



We Are People of God's Peace - Part 1

More Than A Feeling

Wildwood Mennonite Church // September 20, 2020

Worship Leader: Tom W // Music Leader: Krista L // Sermon: Joe H

Welcome to Wildwood

Good morning everyone! Welcome to Wildwood Mennonite Church! It is wonderful to be back in our sanctuary. And wonderful to see many of our friends on Zoom at the same time. It is great to connect with each other in the spirit of worship. I really appreciate the creativity of many people for bringing us together in this way; in a way we could not have imagined a year ago! Thank you especially to Richard and Les for the electronics! Thank you to Krista for bringing us into worship, with real live piano!

'We are people of God's peace' – we know that song from our hymnal; did you know that the text of that song was written by Menno Simons (our namesake)! We look forward to Joe leading us in a series of services on this theme in the weeks ahead – 'We are people of God's peace'. He will address: 'What does it mean to be a "Peace Church" in these conflict-ridden days'? And I think he will share with us why he sees God's peace as 'more than a feeling'.

In the MCC service last Sunday, one of the quotes that struck me went something like this, 'You can do a lot of good development work, but if the country/region is prone to violence, your good work can be quickly wiped out. So, that's why MCC began early on to emphasize peace initiatives to go along with their community development work'.

So, I invite you to contemplate the theme of 'We are people of God's peace' as you listen to Krista share music for meditation.

Music For Meditation // *Thou true Vine, that heals* // Hymnal: A Worship Book #373

Call to Worship

Our call to worship is from Micah 6:8
God has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?



Let's pray:

It is good to be together, God,
on these screens, in these chairs, with these people,
together listening for your voice,
united by your Spirit.
In this time of worship,
tell us about your kingdom of kindness
so that we can seek it.
Show us your justice.
We want to walk with you,
humbly, closely, daily.

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Peace Candle

I will light our peace candle now. And for those of you at home, I invite you to do the same, as we reflect on ‘We are people of God’s peace’.

Let's pray:

As we ponder the words of Menno Simons in this hymn, we read words and phrases including: ‘We are people of God’s peace, as a new creation’, ‘love unites and strengthens us’, ‘serving one another’, ‘spreading joy and happiness’, ‘hope we bring’, ‘Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, confidence will give us’. These are such good words to encourage us, and inspire us in our lives as Christians, as people of God’s peace. Perhaps when we are feeling discouraged by the news we read in the media, by stories of suffering in our city or province, or by stresses in our workplaces or families, we can remind ourselves that the Prince of Peace will give us confidence. Thank you Jesus. Amen


Offering Prayer

We won’t physically collect our offerings now, but your ongoing donations to the church budget are well appreciated. If you aren’t sure about how to donate, please contact the church office after the service. If you are a visitor with us today, your presence is offering enough. And let’s remember that offerings can take many forms, in addition to monetary.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 9:7: God loves a cheerful giver,
Eugene Peterson in his translation of the Bible says,
“God loves it when the giver delights in the giving.”

Let's pray together:

God of grace,
it is our delight and our devotion
to give these gifts to you.



All we are, and all we have
are yours alone.
Accept this joyful offering
as a token of our abiding love:
use it to bring peace, justice,
and comfort to all the world, Amen.

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Song // We are people of God's peace // Hymnal: A Worship Book #407

Children's Story // Keri H

This week's story is "Deepika Kurup Asks the Right Questions" from the book [5-Minute Stories for Fearless Girls](#). Watch for the video link in our Tuesday congregational email.

Scripture // Inclusive Bible translation

Revelation 21:22-27

I saw no Temple in the city, for God Almighty and the Lamb were themselves the Temple. There was no sun or moon: God's glory was its light, and the Lamb was its lamp. The nations will walk by the city's light, and the rulers of the earth will bring their treasures. The city's gates will never be shut by day, and there will be no night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does loathsome things or tells lies. Only those whose names are written in the book of life of the Lamb will enter.

