

# Shalom

Dear Friends,

Shalom involves humans being at peace in all relationships including God, oneself, other people and creation. The opposite of Shalom is restlessness (Hebrew 4) and anxiety (Phil.4:6, 7).

Shalom is not religion, but involves a relationship with the resurrected one, Jesus Christ. It is He who is the gardener of the new creation and the One who issued the proclamation that the Kingdom of God has come (John 20:15, Matt 4:17, Romans 5:15-19). Those who have received Jesus Christ as Lord and have encountered and applied His resurrected power to their daily lives know what I mean when I speak of Shalom. “He came and preached peace to you who were far away and preached peace to those who were near. For through Him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens (homeless), but fellow citizens with god’s people and members of God’s household” (Eph 2:17-19).

When Jesus preached He gave us more than just words. He showed us as He hung homeless on the cross how to bridge the gap between creeds and deeds by interceding for His persecutors as He cried out, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). But that’s not all. Jesus rose from the dead and took us as aliens and homeless people into God’s household. Through the Shalom (peace) that Christ provides we not only come home as fellow citizens with God’s people but we have been empowered to be homemakers rather than home breakers.

The followers of Christ are a people who strive to live in the Shalom of God’s peace, power, presence and purpose. They are the new creations in Christ who view the world as holy and all that live in it as holy because it has been created by a Holy God. Wendel Berry points out that, “the Bible leaves no doubt at all about the sanctity of the act of world-making, or of the world that was made, or of the creaturely or creatures in a world that is holy.” The agents of Shalom who desire peace with all of creation will agree with Berry’s conclusion that “our destruction of nature is not just bad stewardship, or stupid economics, or a betrayal of family responsibility; it is the most horrid blasphemy. It is flinging God’s gifts into His face, as if they were of no worth beyond that assigned to them by our destruction of them.”

Such ecological and social homelessness resulting from lives driven by sinful greed stands in direct contrast to the harmony of Shalom that God’s Love provides. Psalm 85:8-13 describes the results of Shalom upon creation when it freely flows through the people of God. “I will listen to what God the Lord will say; He promises peace to His people, His saints – but let them not return to folly. Surely His salvation is near those who fear Him that His glory may dwell in our land. Love and faithfulness meet together; righteous and peace kiss each other.

Faithfulness springs forth from the earth, and righteousness looks down from heaven. The Lord will indeed give what is good, and our land will yield its harvest. Righteousness goes before Him and prepares the way for His steps.” Salvation has come. Christ is risen. Shalom has arrived and is evident through the love, faithfulness, righteousness and peace manifested through the people of God.

As indicated earlier, Jesus is the personification of the Shalom of God. In Luke 4:18, 19 He explains how this Shalom is the answer to not only ecological and socio-economic homelessness, but includes freedom for all. He declares, “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”

What we have just heard is Jesus’ mission statement, which in turn should be the mission statement of everyone who claims to be a Christian. If that were the case, homelessness would end. Those enslaved to the streets through their addictions and rebelliousness would be set free as they trusted Jesus Christ who has come to set the captives free. The captives that are held by greed and self service to the extent they could care less about the homeless on the streets or the devastation of creation are also set free as they turn to Christ for deliverance.

“What kinds of people must we be in order to overcome the deafness and ignorance, denial and indifference that plague our culture? What habitual dispositions must we exhibit to be faithful earth keepers, the agents of transformation God uses to transfigure the world into a place of Shalom?” These questions asked by Steve Bouma-Prediger and Brian J. Walsh in their book, Beyond Homelessness: Christian Faith in a Culture of Displacement are answered when they state, “Of the many candidates, we believe that four virtues are most important: peaceableness, justice, compassion, and wisdom. We will not begin to address ecological homelessness and the defilement of our home planet unless we become people who exhibit these traits of character.”

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in his message, Nonviolence: The Only Road to Freedom pointed out that Shalom “will be accomplished by persons who have the courage to put an end to suffering by willingly suffering themselves rather than inflict suffering on others.” In Matt 5:9 Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God”. But the peacemakers Jesus is speaking of are not a bunch of nice indifferent people. They are those who recognize need and then try to bring about change in a way that preserves the dignity and respect for all parties concerned. In his 1967 Christmas Eve sermon Dr. King expressed Shalom in operation this way: “We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you.” Bouma-Prediger and Walsh explain the role of peacemakers in creating a community of shalom that provides an answer to the crisis of homelessness by stating, “In a world of ecological homelessness, peaceable people seek long-term, nonviolent solutions for those in the death grip of poverty. Peaceable people expose the emptiness of consumerism and materialism, not with an air of condemnation but in a spirit of

conciliation... In a culture of displacement, where feelings of deprivation and alienation are sinking in and hope is fading fast, people of peace are like a healing balm on an open wound. If we are to resist all that conspires to render us homeless on our home planet, and if we are to be earth keeping homemakers, then we must be makers of peace.”

