



Main Street Congregational Church

145 Main Street, Amesbury MA 01913

May 25, 2025 - Searching for Shalom

I bumped into the Sells on Wednesday night. That was a happy thing on lots of levels. The one I will tell about today was that Lydia asked me what I was going to talk about today. Before I put my words together to answer she suggested that maybe I could do something about Memorial Day (great minds think alike). She went on to ask what Memorial Day was about because she couldn't really remember. My answer was that it was a couple of things. It is a day that we remember those who have been killed in wars and that Jesus was about peace. She reflected on the sadness of the deaths. I was prepared to carry on with words about God's vision and presence to help us have a world without war, about Jesus' non violence, and how Memorial Day also marks the beginning of summer. I was ready to wax on about that energizing tension of human's habits of violence bumping up against the freedom, energy, beauty of summer. The human frailty and fears that fight and oppress and the power of God to bring new life, the way of God that is growth and wonder. I had ideas about what is broken and the presence and agency of God to bring life, peace, justice despite the perpetual practices of fighting. I had been praying about the service and had ideas ready to share. Lydia did also. She reminded me that often I have things for the kids when they come up and maybe this week I could have peace signs that they could color. Lydia took in the story, felt the grief and figured out something to do to bring hope and life through that. Peace signs. Reminders of another way of being. Reminders of Jesus' ways of peace. Coloring them? Joining in on making that peace possibility known and joining in to work for peace.

Lydia preached a powerful sermon. Wars kill and destroy. Jesus brings life and creates, Followers of Jesus remember Jesus way and seek to make it visible in the world. I could say amen and sit down. But I am a preacher and preachers have a reputation for going on and on and on. So on I go. On we go. No coloring pages for us but rather a series of reminders of God's will for peace and space for us to feel where we have missed the mark. A time to remember that no matter our propensity to fight, God endures with a way of peace. Jesus continues to show that way. We get to be part of that way that is counter cultural and the healing our world needs.

We start with prophetic words from the part of our sacred story found in Isaiah chapter 11 verses 1-9 as written in The Message

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse,
and a branch shall grow[a] out of his roots.
The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him,
the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
the spirit of counsel and might,
the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.
His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.
He shall not judge by what his eyes see
or decide by what his ears hear,
but with righteousness he shall judge for the poor
and decide with equity for the oppressed of the earth;...

The wolf shall live with the lamb;
the leopard shall lie down with the kid;
the calf and the lion will feed 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

We continue with a poem entitled Searching for Shalom by Ann Weems

I keep searching for shalom,
drawing my water from one well after another -
but still I thirst
For the shower of blessing
that is shalom

I yearn
for life to be just and merciful and peaceful
but the streets are filled with daily deaths
Of spirit and of flesh
...but not shalom.

I keep searching for shalom,
away from crowds and commotion,
but peace and quiet
Don't blot the pain
of broken hearts and broken bodies.

I keep searching for shalom,
thinking perhaps I'll find it
in a quiet field of flowers
Or in star or sea or snow,
but still the innocent are trampled.

I keep searching for shalom,
standing in holy places,
sitting among the saints
Surely in the sanctuary
I will find shalom.

I keep searching for shalom,
but holy places
are not magic
Good works and printed prayers
don't guarantee shalom.

Beyond cathedral walls,
 and above ethereal music,
 the blaring din of death persists.
Back in the streets,
 the people walk in darkness.

I keep searching for shalom
 I have pursued
 and sought it
Have I looked in all
 the wrong places?

What is this bonding,
 this glue among us,
 this cohesiveness
That holds us in the hope
 of shalom?

The longing won't die
 The hope keeps emerging
 like a new sprout
That preserves on the stump
 of a felled tree.

Even in the daily barrage
 of obscenities
 some new star melts
Into my eyes
 and the promise persists.

Here in the darkness
 some new light
 stirs within me
Here in the streets
 I find shalom.

Shalom lives
 not in the sanctuary,
 but in the streets...
In chaos
 on a cross.

In the face of Jesus
 is the peace
 that passes all understanding
The everlasting Sabbath...
 Shalom!

More from our sacred story this time from Deuteronomy chapter 30 verses 15-20

“See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God[a] that I am commanding you today, by loving the Lord your God, walking in God’s ways, and observing God’s commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you do not hear but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, I declare to you today that you shall certainly perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying God, and holding fast to God, for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.”

This prayer written by Judy Chicago entitled Our Nation

And then all that has divided us will merge

And then compassion will be wedded to power
And then softness will come to a world that is harsh and unkind
And then both men and women will be gentle
And then both women and men will be strong
And then no person will be subject to another's will
And then all will be rich and free and varied
And then the greed of some will give way to the needs of many
And then all will share equally in the Earth's abundance
And then all will care for the sick and the weak and the old
And then all will nourish the young
And then all will cherish life's creatures
And then all will live in harmony with each other and the Earth
And then everywhere will be called Eden once again.

A Blessing for Peace written by John O'Donahue

As the fever of day calms towards twilight
May all that is strained in us come to ease.
We pray for all who suffered violence today,
May an unexpected serenity surprise them.
For those who risk their lives each day for peace,
May their hearts glimpse providence at the heart of history.
That those who make riches from violence and war
Might hear in their dreams the cries of the lost.
That we might see through our fear of each other
A new vision to heal our fatal attraction to aggression.
That those who enjoy the privilege of peace
Might not forget their tormented brothers and sisters.
That the wolf might lie down with the lamb,
That our swords be beaten into ploughshares
And no hurt or harm be done
Anywhere along the holy mountain.

Joan MacPherson
Main Street Congregational UCC
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