

Title: "The Blessing Of Peace"
Text: Numbers 6:22-27; Luke 10:1-9

A couple of weeks ago I shared with you the priestly blessing that God gave to Moses and Aaron to bless the people.

Would you say it with me again, not only to remind ourselves what this priestly blessing says,
-but also to actually speak this blessing to one another.

Let's fill this sanctuary, and fill our minds and hearts with these words which God declared that he wanted to be spoken over his people.

"The LORD bless you and keep you.
The LORD make his face to shine on you and be gracious to you.
The LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace."

I told you that we were going to spend some time this summer,
-on the Sundays on which I am preaching,
-unpacking a little of what it means for God to bless us.

Two weeks ago we looked at the blessing of forgiveness. Today, we are going to look together at the blessing of peace.

This priestly blessing ends with the words, "...and give you peace."

What is this peace that God wants to bless his people with?

I mean, sometimes at our prayer time during worship services, Ann Abbot will pray for "world peace."
-And I think what she is praying for is a cessation of conflict and of hostility between people and nations.

And that is certainly an aspect of the blessing of peace. But at other times we come into this sanctuary praying that God would give us peace,
-and what we are longing for is a little peace and rest.
-We want some inner calmness.

- We are longing for a cessation of the anxiousness we feel inside.
- We want a little peace and quiet, from the noise and busyness and frenetic pace of life.

And there is nothing wrong with that.

- I think we would all agree that the world we live in “out there,” and the world we live in “inside here” in our souls, can both be pretty stressful, conflict-ful, “non-peaceful” places.

There is so much to worry about all the time everywhere.

So what is this blessing of peace that God speaks over us, and that God wants us to experience?

Well, in Hebrew the word for peace is “Shalom.”

- And it is a rich Hebrew word, that means far more than “peace” as simply the cessation of conflict or stress.

Shalom is a word that means peace as “wholeness, health, safety, well-being, soundness, completeness, and prosperity.

- And the word, even as we see it used here in this blessing from God implies a sense of permanence.

- That this state of well-being is supposed to last, and not be just a fleeting experience.

When the priest ends the blessing pronouncing, “...and give you peace,”

- there is a sense that this is a peace that is supposed to go with you and stay with you and rest upon you.

But it’s not just a feeling God wants to give us with his blessing.

The shalom of God is something far wider and longer and higher and deeper than just a peaceful, easy feeling.

In a word, the shalom of God is about “reconciliation.”

- Reconciliation with God.
- Reconciliation with ourselves.
- Reconciliation with each other.

In Colossians 1:19-20 Paul writes that “God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Christ, and through Him to *reconcile to himself all things*, whether things on earth or things in heaven, *by making peace* through his blood on the cross.”

You see, the Bible tells us pretty clearly that the lack of peace in the world, and the lack of peace within ourselves
-is first and foremost a result of being “un-reconciled” with God.

We are all broken by sin, individually and corporately,
-the things in heaven, and on earth.
-The whole universe has been marred by sin and is thrown off kilter.

But it is God’s great plan and purpose to reconcile all things back to himself, and thus “make peace,” Shalom.
-And the New Testament tells us that this is what God was doing in sending us his Son Jesus.
-Making shalom is what God was doing in having Jesus die on a cross.
-Making peace is what God was doing as Christ was atoning for the sin and brokenness.
-God was reconciling us to Himself,
-and He was making peace with us. Shalom.

And when we accept and receive what Christ has done for us on the cross, we make “peace with God.”

“Once we were alienated from God,” Paul says, “but now he has reconciled us by Christ’s physical body through death, to present us holy in his sight, and without blemish and free from accusation.”

Do you know that in Christ, you have been reconciled to God?
Do you know that in Christ, you have peace with God?
-That is the first aspect of the blessing of peace that God has made with us.
-It is the first aspect of peace that is meant to abide with us, and rest on us, and stay with us.
-We are to live in that peace with God, trust in it, receive it.

2. Now secondly, being reconciled to God leads to our becoming reconciled to ourselves, and discovering the Peace OF God..

It is that “peace of God that passes all understanding” which Paul speaks of in Philippians 4.

When God cleans us up, and forgives us our sins, and makes us holy and blameless in his sight through Christ,
-He then gives us His Holy Spirit to dwell with us.

And the fruits that the Holy Spirit begins to produce in us are love, joy, and PEACE,
-along with patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, goodness and self-control.

And these fruits don't come all at once, and they're not instant.
-But as the Spirit begins working on us and in us,
-there is a new kind of reconciling work that begins to take place which slowly but surely begins to enable these fruits to grow in us.

It is a reconciling work as we begin to receive and accept our new identity as sons and daughters of God.

