

## A CALM HEART IN AN ANXIOUS WORLD



**Peace is not in a place  
where there is no noise,  
no trouble, and no hard work.**

**Peace means that within the midst  
of all these things  
we can still find calm within our hearts.**

*Scripture:*

**Acts 4:32-35**

32. Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common.
33. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was among them all.
34. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold.
35. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.



### **THE BEST FOUNDATION FOR WORLD PEACE:**

- I believe that to meet the challenges of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not just for oneself, one's own family or nation, but for the benefit of all humankind. Universal responsibility is the key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace.

### **PEACE STARTS FROM WITHIN:**

- Responsibility does not only lie with the leaders of our countries or with those who have been appointed or elected to do a particular job. It lies with each of us individually. Peace, for example, starts within each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us.

### **KINDNESS TOWARD OTHERS:**

- When we feel love and kindness toward others, it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also to develop inner happiness and peace. – **The Dalai Lama**

### **A CALM HEART**

- For health, and the ability to pay for health.
- For a place to live, and the ability to pay for a place to live.
- For energy to power our homes, and vehicles, and the ability to pay for that energy.
- For safety, and the ability to keep us safe.

We don't need to list the anxieties around us. But the peace of God is not the absence of challenges, it is the bold hope we have to respond to our challenges.

Peace is not in a place where there is no noise, no trouble, and no hard work. Peace means that within the midst of all these things we can still find calm within our hearts.

Politicians cannot define peace for us. The scriptures have already defined it for them.

## SHALOM

The first word out of the mouth of every Jew is "Shalom." It means peace. It means "peace" in ten different ways. There are three-hundred fifty references to peace in the scriptures. Here are just a couple.

**Shalom**(שָׁלוֹם) is a Hebrew word meaning *peace*.

- *Nothing missing, nothing broken, wellbeing, and complete.*
- It is used to say both hello, and *goodbye*. As it does in English, it can refer to either peace between two entities (especially between humans and God or between two countries). It can also be the well-being, welfare or safety of an individual or a group of individuals.

**Shalom aleichem** (שָׁלוֹם עֲלֵיכֶם; "well-being be upon you" or "may you be well"), this expression is used to greet others and is a Hebrew equivalent of "hello."

- The appropriate response to such a greeting is "upon you be well-being" as well. (עֲלֵיכֶם שָׁלוֹם, *aleichem shalom*).
- In the Gospels, Jesus often uses the greeting "Peace be unto you," a translation of *shalom aleichem*.

**Shabbat shalom** (שָׁבוּת שָׁלוֹם) is a common greeting used on Shabbat (the Jewish Sabbath).

- *Ma sh'lo'm'cha* (מָה שְׁלוֹמְךָ; "what is your well-being/peace?") is a Hebrew equivalent of the English "how are you?"
- U.S. President Bill Clinton ended his eulogy for Yitzhak Rabin with the words *Shalom, chaver* (Goodbye, my friend).
- ("Gross Shalom" also is frequently used in the UK to describe a particularly attractive girl. Most guys need no translation for that.)

**PEACE IS NOT BASED UPON WHAT IS GOING ON IN THE WORLD, BUT WHAT IS GOING ON INSIDE US. PEACE, IN THIS SENSE, IS NOT SOMETHING WE LIVE WITH WHEN THERE IS NO WAR; IT IS SOMETHING WE MUST FIND EVERY DAY TO GIVE OUR LIVES MEANING.**

## ANXIOUS DISCIPLES

There were no people more anxious than the disciples after their messiah had been crucified.

Their country was occupied by the Romans. The religious leaders they hoped would lead them, seemed to be in league with their captors.

Hunger, illness, sanitation, and the sciences were still mysteries.

The scripture of Jesus greeting Thomas is part of the traditions of our church. The only witnesses were Thomas and the disciples. The church has clung to this lesson because it transformed their doubt into faith. So it is a parable of Christ turning our own doubts into faith.

### John 20:19-31

19. When it was the evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **'Peace be with you.'**

20. After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

21. Jesus said to them again, **'Peace be with you.** As the Father has sent me, so I send you.'<sup>22</sup>When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup>If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.'

24. But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came.<sup>25</sup>So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.' But he said to them, 'Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.'

26. A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, **'Peace be with you.'**<sup>27</sup>Then he said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and see my hands.

Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.’<sup>28</sup> Thomas answered him, ‘My Lord and my God!’<sup>29</sup> Jesus said to him, ‘Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.’

30. Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.<sup>31</sup> But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

### **IN THE EARLY DAYS, IT WAS TOUGH BEING A DISCIPLE**

Frightened and confused, the followers of Jesus huddled together behind locked doors. They hadn't slept well. The horrors of Jesus' betrayal, arrest, torture, and execution were immediate and real. The incredible reports of an empty tomb and of Mary Magdalene's vision added to their inner turmoil. “Could it be true?” they wondered. “Could it possibly be true? Could Jesus be alive? Or is it all a trick to bring us out into the open so the authorities can arrest us and murder us as well.”

