

2024

Everyday Shalom

Jeremiah 29:4-7

⁴This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵“Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. ⁶Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. Increase in number there; do not decrease. ⁷Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper.”

Theme: Our well-being is tied up with our neighbors well-being.

Good News: God is at work for our ultimate good right now, right where we are. All of us.

Mission: Because God’s promise is ours, we share it. Because God’s Shalom is ours we share it.

SLIDE: Picture of Pass the Peace (Diversity)

In the first church I served, we had a small early morning service in the upper room. When it would come time to greet each other, we did it old school. We passed the peace. That's where you say, "The Peace of Christ be with you." But each Sunday, Doris did not say that. She would shake our hands. Firmly. And say, "Peace is yours." With all confidence and conviction. And each Sunday, I was a little taken a back.

Especially one Sunday after a really hard week. When she leaned in and said, "Peace is YOURS." And I responded, "Sure doesn't feel like it." And she paused and said. "Because of what God has done and is doing. It is sure. And it is for you." And then said it again. Peace is yours."

I've spent a lot of time remembering Doris and the Peace she passes. And I hold on to two things:

First: Live today on the good God has and is and will do. It's trustworthy.

Second: Make sure and pass the peace to others.

SLIDE: COVER

Let's talk about how life changing that can be, but first let's pray.

Holy God, help us become masters of ourselves that we may become the servants of others. Take our eyes and see through them. Take our ears and hear through

them. Take our minds and think through them. And take our hearts, and set them on fire. Amen.

SLIDE: ?

In our scripture today, God's people are sure not feeling the peace. You see their King died. And long story short, another King, named Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took over. Their lives and their land. He started building an empire and made Judah a kind of vassal state. And under captivity, many of the people of Judah were exiled from their home Jerusalem. From Their land. Their families. Their community. And had to go live in service to this King of Babylon. In Babylon. In a place and with a people. That is not like them. Not their own. And where and with whom they did not want to be.

Does not sound peaceful. And yet that's the word in this passage. In Hebrew. Though translated different ways. The word is peace.

SLIDE: SHALOM (leave up)

The prophet Jeremiah has written this letter to those exiled from their homes in Babylon about the peace that is theirs even then. The word for peace is Shalom.

Maybe you've heard it as a greeting of hello or goodbye. Maybe you've heard it as a way of offering peace in the midst of conflict.

But Shalom is richer and deeper in meaning and practice.

Rabbi Safron puts it simply, saying... Shalom is not absence, it's completeness."

The root of this word, means no longer broken, but made whole.

It means not in need but prospering.

It means working against injustice and violence and building justice and harmony.

Instead of distance and division, Shalom is peaceful relationship with God, each other, and nature. All together.

Shalom is Well-being. It's Flourishing.

SLIDE: PIC?

And it is, the dare I say, the very heart of God. Biblical scholars say it shows, from the opening scene of our Bible in the Garden of Eden with a picture of vibrant and peaceful harmony to the end times in Revelation where every tear will be wiped from our eyes, and death shall be no more, there will be more mourning or crying or pain. And we feast together in the heavenly banquet.

From beginning to end. Shalom. Wholeness. Completeness. Peace. For the whole human family and all of creation. Shalom is the promise of God. The Direction of God. The work of God. As God is here. With us. And on the move.

SLIDE: Peace is always bound up in relationship.

But here's the thing about Shalom. It's never individual. It's always tied to connection. Relationship. Community. That by its very nature. Wholeness. Completeness. Peace is always bound up in relationship.

SLIDE: California Redwoods... roots pic

Consider the Redwoods. If you've never seen the Redwoods of California... some of them are 300 feet tall and their trunks can be more than 20 feet wide. Some of the tallest trees in the world and some of the largest living things on earth. So one would think that their root systems would have to reach down to middle earth to sustain them for what are said to be thousands of years.

But no. The roots are shallow. Only 6-12 feet deep. So how are these giant trees sustained? Especially in storms and times of need? Because their roots are wide. Reaching out away from themselves. They ultimately intertwine their roots so they can share nutrients and physically support each other. Just a few feet below the ground is an interconnected support system. They are literally holding each other up. One of those giant trees going down means injury if not peril to a great deal of forest. Conversely the health of one helps create health for others. Their well-being. Their ability to have a FLOURISHING lives is tied up with one another. That is Shalom.

