

Building Community: Crafting Peace

By Scott Runyon

First Baptist Church of Birmingham

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Ephesians 4:25-5:2

Children's Time

Peace is a blessing that God gives us when we trust in God. Way back in Bible times they had a different word for peace, the Hebrew people's word was: shalom. Say it with me "shalom."

Now that you know peace in two different languages, I'd like to teach you what peace looks like in American Sign Language. It's a three-part sign, so watch closely!

First put one hand on top of the other hand, clasped together, like this! Next switch your hands around. Now push both of your hands down and away from you with the palms down.

When I start the sign for peace it feels like I'm worried, I'm wringing my hands, they are not settled down, are they? But God encourages us in the Bible not to be worried about anything! He doesn't want us to worry about

things in our families, or school, or in the world.

Instead God wants us to praying let God know what's bothering us. Then God gives us peace.

The final part of the sign is like God smoothing out and taking away all our worries. God will protect us and always be with us, and we won't have to be worried any more.

So the next time you are worried or afraid, what are you going to do? Pray and ask God to help you, and God will give you peace!

Sermon

We started this series on Building Community three weeks ago using the book of Ephesians. During the first week we talked about how God chose us to be an inclusive family — that God blessed us to be a blessing for others — that God gave us the responsibility to be God's representatives to bring the values of God's realm to the world. This is a big responsibility entrusted to us.

Two weeks ago we talked about how God is grafting in people from a variety of experiences and backgrounds into the family of faith.

Remember that we talked about t-budding. This is the very cool way that horticulturists can graft in a variety of fruit branches onto the same tree so that all are fed by the same root. This is a picture of the community that God is growing among us.

Last week we had the remarkable Reverend Sharon Buttry with us in the Fellowship Hall. She had us broken down into small groups to discuss our experiences on the margins of society and in the mainstream. Perhaps we have experiences in both, depending on where we are at any point.

What did you hear in her presentation?

We were left with the question about where we stand in the church. Are we hanging with the mainstream or are we challenging the status quo from the margins? How do people from those two arenas communicate or not? What are the issues that present tension between them?

These are questions we wrestle with as the church community?

Where is our place as the Church?

Remember what she said about addressing the tension between the mainstream and margins? She said that the first thing to do is “LISTEN” and the second thing to do is “LISTEN” and the third thing to do is “LISTEN”!

We listen to those outside of our own experiences in order to learn and appreciate their life experiences and values.

In the passage today from Ephesians chapter 4, Paul gives some practical and concrete guidelines for living as God’s community.

It seems as though peace is a big part of what it means to live in God’s community.

What does peace mean to you?

READ EPHESIANS 4:25-5:2

Peace is part of the thread that is woven through the Christian community for Paul. If people really committed themselves to live this way, peace would be their experience as a community.

If God’s community really lived with anger but not sinning ...

- if God’s community really worked hard so that they could share with those in need ...
- if God’s community really spoke the truth and words to build up others consistently, not just with one another, but whenever they spoke ...
- if God’s community are truly kind, forgiving, and tenderhearted to all people and the world around them ...
- if God’s community truly lived the way that Jesus lived from a center of pure love ...
- if God’s community lived this way, peace would reign, God’s realm of peace would be present in a powerful way in this world.

Paul said that we are to be imitators of Jesus, who gave himself up for us. Living like Jesus means that we are going to be committed to peace, which is a major theme in scripture.

Jesus instructed his disciples to go out to the communities near Jerusalem and preach about what God was doing in the world. The first thing they were to say when entering a house was “May peace be upon this house.”

In the book of John, Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as

the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”

And then again in John’s Gospel: “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”

Jesus life from his birth to his crucifixion, resurrection, and to his ascension are marked by peace. He was even called the “Prince of Peace” at his birth. His birth announced that God’s peace had come to the world.

At the end of his ministry, Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday and the people shouted “Peace in Heaven and glory in the highest.”

Peace is certainly central in Jesus’ life and God’s realm. He instructed his disciples to live lives that demonstrate peace amid the differences of opinion and even oppressive forces in the world. This is what Paul reinforced in his teaching and what we also are called to do. We are to carry a message of peace not only in our words and actions, but within us.