Revelation 22:1-5

The angel then showed me the river of life-giving water, clear as crystal, which issued from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and flowed down the middle of the streets. On either side of the river grew the trees of life which produce fruit twelve times a year, once each month; their leaves serve as medicine to heal the nations. There will no longer be any curse.

The throne of the Almighty and of the Lamb will be there, and God's subjects will serve faithfully. They will see the Most High face to face, and bear God's name on their foreheads. Night will be no more. They will need no light from lamps or the sun, for our God will give them light, and they will reign forever.

Sermon // "Peace Church 101" // Joe Heikman

(If you'd rather watch than read, the link to the video version will be posted to wildwoodmennonite.org, hopefully by late Sunday afternoon)

what does it mean to be a Peace Church?

For me, that question has long been a foundational part of my identity.

I spent the first 13 years of my formal education, from kindergarten through grade 12, at Shalom Christian Academy. Shalom was a private Christian school, though we occasionally had to explain to the uninformed that we were not actually Jewish and didn't speak any Hebrew beyond that one word.

Shalom, as most of you know, is the Hebrew word for "peace." (Its actual usage and definition are much broader than that, and I'll get to that later.) My school was called Shalom because it was founded by the three "historic Peace Churches" in my region of the States--the Brethren in Christ, the Church of the Brethren, and the Mennonites.



That was actually a pretty diverse group, culturally and theologically. But that emphasis on the way of Jesus as the Way of Peace brought us together.

And that branding stayed with me. I was a *Shalom* kid, part of the Peace Church tradition. Those are my people, and peace has always been inseparable from my understanding of Christianity.

So it's not an accident that I've found a home in Mennonite churches wherever I've gone in my adult life. "[We Are People of God's Peace](#)," as we sang. Those words go all the way back to Menno Simons in 1552. In my mind and heart and experience, that's what church is.

Now, what does that actually mean, to be a Peace Church? That's the driving question of the sermons I have planned for the next couple of months.

As usual, I see this as a Very Complicated Question.

I know that some of you have put a lot of thought into this. Some of you have degrees in peace theology, peace and conflict studies, restorative justice.

Many of you have lived out the work of peace; that's what many Mennonite organizations are all about. Last week in our worship we celebrated 100 years of the Mennonite Central Committee doing this work. Spoiler alert, I find that to be a very compelling vision of what a Peace Church is all about.

Some of us find the Peace Church theology and practice quite compelling and attractive. Others of us don't think about it very much and find other things more important about faith and church.

And there are those of us who even dislike or disagree with the ideals of peace church theology. We'll talk about some of the ways Mennonites have been and continue to be hypocritical in our talking and walking in the Way of Peace. Some of us struggle with that idealism and sanctimony. Some of us have different ways of seeing the world and its problems. And that's okay, that skepticism is warranted, and even the Mennonite tradition has long made space for different ways of thinking about and living out these things.

And finally, there are those of us who have been around long enough that we're just comfortable with the language and ideology of Peace. It's just part of the branding, part of how we're used to seeing ourselves, it feels good to be people of peace.

I probably identify most with that last group, of comfortable peace-ish people.

Which probably means trouble if you do as well, because as usual I'm mostly preaching to myself while the rest of you listen in.

Comfortable peace? Come on, Heikman, is that really a thing? I intend for this sermon series to make me *less* comfortable, and perhaps some of you as well.

in this church, we are...

thinking about and living
out peace (or not) in
many different ways

But wherever you're coming from, I think it's important to name that we're not all coming to this topic from the same place. Because I know from experience that we're not all going to agree on what God's Peace means or what role you and I and the church have to play in it. And that's okay; wherever you're at on this topic, you're in good company.

Notice how hard I'm working to avoid any conflicts over my sermons about peace! :)



Because we're not all coming to this Peace Church from the same place, I'm going to start with the basics and share how my understanding of what it means to be a Peace Church has grown and developed.

At Shalom Christian Academy, what I learned about being a Peace Church was mostly a list of things that people of peace did not do.

