

Shalom

Isaiah 2:2-5

June 24, 2018

Shalom aleichem.

Peace to you.

Shalom is a greeting. It's a greeting you might offer as you open the door of your house to a friend -- *shalom* -- or a greeting you might offer with a nod of your head as you pass a stranger on the street -- *shalom*. Shalom is a greeting, but more, so much more. Shalom is a blessing.

Shalom aleichem.

Peace to you.

You offer your wish, your hope, your prayer for peace for the one you greet, your wish, your prayer for life free from conflict and threat and disturbance and calamity, but more, too, so much more. Because shalom is so much more than the absence of discord. Shalom is not so much defined by what it isn't as by what it is.

Shalom is good health and a full and productive life. Shalom is a safe home and homeland and a good harvest. Shalom is honest relationships and good friends. Shalom is a long and happy and fulfilling life and shalom is a good dying when the time for dying comes. My mother's dying was shalom.

I have led studies of the biblical concept of shalom four times now, twice with Bible study groups in Maine and twice with you. These studies have transformed the way I understand the meaning of my faith in Jesus and I hope they have transformed your minds and hearts, too!

As Christians, the central symbol of our faith is the cross. We believe that Jesus, in his dying, has changed our lives, changed the course of each of our lives and changed the course of the history of this world. But how? We say that he has saved us from our sins, and he has, but what does that mean?

It means we are saved from destructive and self-destructive behaviors, that we are saved from anything and everything that takes the beauty and goodness of life away, that we are saved from anything and everything that sets us against God and against each other. We are saved by Jesus from all of this, but that's only the half of it! We are equally saved by Jesus for ... not just from, but for.

For? For shalom! For intimacy with God and intimacy with each other. For living in harmony with the earth and in harmony among nations. For appreciating beauty and preserving beauty and creating beauty. For living. For living good and full and enriched and enriching and joyful lives.

God created the world in shalom and for shalom, and, as Christians, we believe that by his life Jesus has shown us what shalom is and through his death and resurrection has given us shalom, as a gift.

Shalom aleichem.

Peace to you.

Shalom is a blessing, an offering of the gift of shalom, of a life, of a world, as God intends it, as Jesus gives it.

Shalom is a blessing and shalom is a promise.

In days to come ...

“In days to come,” said the prophet, “the mountain where the Temple stands will be the highest one of all.” Not because of any geological change, but because of a theological change! Because people, many people, people from many nations, will be drawn here to the mountain of the Lord, to listen and to learn and to follow God’s path, the path of shalom. And when they do, in days to come when they do, nations will never again go to war.

There will be no more war! No more war and no more implements of war! No more swords. No more spears. No more AR-15’s. No more grenade launchers. No more smart bombs. No more killing drones. No more bunker busters. No more ICBM’s. No more nuclear warheads. No more space force. No more!

Instead of using the best of our ingenuity and the lion’s share of our wealth to develop more and more deadly weapons, we will use brains and passion and resources to develop better plows and pruning knives, better tools for tilling the earth and producing food, better tools for taking care of the earth and its bounty, better tools for taking care of each other, for making life better for all of us. For all of us.

In days to come. It’s not a hopeful wish, but a promise, not what might be, but what will be. When? In days to come. And meanwhile, we live toward that day. We live in expectation of that day. We live in anticipation of that day. We live for the sake of that day. We live to make that day come all the more quickly, by walking now in the light the Lord gives.

Shalom is a blessing and shalom is a promise and shalom is a way. Shalom is God’s way. “Blessed are those who make peace, for they will be called God’s children” -- shown to be God’s children by the family resemblance, by making peace. God’s children are like God. They are peace-makers, shalom-makers.

How? How do God’s children make shalom? By mediating disputes and de-escalating conflicts and talking down threats, but by so much more, too. Remember what shalom means!

When Michelle fills bags with pastas and soups and canned meats from our food pantry, she is making shalom and we are making shalom, too, because we stocked the shelves.

When you plan or cook or serve or set up or clean up for our second Monday community meals, you are making shalom.

When you buy flip flops for a child in Chinandega, or diapers for an expecting mother, you are making shalom.

When you run or walk in a Relay for Life or a CROP Walk or a Pink Ribbon Run, you are making shalom.

When you help rebuild a porch for a sickly woman on twenty-four hour oxygen in Hinton, West Virginia, you are making shalom, and when you listen to her stories, when you are changed by her faith, you are making shalom.

When you drive a thousand miles to repaint the walls of a New Orleans row house, you are making shalom.

When you bend down low to greet a child face-to-face, you are making shalom.

When you make a visit to a person isolated by age or infirmity, you are making shalom.

When you listen patiently to a friend unleashing their grief or anger or frustration or despair, you are making shalom.

When you kiss your wife or hug your son or touch the shoulder of a stranger, you are making shalom.

When you invite the men and women of Christian Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church to join you for worship, when you accept their invitation to join them for worship, you are making shalom.

When you welcome into your church an immigrant from Burma or Liberia, or when you attend a rally in support of the rights and fair treatment of immigrants like them, of every immigrant like them, you are making shalom.

When you welcome into your church somebody who has felt unwelcome in church, you are making shalom.

When you speak out against the use, any use, ever, of torture or so-called “enhanced interrogation techniques,” you are making shalom.

When you speak out against, when you vote against, income inequality, you are making shalom.

When you speak against, when you vote against, racism in all its forms and effects, you are making shalom.

When you hold up a sign or write your representative or talk with your neighbors about common sense gun controls, you are making shalom.

When you say and mean that “there is no such thing as other people’s children,” you are making shalom.

When you pray for the members of your church family, when you pray for the communities of Waterloo and Cedar Falls, when you pray for our state’s leaders and for our nation’s leaders, when you pray for Mr. Trump, when you pray for all the nations of the world, when you pray for justice, when you pray for mercy, when you pray for peace, when you pray for wisdom, when you pray for forgiveness, when you pray ... you are making shalom.

And when your prayers are as much about listening as asking, when you listen for what God is saying to you, to us, here, now, when you hear God’s words and do them, you are making shalom.

And when we pray and work, work and pray, at building a community of love in this place, a community where God is loved above all else, with all the energy and passion we have, and where each person is loved as they are because God loves each of them as they are, we are making shalom.

Shalom is a way, God’s way, and shalom is a promise, God’s promise, and shalom is a blessing, a blessing offered by God to us, and a blessing offered by us to each other. May the Lord bless you.

Shalom aleichem.

Peace to you.