Jesus greeted them: "Shalom," said Jesus.

Three times during his brief visit to his fearful disciples, Jesus says, "Shalom." He wouldn't have repeated it if they had gotten the message the first time. He wouldn't have offered peace to his friends if they already had it. Peace is slippery. No matter how tenaciously one clings to it, it always slips away. Yet it is infinitely renewable.

Through the sacrifice of God's son, God has broken down the wall of separation between heaven and earth. In Jesus the Christ, God is with us and for us. We are a forgiven, restored people and we can become forgiving and restoring people.

The Prince of Peace is God's gift to us.

### **THREE GREETINGS**

So I say “peace to you” in three ways this morning.

**I. Shalom. Peace.** You are a stranger, but we should not fear each other. It is good that life has brought us together. It is good to be in California. It is good to worship God together. It is good that our daily needs are cared for, and that we are alive.

For whatever miracles have taken place in your life to get here, Praise God for this peace.

Whatever miracles it may take to keep you alive, Praise God for this well being.

Above our desperate world the skylark sings.

### **II. Shalom. Peace**

I say peace to you a second time, and reveal to you my humanity. Like Jesus, let me show you the hands that I have used to work for God, and let me tell you that sometimes my heart has been pierced by the spear. I've lost people and pets that I have loved. I've moved places, I've put up with things that annoy me, and reached the limits of my own skills. All of this, I have done in the name of God's peace.

### **III. Peace. Shalom.**

I say Peace to you a third time. In the way that Jesus spoke to his friends and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit.” You are my family. “If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.” I have invited you to come in peace, so I send you to go in peace. This shalom means "Pack now! Get ready to go! God is sending us.

*(The sound of a LARK was played.)*

Do you recognize the sounds of the lark - the skylark and the western meadowlark?

A poet wrote about the song of the lark; do you remember who it was?

The poem he wrote about the lark is a poem about the calm heart in anxious times.

**We look before and after,  
And pine for what is not:  
Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught;  
But still we sing.  
Still we sing.**

How can we sing sweet songs, when the world around us is so anxious?

How can we believe that we can outlast our pains, and live up to our hopes?

(Anita Pinney is going to read us that poem in a moment.)

### **IMAGINE IT**

- When Jesus said to Thomas, “Peace,” Thomas answered there will be no peace until I see it.

- But when Jesus showed his scars to Thomas, and his divinity, he explained, “There will be no peace *until you can imagine it.*”

### THE PICTURE OF PEACE

A king offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. In the end, The king had to choose between two.

One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror; peaceful towering mountains were all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky from which rain fell and in which lightening played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This was not a placid scene.

Which did the king choose?

He chose the one in which he could see that behind the waterfall there was a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. From the bush being watered with rain, a mother bird had taken the twigs to build her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird, a Marsh Tern, on her nest that floated upon the water.

**The king said,  
"Peace does not mean to be in a place where  
there is no noise, trouble, or hard work.  
Peace means to be in the midst of all those  
things and still be calm in your heart.  
That is the real meaning of peace."**

**"TO A SKYLARK," BY PERCY BISCHÉ SHELLEY  
READ BY ANITA PINNEY  
(SELECTED VERSES)**

**What objects are the fountains  
Of thy happy strain?  
What fields, or waves, or mountains?  
What shapes of sky or plain?  
What love of thine own kind? What ignorance of  
pain?**

**Waking or asleep,  
Thou of death must deem  
Things more true and deep  
Than we mortals dream,  
Or how could thy notes flow in such a crystal  
stream?**

**We look before and after,  
And pine for what is not:**

**Our sincerest laughter  
With some pain is fraught;  
Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest  
thought.**

**Yet, if we could scorn  
Hate and pride and fear,  
If we were things born  
Not to shed a tear,  
I know not how thy joy we ever should come  
near.**

**Teach me half the gladness  
That thy brain must know;  
Such harmonious madness  
From my lips would flow,  
The world should listen then, as I am listening  
now.**

### SO WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS OF INNER PEACE?

1. A tendency to think based upon hope, rather than on fears based on past experience
2. An unmistakable ability to enjoy the moment followed by episodes of appreciation
3. A loss of interest in judging others or interpreting their actions.
4. An increased susceptibility to the love extended by others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it.

### SO I SAY TO YOU ...

**Shalom as you enter:** God brings the strangers together in peace.

**Shalom as our friendship grows:** God urges us to share our humanity, and live together as family.

**Shalom as we exit:** because God’s work awaits us when we leave.

**In God’s peace and God’s time, our hearts  
will be calmed in an anxious world.**



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