go in peace; the God of Israel grant the petition you have made to him". — 1 Samuel 1: 13–17*

Eli was the high priest of Shiloh — a position with power. To have power given by the culture or to have control provided by religion brings with it the risk of losing touch with humanity. So the man with power sees the drunk woman. The problem is the woman is struggling with life and with God. She defends herself with the religious man, and he ceases to be arrogant and powerful. He does as he should and offers the woman the peace of God. The woman, Hannah, becomes the mother of Samuel, the one who anoints King David.

The minister had a bad day. All the staff had gone home, and he was eager to get home, have a quiet meal and relax with his family. As he passed the front door of the church, there was a person at the door. "He looks like another one of those poor drunk street persons," he thought. "I don't need that right now." He ignored him and avoided eye contact. But he felt guilty and eventually turned and opened the door. The man at the door asked, "Does Bus 54 stop on the corner?" He was a simple person in need for whom Christ died. The minister was, too, and he had answered the call to proclaim Christ's peace and love to the very person now standing before him asking about a bus route. Not everyone will be someone who will be part of something great, but everyone is a child of God who can foster peace so that each one of us can receive it.

*Lord God, in this time of Lent, help us to see through our power and arrogance to see clearly the peace that can be offered to everyone we encounter. We are all children of God for whom Christ died on the cross. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Thursday, March 4**

#### ***How beautiful it is to proclaim peace***

*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." — Isaiah 52:7*

The shiny trucks of UPS and Amazon could be called beautiful when they bring things that we have longed to get in stores ourselves because of the pandemic. They bring the necessary and the desired. How beautiful are those trucks!

How much more beautiful, though, are the proclamations we bring into the world about Jesus, our Prince of Peace. How much more beautiful is the news we can share of peace on earth that the angels sang at the birth of Jesus. How much more beautiful it is to know that our God reigns and to proclaim it.

And isn't Lent our time to face the uncomfortable reality that such beauty was consummated in the denial of Jesus, in the mocking and the beating, in the shaming questioning of Jesus by the council, Pilate and Herod, and in Jesus' crucifixion, death and burial? How can it be that God redeems this darkness? God does though. And because of that we can be at peace. We can proclaim that peace.

*Lord God, in this time of Lent, help us in our prayers of confession and penance to find our peace and then to proclaim it to others who are seeking the same. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Friday, March 5**

#### ***Flourishing***

*Deceit is in the mind of those who plan evil, but those who counsel peace have joy. — Proverbs 12:20*

Joy seems to have a special meaning in the vernacular language of Scotland. When one comes out of a job interview, a friend will ask, "Did you have joy?" It has the connotation of flourishing. It has an almost spiritual meaning. When you have joy, you flourish.

But one cannot flourish while planning evil. For such thinking chases away any hope for joy. In other words, there is no peace in the hearts of those who continuously plan and do deceitful things — dare I bring up church

parking lot meetings without the pastor, gossiping on the phone or spreading hateful words on social media? These are the very things that are destructive to the community as well as the body of Christ.

In the church, we work for peace. We desire joy. And yet, there is always the risk of deceit in our hearts to crowd out joy which stops us from flourishing, which robs us of peace. It is the peace of our Lord Jesus that should be at the core of everything we think, say and do.

*Lord God, in this time of Lent, make sure that all our thoughts, prayers and actions are of peace rather than personal deceits. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*

### **Saturday, March 6** *Peace is a gift from God*

*He called that place Bethel; but the name of the city was Luz at the first. Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God." — Genesis 28:19–21*

When Jacob wrestled with God, God broke his hip, and he limped for the rest of his life. In this text the rock that

Jacob used as a pillow is a symbol of the loving presence of God. As unbelievable as it might seem, a broken hip and a cold stone are God's gifts of peace.

In this age when we wrestle with a pandemic and making sure all have access to care and vaccines, it would seem this is not the peace that we would choose. But often God gives us not what we want or what we think our lives should be. That doesn't mean, though, that God still isn't giving us peace.

There is a scene in "Dr. Zhivago" where an elderly Jewish couple is packed into a cattle car going to a forced labor camp in a Siberian blizzard. Cuddled together for warmth, they were surrounded by those already dead and those going to die soon. As night fell, they sweetly kissed each other. With nothing else but their love and sure death, they found solace. The kiss would not save them, yet it was sufficient. They found peace being in the presence of one another and in the presence of God. And that presence of peace was enough to sustain them on a very difficult journey.

*Lord God, in this time of Lent, help us accept your gifts of divine love as yours to give — as you choose to give them — not what we insist them to be. Open our eyes to see that. May we feel your presence of peace this day. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen.*