SLIDE: The Redwoods of our lives.

You all have had Redwoods in your life. A parent. A grandparent. A coach, or mentor. A friend or neighbor or partner. Those whose lives helped nourish you, support you, heal you. Give to you. Fight for you. Work for your well-being. Either in a moment or over time. Even the redwoods in your lives right now. Your peace has been intertwined to them. And maybe you can think of some of the Redwoods in your life right now. And you are that for somebody else. And if you're here today and you feel like you are unrooted. And in need of connection. We are glad you are here. WE want to connect with you.

Because from our infancy, we understand that a flourishing life. Our Shalom like the Redwoods, is Bound up and intertwined with one another. And that is the teaching in our scripture today.

Slide: Jeremiah 29:11(put verse)

Jeremiah writes this letter to the exiles and uses Shalom at least four times. At the bottom of the letter he assures them, That God has plans for them.. to give them Shalom... to give them hope and a future. God is at work for their good. So in the words of Doris. Peace is yours. Because even while it's not all worked out, God is is with you.

SLIDE: Jeremiah 29:5-6 (put scripture NIV)

And then he talks about passing that peace. Shalom. Translated both as peace and prosperity in this scripture.

He says, I know, I know you don't want to be there, but spread your roots. Settle down: Build houses, plant gardens, marry, and have children. Begin to flourish right where you're planted. But your roots, are meant to support the flourishing of others.

SLIDE: Jeremiah 29:7 put scripture

He says seek. Work for the shalom of the city. Pray for the Shalom of the city. Because if they begin to realize Shalom... harmony, justice, joy, healing, wellbeing... so will you.

SLIDE: Cover

He's saying, peace is not found in just fighting and working for your own good like in the chapter before, but for the good of others.

Peace is not just found in your own home and family, but in empowering the families of others. Even in exile with those they don't know, don't agree with and don't want to be with.

Peace is not found just in praying for the ones you know and love but for your neighbors, and city.

That is the work. The call. The mission. The commitment God asks of his people. Then and now.

Work for the flourishing of our neighbors. Our community. Our city, because it is tied up in ours. We flourish together.

SLIDE: Jason Brown and his farm pic

Jason Brown, NFL Offensive Lineman heard that call. He was the highest paid Center in NFL history and walked away from an 35\$ million contract. To start farming in Eastern North Carolina, though he knew little about it.

When asked in one interview, he said his awesome big brother served in Iraq and Afghanistan. And paid the ultimate price in his service. So when Jason at the height of his success stared into the mirror on his birthday and wondered why he wasn't all that fulfilled. And through is faith... felt the call To somehow work in community. And somehow that was farming.

It was really hard. He didn't know what he was doing. But eventually he and his family began harvesting food. And what was going to be giving a portion of way, he ended up giving it all away. When asked why, he said...

“How can I realize my dreams, when there are those in my community who aren't.

“ Shalom.

And so over time neighbors, volunteers, non-profit organizations have joined. To help farm what is now over 1000 acres. Helping to feed Eastern North Carolina communities. Also, teaching, training, and agritourism tied to this farm support this

community. And so as the farm has grown, Jason speaks on finding his Shalom and his family's Shalom... so has the communities around him have found more work. More learning. More growth. More stability. More food. More connection. More hope. More Shalom.

Pass the Peace. It's at the very heart of God. That we might know peace That Peace is yours today because God is FOR YOU. WITH YOU. And then? To pass it. Pass the Peace that is the fullness of Shalom.

SLIDE: How might we hear the call of Shalom today? (Leave up.)

Good people of God, how might we hear that call today? As people. As a Beloved church community called St. Luke's.? How will we root ourselves right where we're planted in the call of Shalom? In a moment Shelly Clasen the Director of Outreach and Justice ministries is going to share about how we can deepen the the ways we extend Shalom into the very corners our communities.

Might mean shifting our understanding about flourishing. That ours is sacredly tied to our neighbors. Our community's. Our cities. It means praying over our community as a place where everyone freely experiences and contributes to wholeness. And it means, we lean in together. We get to know our neighbors. And we deepen the ways we, love, serve, and work for justice as part of the human family.

SLIDE: Cover

For peace is yours. It is our neighbors. And it's ours to share. Together. Everyday.

Everyday Shalom.

In the name of the Father, The Son and The Holy Spirit.