Nichols Wolterstorff has correctly stated that, “There can be no Shalom without justice. Justice is the ground floor of Shalom. If persons do not enjoy and possess what is due them, if their rightful claims on others are not acknowledged by those others, then shalom is absent.”

The Bible is the book beyond all books that has revealed God’s special concern for the homeless, poor, fatherless, elderly and those experiencing oppression and injustice. Throughout the New Testament we see Jesus identifying with those on the fringes of society. In Matt 25:45 He declares, “That as often as you have done it to the least of these even so you have done it unto me.” James 1:27 says, “Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.”

Nicholas Wolterstorff declares, “What is striking in the Old Testament declarations about justice is the passionate insistence that all members of the community are entitled to a full and secure place in the life of the community. Hence the clanging repetitive reference to orphans, widows and sojourners. Over and over when justice is spoken of, that trinity is brought into view. For these were the marginal ones in ancient Israeli society. Justice arrives only when the marginal ones are no longer marginal.”

After over forty years of working with the poor and homeless I believe that exercising both justice and compassion is absolutely essential. If one spends their life only in confronting issues of injustice not only will they find themselves eventually getting burned out, tired out and worn out, but actually marginalized as they will have to become increasingly radical and dramatic in order to get media attention for their cause. On the other hand, individuals who want to avoid the issues of injustice and only want to engage in actions of direct compassion, will find themselves either compromising with the powers of injustice or ignoring the acts of injustice which contribute to the needs warranting compassionate action.

In order to have this unique blend of justice and compassion to take place I have found that prayer is absolutely essential. Shalom belongs to the prayer warriors who believe, agree and stand on the promises of God. They are the people who persevere for justice in spite of the obstacles and the odds. They know what is right according to Scripture and, as a result, will engage in prayer that brings forth actions of hope and help.

Prayer warriors know that prayer is not vocalized worry. I found from personal experience that true prayer comes from the heart where a victory has resulted from an interior battlefield in which Christ now reigns supreme. In such a life, the prayer warrior is free to act in obedience to God’s Word and not the expectations of others. He or she is able to hear the cries of those in need until compassionate justice flows forth. The status quo is rendered obsolete and the obedience to Christ reigns supreme. If Jesus is not Lord, then all activity and

activism only further enslaves us to the god of self. As a result we will simply be caught up in self-centered passions and fail to discover the possibilities of believing prayer. Without a life immersed in prayer bringing forth Shalom, our social activism and acts of charity will only result in self-justifying good works. Unless the rivers of living water, resulting from a relationship with the Divine, perpetuated by prayer without ceasing, unfold, the wells of love in our lives will run dry. As a result we will take on the likeness of the beasts of self-centeredness that are destroying the wonders of God's creation.

To be effective prayer warriors, bringing forth the Shalom of compassionate justice we must understand how destructive fear can be. It is fear which paralyzes both preacher and parishioner when it comes to opening the church doors to the homeless or confronting the institutional power structures which legitimizes stealing the homes of the poor and elderly in the name of economical development. When the paralysis of fear strike, thoughts like, "what will they think of me, will this hurt donations, what will they say about me if I do this," plus a hundred other crazy tapes of fearful thoughts can go through one's mind.

The antidote to the poison of fear is love according to 1 John 4:18 which declares, "perfect love drives out fear." Our love for the oppressed and homeless give us the faith and courage to confront governments that always have resources and tax abatements for the rich but plead poverty when it comes to helping the poor, fatherless, widowed and homeless. In order to be victorious in this area we must remember it takes faith and prayer to confront these principalities and powers. We are told in I John 5:4, "this is the victory that has overcome the world even our faith."

Faith and prayer in the life of the prayer warrior becomes the theater where one experiences Shalom and the healing needed as he or she battles the principalities and power of this world.

True prayer is not just talking to God with our mouths, but it also involves the use of our ears and central nervous systems to hear and experience what God is desiring to say to us at this time and place. God created us to live in an interactive relationship with the Trinity. This relationship, made possible through Jesus Christ, enables us to be connected with God in every area of life. As a result we must see prayer as something that involves every fiber of our being. When we pray, we behold God's glory of creation with our eyes and begin to move into the world of Shalom. As we do this we hear the wonders of His presence in the singing of the birds and feel His wind embrace us. We breathe prayer into our lungs with each breath of fresh air and thank God for it.