The big one was "No War." We learned that "Thou Shalt Not Kill" and "Love Your Enemies" were central to the teachings of the Bible. We heard the stories of the [Martyrs Mirror](#), of Christians throughout history, like Dirk Willems and Michael Sattler, who were willing to die for their faith, but refused to fight or kill for it.



We heard testimonies from people who were conscientious objectors and worked in alternative service programs instead of joining the army when their numbers came up in the draft. When I turned 18, I was legally required to register with the US Selective Service agency, and I felt the weight of all that history when I wrote "Conscientious Objector" across the registration card.

I learned lots of reasons for *why* we refused to participate in war. I'd say that the core of it came down to a choice of citizenship. Wars were the way of human governments, and war demanded the total allegiance of those who participated in it. But as Christians, we were to "seek first the Kingdom of God." Our core allegiance was to God, and we put our faith in God for protection and justice. "*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God.*" (Psalm 20)

The follow-up to "no war" was "no killing." Which in my childhood, was expressed most clearly as a prohibition on guns. Now, I grew up in *prime Pennsylvania deer huntin' country*, so this was a complicated one. But in my family, there were no guns, not for hunting or sport shooting, not even for killing the groundhogs who wrecked our fields and tractors.



Guns took lives, and that was for God alone to decide. When we said we were pro-life, for my people anyway, that wasn't just about abortion, that was about the sanctity of all human life. Owning a gun, even for self-defense, was to risk taking on a role that was meant for God alone.

Following that same track, a little lower down on the priority list was "No Violence" by which we meant, no fighting."

I've never been in a physical fight, never punched anyone other than my older brother. I've always lived a rather sheltered existence and I'm pretty good at avoiding volatile situations, and I'd like to think that my size would make most people think twice about starting something with me...? It's quite convenient for me to not fight people, and all the hypothetical discussions about "what would you do if someone you love was attacked..." have remained hypothetical for me.



So my non-violence is largely situational. But some of it also has to do with a deeply ingrained resolve to "turn the other cheek" in the way of Jesus. Non-resistance was the word I was taught for it, the ideal that it is better to accept harm than to do harm, even in self defense. That was the way of Jesus, I was taught, who thought it better to allow himself to be beaten and killed on a cross than to use his power to fight back.

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord'... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" ([Romans 12:19,21](#)). Here again, the understanding that I was raised with is that Justice and Protection are God's department, that humans are meant to do our best to be faithful to the good in every situation--love, kindness, integrity, hope--and trust that God will take care of us and work things out in the big picture.

The final "no" on the list was "No Conflict?" There's a question mark with that one, because of course there was conflict in my school and church and family. Plenty of it. But 95% of it happened behind closed doors. In my recollections of childhood, when people had a disagreement, they left--they were taken out of the classroom, they went to private meetings, they left the church--and the rest of us carried on like nothing was happening. When they came back, if they came back, they didn't talk about it. Nobody talked about it.

Of course that's just a childhood recollection. But there was, and is, definitely a sense that being a Peace Church means the suppression of conflict, in public perception if not in reality.

And so many of us do practice non-resistance in unhealthy ways: tolerating abuse, avoiding conflict, failing to protect vulnerable people, and choosing passive-aggressive patterns over good communication. Not in *this* church, obviously, but I've heard that *other people* struggle with those things... ;)

So that was Peace Church 101 at Shalom Christian Academy.

As a kid and then an idealistic youth thinking about faith and peace, that worked for me. Now that I've grown into a highly mature and sophisticated adult thinking about faith and peace, things are more complicated.

a Peace Church means...

NO War
No Killing
No Violence
No Conflict?



For one thing, there are a lot of absolutes in that list of things people of peace should abstain from. It's really complicated to live out those absolutes with integrity in a world that is filled with connections and human complications.



complicit 

[kuh m-plis-it]

[Spell](#) [Syllables](#)

Examples

[See more synonyms on Thesaurus.com](#)

adjective

1. choosing to be involved in an illegal or questionable act, especially with others; having complicity.

