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I want to begin my remarks today with very familiar words from scripture, those from Isaiah 11:6-9 that some say describe “The Peaceable Kingdom,”

The wolf shall live with the lamb,
the leopard shall lie down with the kid,
the calf and the lion and the fatling together,
and a little child shall lead them.
The cow and the bear shall graze,
their young shall lie down together;
and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.
The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp,
and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder’s den.
They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.

These words are often viewed as a vision for an ideal world, free from violence, free from pain, and free from suffering. Christians through the ages have framed this passage as a description of heaven, a goal for a life well lived, and a reward after we die.

But what if this is not a vision for a time and place far away, but instead is the will of God for the here and now? What if our purpose on earth is to work together to create the peaceable kingdom for all people today?

The Hebrew concept of peace – God’s *shalam* (of modernized and Americanized as *shalom*) – is not of the absence of war, contention, or strife, but of a state of sufficiency, wholeness, and completion. It reflects a world where everyone is cared for, where there is no deficiency or need, and where all live in the blessed assurance that there is enough. *Shalam* defines a peace guaranteed through justice, compassion, equity, and safety.

In Greek, the most common word used is *eiréné* (pronounced i-ray’nay), also a much larger concept than the absence of violence or war. *Eiréné* literally means, “to join together” or “to make whole.” *Eiréné*, like *shalam*, indicates a

state of being where there is no need for fear, for competition, for violence. There is a universal wholeness, comfort, and security. No one lacks for any basic human need, and no individual benefits at the cost of another. No one needs to take, because everyone already has.

In the Hebrew scriptures, the vision for peace often comes through the mouths of the prophets, like Isaiah and Jeremiah as something that the Lord will do for God's people. Framed in such a manner, the promise of peace comes as both promise and threat. Isaiah paints a vibrant picture of reconciliation, restitution, and restoration that is to come. Peace is depicted as a ultimate goal, and is even personified in Isaiah 60:17:

Instead of bronze I will bring gold,
instead of iron I will bring silver;
instead of wood, bronze,
instead of stones, iron.
I will appoint Peace as your overseer
and Righteousness as your taskmaster.

It is easy to dismiss such visions of peace as idealistic, simplistic, and denials of reality. Truly, the vision of a peaceable kingdom is counter-cultural and idealistic, but this does not make it wrong or unreasonable. The inherent flaw in the vision of a peaceable kingdom is not in the vision itself, but in the idea that God will do it for us. Listen to the words of Jeremiah, and his vision of peace restored from chapter 8, verses 8-9 and 11-12:

How can you say, 'We are wise,
and the law of the LORD is with us',
when, in fact, the false pen of the scribes
has made it into a lie?
The wise shall be put to shame,
they shall be dismayed and taken;
since they have rejected the word of the LORD,
what wisdom is in them?
They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying,
'Peace, peace',
when there is no peace.
They acted shamefully, they committed abomination;
yet they were not at all ashamed,
they did not know how to blush.
Therefore they shall fall among those who fall;

at the time when I punish them, they shall be overthrown, says the LORD.

Jeremiah clearly states that those who cry out for peace, those who preach peace, those who promote peace have denied and destroyed peace through their actions. We cannot separate the words of peace from the actions for peace. When we treat peace as a concept, as a mere abstraction, we “make it into a lie,” and we “reject the word of the Lord.” We can paint pretty pictures of the peaceable kingdom, and we can lament that it is idealistic and therefore unrealistic, but by doing so, we reject the will of God and unintentionally “wound God’s people carelessly.”

In context, for Jewish people, for Christian people, and for Muslim people, peace is not a concept or an ideal, but it is a characteristic defining our identity. The three great monotheistic religions claim peace as a core value and a defining practice. However, true peace does not happen by accident, but only by design and intention. Today, we treat peace as a noun – as the descriptor of a desired or wished for hope. However, historically through our scriptures and our theology, peace is a verb – a set of actions and processes that lead us to a desired outcome and reality. Restoration, restitution, reconciliation, justice, and equity are full-time occupations. Peace is hard and important work.

Throughout the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, the work of peace requires three core functions – peace-making, peace-building, and peace-keeping. These are interrelated, but unique skill-sets and functions. I offer the metaphor of building a house for the essential work of peace: peace-making lays the foundation for peace, peace-building constructs the structures for peace, and peace-keeping is the ongoing maintenance and stewardship of peace. Peace is not a far-off goal; it becomes the environment and reality in which we live together.

If we simply took Jesus’ instruction and blessing in Matthew 5:9, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God,” seriously, our world – and our church – would be a radically different place. What would change if disciples of Jesus Christ understood their purpose and work to be peace-making? If we, like Paul, understood that through our faith Jesus breaks down the dividing walls and destroys the hostility that separates us – making us truly one in heart, mind and the spirit of peace – we would make significantly different choices and engage in fundamentally different behaviors.

Conflict resolution, mediation, and arbitration have become industries of business. These practices, and the theories they are based upon, are essential and important, but they are only the beginning tools of peace-making. Peace-making is

a real paradigm shift in thought, word, and practice. We are talking about changing cultures, values, and worldviews. What is normal in our world – competition, power struggles, control, and privilege – are anathema to peace. Before we can build peace, we need to tear down what is already in place. This is hard work, and it will not happen overnight. Peace-making requires deconstruction before healthy reconstruction can take place.

