

Peace  
Galatians 5:22-26  
Romans 12:9-21

Westminster Presbyterian Church  
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June 21, 2020

Galatians 5:22-26

By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another.

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This summer we're talking about the fruit of the Spirit, the things we should look for, to see where the Holy Spirit is at work in the world. They are the things we should strive for in our own lives, in order to be working with the Holy Spirit.

Last week we spoke about Joy. This week we're talking about Peace.

Peace is a word with different meanings, depending on you ask. When someone talks about peace, you have to ask, peaceful for whom?

As far back as the Roman Empire, some Romans acknowledged that the famous *Pax Romana*, or so-called Roman Peace, was really only peaceful for some people. The historian

Tacitus, in explaining Imperial Rome, said that, “To robbery, butchery, and rape, they give the lying name of ‘government’; where they create desolation, they call it peace.”<sup>1</sup>

That is a great example of the world’s peace, isn’t it? Once the Romans had killed everyone who didn’t do exactly what they said, it was peaceful, right?

Peaceful for Romans, but not for everybody else. The Roman legions were still an occupying army, with all the abusive dynamics that implied. A soldier beating or even killing an innocent native was routine and there was nothing to be done about it. A Roman governor had the power to execute a native for saying things that the Romans didn’t like.

The Hebrew word that is translated, “Peace,” in the Old Testament, is *Shalom*. *Shalom* means peace, but it means so much more than the mere absence of armed conflict. *Shalom* means peace, and being safe and secure, and having enough. Not necessarily being a millionaire, but having enough. “Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken.”<sup>2</sup>

That is the peace of God, the peace that God wants for all of God’s children. That is what Jesus meant when he told his followers, “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.”<sup>3</sup>

The thing about *shalom*, as opposed to the world’s peace, though, is that it doesn’t work if only some people have it.

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<sup>1</sup> Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30 (ca 98 AD). My translation.

<sup>2</sup> Micah 4:4, NIV.

<sup>3</sup> John 14:27.

If these people over here have enough, and are safe and secure, but those people over there don't and aren't, that's not *shalom*. People are going to need to travel from danger to safety. We call those people refugees. It's been going on at least as long as recorded history. Naomi and Ruth were refugees in Bethlehem.<sup>4</sup> Joseph and Mary and Jesus were refugees in Egypt.<sup>5</sup> Many of the founders of early Christian congregations were refugees after the Romans kicked Jews out of Jerusalem. The Hebrew Scriptures recognize this, and have strong words about how all who believe in the Law are to treat the alien among them – with all the rights of a local and all the charity that is given to the local poor.<sup>6</sup>

If some people in a place have enough and others don't, then everyone stops being safe and secure. That's not *shalom*. It may seem peaceful, to the extent that there is no obvious violence, and some people may feel safe, but the truth is that growing up without enough to eat damages people just as truly as being beat up, just in different ways.

We do not have *shalom* right now.

So how do we get there?

Paul tells us how we can get to *shalom*.

We may not be able to achieve *shalom* for the whole world in our lifetimes, but we can change what's in our area, within our sphere of influence.

“Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.” If something is wrong, call it for what it is. Do something to change it. If you don't see something to do, ask the people most affected by what is wrong. If you do nothing else, vote.

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<sup>4</sup> Ruth 1.

<sup>5</sup> Matthew 2:13-19.

<sup>6</sup> Exodus 12:49, 22:21, 23:9, Leviticus 19:10, 19:33-34, 24:22, Numbers 15:16,29, Deuteronomy 24:17-21, etc.

“Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.” Even strangers who don’t look like us or sound like us.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” We do this every week when we pray together in worship, but it’s not limited to once a week.

“Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.” *We* are not better than *they* are; don’t pretend we are.

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.”

“If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” We may not always be able to live peaceably with people who don’t want to live peaceably, but we have a lot more control over the world than we like to admit sometimes.

“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”

“If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

If you want to see where God is at work in the world through the Holy Spirit, look for people who are doing these things. Rejoicing with those who rejoice, crying with those who cry. Taking the high road, even when their enemies are petty. Refusing to take revenge, even when they have clearly been wronged, because God’s got things under control. Treating others with compassion.

Where you find those people, you will find *shalom* in the world.

We are Christians, followers of Jesus Christ. We're called to BE those people, to do these things. It all comes down to love. Love God, love your neighbors.

I pray that all of us would look, even more than we already do, for opportunities to extend *shalom* to those around us.

AMEN