Is it possible to live my privileged existence in Canada and actually claim to not participate in war and violence? From my taxes to my investments to my personal safety and security, there is a great deal of violence threatened and actually done in my name, to my benefit. There's no getting around it.

How can we be people of Peace when we are very much a part of a society that embraces violence?

Second, there's a strong link between how I was taught to understand Peace and how I was taught to understand God. As my understanding of God has developed and grown, so too my understanding of peace needs to grow and develop.

To greatly oversimplify it, I used to believe that war and self-defence were not necessary because protection was God's department. And I believed that retributive and punitive violence were not up to humans, because God would bring judgment and justice. I was taught that God is in control, and if God is in control then it's a lot easier to "turn the other cheek" because I had that assurance that God's going to take care of me, God's going to make it all work out in the end.

But what if I'm not so sure now that God is in control in that way? What if I'm learning and choosing to focus less on God's power controlling things, and more on God's intimacy and sustaining, redeeming presence with us? What if I no longer believe that God is actually in the business of protection and judgment, but rather concerned with healing and compassion in all things, all the time?

I don't have time to explore that fully today, but suffice it to say that if that's how I see God, then that must have significant impacts on my understanding of Peace. Theology has to have practical implications if it's going to mean anything.



Finally, you will have noticed that the "No War, No Violence" etc. approach to Peace is a very negative approach. It says quite clearly what we're against, but it leaves unanswered the question, "what are we *for*?" And having that negative aspect as a primary part of our religious identity--Mennonites practice nonviolence--that has led us to invest heavily in convincing ourselves that we're actually not violent. That violence exists outside of us as individuals and families and communities.



But the truth is, carrying these ideals of no war, no killing, no fighting, *hasn't actually solved the violence issue*. Our communities have suffered deeply from unhealthy patterns of conflict, from domineering leaders, from physical, sexual and emotional abuse, and even more from *hiding* and justifying those abuses.

Abstaining from the most overt forms of violence has not actually kept our hands clean. Violence is more insidious than that. We bring it with us, so avoiding conflict in the name of peace hasn't worked. Isn't working, not for everyone.

So then, given all of that background, recognizing the complications and that we're going to fail to live up to our ideals, what does it mean to be a Peace Church?

That's going to take at least another four or five sermons to work out, at minimum. :)

But for today I'll start and end back where I began, with *Shalom*.

As I said, *shalom* means "peace," but it also means much more.

Some of you know [the song](#), "Harmony, unity, wholeness and justice, peace and salvation, all are shalom."

Shalom is about right relationships, "nothing missing, nothing broken."

Probably the most straightforward definition is that shalom means "flourishing." [As John Stackhouse says](#), shalom is "*this literally global idea where everything is what it can be, everything lives up to its potential, and all those relationships are flourishing.*"

Flourishing.

That's the dream, right?

But how do we get there from here?

We read earlier the vision of John the Apostle from the book of the [Revelation 21:22 to 22:5](#).

shalom
means
flourishing



The angel then showed me the river of life-giving water, clear as crystal, which issued from the throne of God and of the Lamb, and flowed down the middle of the streets. On either side of the river grew the trees of life which produce fruit twelve times a year, once each month; their leaves serve as medicine to heal the nations.



I know many of us have been trained to think about Revelation as a vision of “the end of the story,” the eternal unchanging glory, the great “happily ever after.”

But this vision has a calendar, a sense of ongoing time--trees that produce fruit in a continual cycle of renewal and harvest.

And this is a river city--we live in Saskatoon; I don't have to tell you that a river is flowing, moving, changing. It has a life of its own.

And then there's that last line about the trees,

“their leaves serve as medicine to heal the nations.”

If all the struggles are over, there would be no need for medicine. If the hurting is over, where is the need for healing?

That's the word that I keep coming back to, healing.

Clearly, we do not live in *shalom*. Our world is not flourishing, not wholly.

To get there, it's going to take healing. Healing within us, healing among us, healing beyond us.