The end of Apartheid in South Africa illustrates this point. Rampant racial prejudice, a mentality of entitlement and exclusive rights on the part of the oppressors, and economic inequalities were the norm, and were widely accepted by those in power as legitimate. Many felt that an end to apartheid structures were simply impossible because they were so ingrained in the cultural and social reality. It was not until those in power were able to accept the need to deconstruct perceptions, prejudices, and predispositions that real change could begin. Once the negative and destructive practices and beliefs were addressed, space was created to replace them with healthy, generative, and healing practices.

Peace-building demands an orientation and commitment to live the fruit of God's spirit. At the very least we embrace and embody the short list that Paul delineates in Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Adding in a commitment to mercy, justice, and compassion, gives us the tools and resources to build and maintain peace.

As with many transformative and lasting processes, peace requires an ever-expanding circle of ownership, commitment and engagement. Peace-making starts with a small group of people realizing and accepting the need for change. Peace-building requires a larger group of gifted, skilled, and dedicated people working together to establish structures, practices, and protocols for peaceful existence. Peace-keeping demands widespread, almost universal, acceptance and engagement in sustaining the new reality.

In John's gospel, Jesus delivers a wonderful and compelling statement about peace in chapter 14, verses 25-27:

“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. But the Advocate,^{*} the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. 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.”

Beyond the promise of comfort and care Jesus shows the disciples, there is an underlying assignment and commission – as Jesus has done for us, so we are to do for others. If God’s Holy Spirit brings us peace, this fruit of the Spirit is one which we must share with others. This is a subtle commission to the work of peace-making, peace-building, and peace-keeping.

It is too simple to be a passive spectator to the work of peace. In so many ways we have abdicated our responsibility for peace to our government and military leaders. We have succumbed to the notion that peace can only be “won” through military might, the machinery of war, and expensive defensive weaponry. Jesus teaches us that peace is incarnational. We are to become the peace – the *shalam* and the *eiréné* – that Christ himself bestows in the form of the Holy Spirit.

Looking at the current situation in the Korean peninsula, the work of peace-making, peace-building, and potential peace-keeping is very relevant. The world is watching the meetings of Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un, as well as meetings between the leaders of North and South Korea, with hopeful excitement. To date, few substantial actions have occurred, but what has happened has been significant. For the many who question whether reunification and restoration is possible, we have witnessed meetings that some thought unlikely. The initial work of peace-making is generally awareness raising, vision casting, and exploration of alternative futures. This is happening now. But for the most part, it is happening at the highest levels of political and military involvement. What is our role in such peace-making events?

As a people of faith, we begin in prayer. To pray for peace should be a daily practice. Peace is the will of God for God’s people, so when we seriously pray to discern and understand God’s will, we pray for peace. To pray fervently and regularly for peace is to center peace as a value in our daily living. Peace is lived in big and small ways. It is impossible to make peace if we do not feel and experience peace in our hearts and minds. If we cannot live peacefully with family and neighbor, we will not live peacefully with strangers and perceived enemies. Peace begins in the spiritual center of each individual and community of faith.

A second essential element of peace-making for all is education. To learn peace is foundational to live peace. What are the values, the beliefs, and the

practices that lead to peace? What are the key elements of healthy relationships? What are the building blocks of civility, respect, affirmation, concern, and positive regard for the other? What are the contributing factors and forces to conflict resolution, economic justice, and fair treatment? How do we help people move from an entitled mentality of personal rights, to a compassionate mentality of the common good? Free thinkers, philosophers, and religious teachers of every age and culture have engaged these concepts. To learn all we can, and to reinforce these concepts and practices on a regular basis, orients us to the works of peace-making, building, and keeping.

The next essential element is evangelism. Peace is God's good news. The Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, models for us a path that leads to life for all. Sharing core concepts of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in Matthew and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke proclaim a gospel message of peace and justice. More than a vision for a peace to come in an age far, far away, Jesus' teaching instructs us on the thoughts, behaviors, and practices in the here-and-now that create peace. Teaching others what it takes to live in peace is crucially important in a world that celebrates power, might, conquest, and military dominance.

There are no such things as "weapons for peace," only "tools for peace." True peace cannot come through threat, force, coercion, or violence. The idea that one group can impose peace on another group is a denial of God's will.

Another important aspect of participatory peace-making is active engagement. I speak personally when I say that I regularly work to build bridges between dissident and disagreeing groups. I work to build interfaith and ecumenical community. I walk with those who protest injustice. I preach a message of unity and healing. I write to my political leaders to support peace engagement and to challenge unjust or unsustainable acts. I look for those places where I can use my gifts, my education, my talents, and my influence to cast the vision for peace. We are all called to do the same. I appreciate on President Moon and Chairman Kim for their patients and mutual engagements for such difficult and critical process and new relationships. It is required of much necessary sacrificial leadership.

I say again, peace does not happen by accident. Peace is made. Peace is built. Peace is kept. Always at a cost. True and lasting peace is not cheap. True and lasting peace does not favor one side in power at another's expense. Peace does not exist in an atmosphere of disrespect, fear, suspicion, and secrets. Peace is the very kingdom of God made real on the earth, so it demands that we place God's will above our own, and that we set aside all earthly agendas to pursue God's vision for all creation.

This is noble work. This is work of which we can all be proud. This is work that witnesses to the world that we are "servants of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God," (I Corinthians 4:1) and that peace may be one of the most blessed mysteries of all. "Not as the world gives, do I give to you," says the Christ. The Peaceable Kingdom is not our lived reality, but it is the life, and world, and realm to which God calls us. Let us work together to make peace, to build peace, and to keep peace, to the honor and glory of God.

"They will not hurt or destroy
on all my holy mountain;
for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea." (Isaiah 11:9)