The Hebrew word that is translated as peace is “shalom.” You may have heard the word. Even today in the Middle East it is a common greeting when two people meet, and then also as a farewell blessing.

We often think of peace as the absence of war, or simply quietness, however, that is only one part of a much deeper meaning of the word shalom.

Hebrew words are full not only of a definition, but also feeling, intent and emotion.

Shalom is a feeling of contentment, completeness, wholeness, well being, and harmony. However, shalom goes beyond feelings and holds a sense of an all-encompassing depth of being well.

So, we can talk about shalom as health, positive welfare, safety, tranquility, even prosperity, perfect fullness, rest, and balance.

Hebrew understand held that shalom is only possible by the hand of God. God is the author and perfecter of the fullness of human life and therefore the only one who can provide completeness of shalom in the world.

Jesus invites us to live in his realm, to live by His Spirit and in so doing we understand the ways of shalom. It is our responsibility to live shalom with one another and also to take that Shalom into the world that others may also come into the space of God’s shalom in God’s realm.

I just heard that tickets will go on sale this Friday for the new Star Wars movie “The Last Jedi” In the last movie Luke Skywalker is known as the most powerful of all the Jedi, however it was different in the first Star Wars movie released in 1977, Chapter IV: A New Hope.

You might remember how Obi Wan Kenobi taught young Luke the ways of the Force. It wasn’t something that Luke understood at first. In fact, for a time, he completely doubted his ability to use the Force. But the more he practiced and the more he lived it, the better he understood and could live within the Force and use it for good.

God’s shalom is like that. We can’t understand it by knowing its definition, we must witness it from the inside, experience it, and live it in order to understand it.

Are we living in relationship with God’s Spirit to know God’s shalom

by experience? Are we able to join Jesus' first disciples and God's community to carry shalom into the world?

Peace in this world is not going to happen as countries flex their ego muscles back and forth trying to intimidate each other or get the other to back down. Even if the other does back down, do we really have peace? Is that creating a sense of balance, harmony and wellness?

When we understand shalom, we understand that the answer is a resounding "NO!"

Reacting in retaliation when we are hurt or threatened doesn't bring shalom.

So, how do we absorb the wrong that has been done to us, allowing it to die, and then allowing the Holy Spirit to transform it into new life through an expression of peace, or shalom?

Here's an example of this.

In 2014 there was a 13-year-old baseball phenom named Mo'ne Davis from Pennsylvania who pitched in the Little League World Series of baseball that summer.

Mo'ne touted a wicked 80-mile-per-hour fastball. She was the first girl to pitch a shutout win in a Little League World Series. She was also the first little leaguer to make the cover of Sports Illustrated.

Mo'ne gained all sorts of public notoriety, meeting all kinds of professional athletes and celebrities, including President Obama, who challenged her to a game of HORSE, because today she is a basketball standout who has a goal to play in the Olympics at part of the USA Women's Basketball team.

A couple of years ago, Disney announced that they were going to make a movie about her called "Throw Like Mo". After the announcement, there was a college standout baseball player from Bloomberg University who posted a public message using Twitter. In the message, he harshly insulted Mo'ne and criticized Disney for making a movie about her. Bloomberg University got wind of this and kicked him off of team.

Imagine how Mo'ne Davis might have felt. It has got to hurt to be cut down like that in public at such a young age. What was her response?

She stepped beyond her years and chose to cultivate the way of peace, and a very mature demeanor. Mo'ne took the high ground with incredible graciousness, compassion, and forgiveness.

In an articulate way, the 13-year-old said, "It hurt on my part, but I know he's hurt even more. If it was me, I would want to take that back. I know how hard he's worked. Why not give him a second chance?"

Mo'ne, like Jesus, absorbed the violence directed at her, allowed it to die with her, and returned with a response that is reflective of God's community. She offered the gift of shalom with a request that her attacker be restored.

While the media was demonizing this college baseball player and casting him aside, Mo'ne gave him respect as a human being, and even identified with him. She stood up for her attacker when nobody else would.

It sounds very similar to Jesus' words as he hung on the cross, "Forgive them for they know not what they do."

Shalom. ... Peace ...

Mo'ne chose shalom in the face of violence.

May we the Church, do likewise.