And some of you noticed that code word in the vision, the note that the tree produces twelve different kinds of fruit, twelve being the code word for the People of God.

The Tree of Life, we are part of that. And the life of the Tree becomes medicine for the healing of the nations.



what does it mean to be a
Peace Church?
Healing

That's the summary of the biblical vision for the world and our part in it, "[God's Healing Strategy](#)" to bring out the flourishing of the whole cosmos.

I'm going to talk more next week about the biblical vision of *shalom*, the Way of life.

But for today, I want to leave you with the question:

how are you part of the
healing that God is
bringing in our world?

Some of us are professional healers, repairers and nourishers and growers by vocation. Do you see that work as the work of *shalom*?

Some of us are community builders and conflict resolvers in our various circles, do you see those transformations in the context of God's healing?

And some of us are engaging the hard work of healing in our own wounded selves. This too is the work of *shalom*, as my individual flourishing is connected to yours and to ours and to the whole of everything.

So that's my take on what it means to be a Peace Church. I look forward to learning and growing as we walk this path together this fall.

[May grace and peace be yours](#) in abundance in the awareness of God and of the way of Jesus.

Amen.

Song of Response // O healing river // Hymnal: A Worship Book #372

Sharing Time // ["Hey Wildwood..." online sharing](#)

Not hearing from one another in person through the Sharing Time is a significant loss for many of us. It's not the same, but one way to express your grief, anxiety, prayer requests and gratitude is through the "Hey Wildwood" link above. If you're able, join us for our Sunday Morning Zoom gatherings, or check your email for the sharing items from last Sunday. Or maybe now would be a good time to pause your reading to call someone from church or elsewhere that you haven't heard from this week.

Congregational Prayer for Joys and Fears // Eileen Klaassen i

Thank you, God, for the joy of today.

It is still morning, and yet so many good things have come our way:

First of all, that some of us are able to meet for worship in-person
for the first time in MONTHS!

Thank you for those who are online,

And for those who worship on their own using the same worship materials.

Thank you for the joy of worshipping you, our Creator, as one body.

But we are grateful also for the things we tend to take for granted:

the joy of shelter, the joy of clean water coming out of taps,

the joy of food on the table.

Thank you for friends who understand us,

and the joy of meeting new friends.

In the midst of joys, in all honesty

we admit that we come with fears.

Some of us have fears about new beginnings;

new schools and new ways of being in school,

fears about new relationships, new jobs.

We don't know how we'll do or how we'll feel—

we are nervous and want things to go well.

There are fears about health:

aches and pains that won't go away,

symptoms that are unexplained,

treatments that we hope will be effective.

Some of us have financial fears:

will we find work, or is our work secure,

how will we pay these bills,

have we saved enough for the future?

And then there is the fear of loneliness

that strikes us all at some points--

we fear that we won't find people to love,



or that we'll lose the people we do love.

God of hope, thank you that you are with us in all our fears,
and that you bring joy even in the midst of them.

Thank you for your faithfulness through time,
for the ways you have been there for us in the past,
and that nothing can separate us from your love.

Help us this week to have compassion for those who fear:
for those who are fleeing bombs and bullets,
for those who face governments that are oppressive,
for those who cannot worship openly, but must meet in secret.
In our own community, there are people who live with the fear of violence.
Help us to be people of refuge, who offer help and support,
and who go the extra mile when we see people in need.
Forgive us for the times we have been too wrapped up
in our own fears and joys to truly see our neighbour.
Help us this week to embrace joyful living,
being mindful of the gift of each day,
remembering our Saviour Jesus Christ
who lives in us and through us. Amen

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Found at <https://carolpenner.typepad.com/leadinginworship/2019/08/congregational-prayer-for-joys-and-fears.html>
and adapted for use on Sept 20, 2020.

Song // Oh, have you not heard // Hymnal: A Worship Book #606

Benediction

Now may the **God of peace**, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. (Hebrews 13:20-21)