True prayer in the life of the prayer warrior involves experiencing Shalom with all of creation as we use our senses to pray. When I go on my prayer walks I love to pray using my senses of seeing and hearing, touching, smelling and tasting. It adds so much more to praying than just speaking words. Such praying challenges me to further focus on God and the wonders of His creation. As I pray I want my ears to hear the birds and other sounds of creation. I will frequently smell the flowers and even taste a leaf or even a flower. Then as I pray I touch a tree and let the touch of the wind embrace me. Then my eyes are used to

observe that squirrel, deer and other forms of wildlife as well as the beauty of the flowers, tree leaves, sunsets and much more. Praying with the senses causes me to praise God and literally rise above my troubling thoughts and see that God is bigger than every problem. Such praying enables me to experience the Shalom of being at peace with God, people, other creation and myself. Bonaventure wrote, “Concerning the mirror of things perceived through sensation, we can see God not only through them as through vestiges, but also in them, as He is in them by His essence, power, and presence... We are led to contemplate God in all creatures which enter our mind through our bodily senses.”

Prayer also involves listening as much as it does speaking. It is a call to “taste and see how good the Lord is.”(Ps. 34:9) Tasting and believing the goodness of God involves the prayer warrior directly in the existential struggle against the belief that God is out to get us. Tasting the goodness of God confronts the lies of the enemy that God doesn’t care and He only rewards “good” people. Tasting the goodness of God in prayer involves being baptized in His grace and accepting Him as His Word when He says, “Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden.” As we pray we discover that it is our resurrected Lord, and not government, that meets our needs.

Another reason New Life Evangelistic Center doesn’t take city, state or federal funds is that the reception of such funds would not only hinder our bold proclamation of the gospel, but also our freedom to address the policies of the government entities which daily compound the problems of the very people we want to help.

Lewis Smedes in his work, Mere Morality, points out that while compassion “always seeks at least justice because people are deeply hurt when they are denied their rights,” compassion adds to justice by, “pushing the common sense of justice beyond itself into the righteousness of the Kingdom of God.” So desiring to be a people of Shalom we find ourselves providing food, shelter, on the job training programs and much more to those in need as we confront the injustices that perpetuate such problems.

The application of compassionate justice along with peaceableness is not complete when it comes to solving the problems of social economic and ecological homelessness unless wisdom is applied. This is outlined for us in Proverbs 2:6-7. “For the Lord gives wisdom: from His mouth comes knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk blamelessly, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of the faithful ones. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path. “It is wisdom working through compassionate justice which shows us what issues to address.”

Just like dirt does not create a human being called Adam unless God breathes upon it and gives it life (Gen. 2:1), even so peaceableness, justice, compassion and wisdom do not create Shalom resulting in the elimination of homelessness unless God’s breath of life is given. Without this breath of life, commonly called the anointing or the filling of the Holy Spirit, much of what is done ends up becoming paternalism or self serving instead of the miracle of Shalom.

The other day I had three trainees come to my office. Charge and counter charge was being leveled by the three at each other. After fifteen minutes of this it became obvious that none of the three had the Biblical maturity to perform the responsibilities placed before them. I was tempted to let all three of them go. Yet to do such would mean closing an important shelter with many people remaining outside. As I struggled with this I thought, “if only strong Biblically equipped people would come forth then those “babies” in Christ wouldn’t have to do this job.” No sooner had this thought entered my mind then the Holy Spirit spoke to me saying, “isn’t it amazing how God uses imperfect people to do His perfect work.” Then it was like the Spirit opened my eyes and I saw these three the same way Jesus must have first seen Peter, James and John. These were not yet fully equipped, yet they were desiring to change and desiring to serve Jesus even with all their imperfections.

The three described are still on the job with all their struggles and deep desire to serve. God has used me in the same way all these years as I have tried under His mercy and grace to bring forth the Shalom healing that both the human and ecological homelessness need. Isn’t it amazing how “God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise. God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong” (1 Cor. 1:27).

It could be said that the Shalom God uses to answer the crisis of homelessness is brought about by the FROG. These are the people who Fully Rely On God. When they feel overwhelmed they know they can call upon Him in prayer. In the midst of adversity brought on by human and ecological homelessness the people of shalom can speak the truth in love and peace, standing steadfast in the pursuit of justice and acts of compassion. To all of us that desire to be God’s Shalom answer to the crisis of homelessness Paul would say, “I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints, and His incomparably great power for us who believe (Eph 1:18, 19).

Think about this power that God desires to let flow through you into this world of hurt, hate and homelessness. Then let His Kingdom of Shalom come forth and praise Him as John declares in Rev. 1:5, 6, “To Him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by His blood, and has made us to be a Kingdom (of Shalom) and priests to serve His God and Father – to Him be glory and power for ever and ever; Amen.”

Yours in the work of *Shalom*,

*Larry Rice*