- And accepting that new identity involves shedding our old identity,
 - being healed of the hurts inflicted on us, letting go of the insecurities, giving up some of our old habits and besetting sins.
 - The transition can be difficult at times, but part of what makes it so difficult is that we are not reconciled within ourselves.
 - We want to change all at once. We are anxious to get this sanctification process going faster.
 - We don't like parts of ourselves, and we wish we were different, and we'd like to be more like so and so.
 - We get frustrated with ourselves. We think we are lousy Christians.

We think, “I don't pray enough. I don't know the Bible enough.
-I don't see enough of the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience in my life.

- I'm really not a very faithful person, nor kind, nor good, nor gentle.
- And self-control? Forget it. I want to control everyone else but I am terrible at controlling my self."

But my friends, we need to be reconciled to the fact that these godly qualities are the fruits of *God's Spirit*.

- They are not the fruits of *your spirit*.
- You can't just make yourself be more loving, joyful, or peaceful.
- On our own, we don't have enough of any of these fruits to go around.

But can you be reconciled to that fact?

- Can you learn to give up on yourself, and trust in God?
- Can you accept yourself for who you are, a sinner who must every day be saved by grace?
- God's peace begins to flourish in those who give up on themselves.
- Those who learn to accept themselves.
- Those who learn to be reconciled to who they are.

And here's the key, if God has reconciled us to himself,

- then who are we to not be reconciled to ourselves.

If He has accepted us and forgiven us for who we are, and for all we have done,

- then who are we to not accept and forgive ourselves for who we are, and all we have done.

This, too, is part of receiving the blessing of God's peace.

- Allow the Holy Spirit to produce that fruit of peace in your own soul, as you learn to be reconciled to who you are.
- As we do, the peace of God that passes all understanding begins to flow in us, and it guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

3. And then thirdly, God's peace brings reconciliation with each other.

Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:14-22, "For Christ himself is our peace.....to the one Father by one Spirit."

Paul is writing here specifically about Jews and Gentiles,
and how in Christ, these two formerly hostile people groups
were made one.

This, too, is the shalom of God: the reconciliation of enemies.

It is the breaking down of walls of hostility.

It is the work of God's Spirit by which we begin to treat others
as God in Christ has treated us.

Because we have been forgiven so much, we begin to learn to
forgive others.

Because we have been accepted and loved, we begin to learn
to love and accept others.

And it's not easy, and something in us rebels against this.

-Because those people God invites us to love and accept and
forgive are often not easily loveable, or acceptable, or
forgive-able.

Democrats and Republicans don't like each other much these
days.

-They see each other as the enemy.

Christians and Muslims often see each other as the enemy.

-Blacks and whites, Catholics and Protestants, Communists
and Capitalists, Gay and Straight.

-We have so many polarities, so many dividing walls, so many
hostilities.

But Christ came to preach peace to those who were near to
God, and peace to those who were far away.

-He wants to bring shalom to those who are your friends
and like you,

-and He wants to bring shalom to those who are your
enemies and who don't like you any more than you
like them.

Earlier in the service we read how Jesus sent his 72 disciples
out into ministry on his behalf.

-And he said as he sent them out, "I am sending you out
like lambs among wolves."

-But here's what I want you to do. "When you enter a house say, Peace to this house."

Do you hear that? They were going out like lambs among wolves, but the first thing Jesus wants them to say is "Peace to you." "Shalom be upon this house."

And then he says, 'If a person of peace is there, your peace will rest on him. If not, it will return to you.'

And Jesus goes on to say that if a person of peace is there in whatever town you enter, stay with them.

Build on that relationship. Heal the sick. Share the gospel.

-Bring reconciliation.

-Let them know that the Kingdom of God is near.

My friends, this is what Jesus sends us into our world to be and to do as well.

-To bring the peace of God which we have experienced to others.

-To those who seem far away and those who seem near.

-To those who seem like wolves, and those who seem like enemies, and those who seem like pagans, and those who we might not even like very much.

Go, Jesus says, and bring my peace.

Bring the reconciliation of God into the world.

Bring the shalom of God into the world.

For in Christ, God is reconciling all things to himself, things in heaven and on earth.

-This is the great blessing of God.

But we can't give away to others what we don't have ourselves.

-So receive God's shalom today yourself.

-Receive it and invite the Holy Spirit to release the flow of that peace into your heart and mind and soul.

The peace with God that reconciles you to the Father.

The peace of God which passes understanding that helps you be reconciled to yourself.

The peace of Christ which breaks down walls of hostility and reconciles you to those around you.

And indeed, today and every day,

“May the LORD bless you and keep you.

May the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you.

May the LORD Lift up the light of his countenance on you, and give you peace.”