

Micah 5:2-5a  
The Promise of Shalom  
WRCoB 11.13.22

On a plaque marking Abraham Lincoln's birthplace  
Near Hodgenville, Kentucky are these words.

The words are part of a fictitious conversation.

"Any news down t' the village, Ezry?"

"Well, Squire McLains's gone t' Washington  
t' see Madison swore in

and ol' Spellman tells me this Bonaparte fella  
has captured most o' Spain.

What's new out here, neighbor?"

"Nuthin', nuthin' a'tall, 'cept fer a new baby born  
t' Tom Lincoln's.

Nothin' ever happens out here."

~~

Bethlehem, like Hodgenville was a small village.

Nothing much happens there.

And yet, like Hodgenville, it was notable in that  
It was a birthplace of a king and a prince  
King David and the Prince of Peace.

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Hodgenville KY is still a sleepy little town  
With a population of a smidgen over 3000.

So too, is Bethlehem with 25,000 people.

Just because famous people are born  
In sleepy little towns  
Doesn't make the town any less sleepy.

Heck, Markle IN, where I was born  
Is still a little town with a population of 1000.

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Micah was a contemporary of the Prophet Isaiah  
During the mid700s BCE.

Whereas Isaiah grew up in aristocracy  
Micah came from a working-class family.

He grew up in a rural village named Moresheth-gath.  
Southwest of Jerusalem in the kingdom of Judah.

Due to his humble beginnings  
Micah identified with the poor and marginalized.

He knew first-hand the hardships of the common folk.

He spoke out against the socioeconomic injustices  
And stressed one could not have peace without justice.

He foresaw that the messiah would be born in Bethlehem  
In the lineage of David

And that through him  
Wrongs would be righted  
Justice and peace would prevail.

He anticipated a time when  
Bethlehem would give birth to the One of Peace

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The Hebrew word that translates to the English word peace  
Is the word, shalom.

It is often used as a greeting among the Jews  
And Muslims, salaam alaikum.

The English word peace doesn't do justice  
To the Hebrew word shalom

Shalom incorporates so much more  
Than our definition of peace.

Peace has an internal and external aspect.

Internally, it means to feel calm.

Externally, it means the absence of conflict.

The Church of the Brethren  
One of the historic peace churches  
Including the Mennonites, Amish and Quakers.

Has published many peace statements over the years.

From a recent statement on peace

*We believe, that war or any participation in war is wrong and incompatible with the spirit, example and teachings of Jesus Christ.*

However, shalom' s meaning is much broader.

Shalom is about relationships

With God, with others, and with creation.

It is health and wholeness in all of life.

In 1986, the United Methodist Council of Bishops

Produced a statement on peace.

*It is much more than the absence of war. Shalom is positive peace: harmony, wholeness, health, and well-being in all human relationships.*

*It is the natural state of humanity as birthed by God. It is harmony between humanity and all of God's good creation.*

Shalom doesn't just mean all is well within me

Or within my family

Or within my various networks

Or within my country

Shalom means a healthy and whole interconnectedness

Found in all things.

When one suffers in the fabric of life, we all suffer.

Shalom is peace as inseparable from justice.

When there is shalom

No one goes hungry . . . anywhere on earth.

When there is shalom, all live in harmony and prosperity.

When there is shalom

Differences are acknowledged and celebrated.

When there is shalom all is right with the world.

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The New Testament writers searched scripture

And looked to the writings of Micah and Isaiah

As pointing to Jesus, the Prince of Peace

### **Isaiah 9:6 CEB**

**<sup>6</sup> A child is born to us, a son is given to us,  
and authority will be on his shoulders.**

**He will be named**

**Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,**

**Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**

Jesus possessed the capability

Of bestowing peace on an individual.

**John 14:27 NRSVUE Peace I leave with you; my peace I  
give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.**

~~

There are many in the church today

That consider Jesus as an example of right living.

Kind of like a coach or a trainer exemplifying morality.

That Jesus models by his teaching and the way he lived

The way we all ought to live.

That to achieve peace defined in the word shalom

We are to do our very best

To be the peacemakers God calls us to be.

To achieve peace, then, rests on our shoulders.

And that's right.

But it's only partially right.

Again, from the United Methodist statement on peace.

*In the New Testament, Paul begins his letters, "Grace to you and peace **from** God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."*

*The bishops explained, "Paul's letters announce that Jesus Christ is "our peace." It is Christ who "broke down the barrier of hatred that divided us," creating one humanity, overcoming enmity, so making peace (Ephesians 2:14-19)."*

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And so how do we achieve shalom?

**Do** as if everything depended on you  
And **pray** as if everything depended on God.

Peace on earth begins with peace with God.

Jesus says, my peace I give you.

The peace we seek on earth  
Is not just the absence of conflict

There is a spiritual dimension to shalom.

We receive it as a gift  
When we profess Christ as Savior.

I believe that.

Real peace can only start

When it starts from within each of us

Through inviting Jesus into our life.

Christ is our peace.

Frederick Buechner

*Christ never promises peace in the sense of no more struggle and suffering. Instead, he helps us to struggle and suffer as he did, in love, for one another.*

*Christ does not give us security in the sense of something in this world, some cause, some principle, some value, which is forever. Instead, he tells us that there is nothing in this world that is forever, all flesh is grass.*

*He does not promise us unlonely lives. His own life speaks loud of how, in a world where there is little love, love is always lonely. Instead of all these, the answer that he gives, I think, is himself.*

*If we go to him for anything else, he may send us away empty or he may not. But if we go to him for himself, I believe that we go away always with the deepest of all our hungers filled.*

When we pray for peace

When we seek peace in our relationships

When we strive for justice and peace

We become channels of God's Spirit  
Which is always at work  
Reconciling the world towards shalom.

As in St Francis' prayer  
When we open our hearts to the one of peace

We become instruments of God's peace  
Sowing love where there is hatred.

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You can call me an evangelical if you want  
It actually means the bearer of "good news"  
But I believe Jesus is our Savior.

I believe we need a spiritual relationship with Christ.

In a progressive thinking churches  
Pastors have the challenge to speak  
Of the personal and spiritually dynamic  
Dimensions found in Jesus.

Progressive churches tend to emphasize  
The doing of the work of Jesus  
Towards peace on earth

At the expense of God's Spirit of peace within.

To me, it is not one or the other it is both.

**Ephesians 2:8-10 CEV**

**<sup>8</sup>You were saved by faith in God . . . This is God's gift to you, and not anything you have done on your own.**



**<sup>9</sup> It isn't something you have earned, so there is nothing you can brag about.**

**<sup>10</sup> God planned for us to do good things and to live as [God] has always wanted us to live. This is why he sent Christ to make us what we are.**

The good things God plans for us to do focuses on shalom.

As Jesus said, blessed are the peacemakers.

It combines the work of peace and justice.

The World Council of Churches calls this “just peace”

From their *Statement of the Way of Just Peace*

*Just peace is a journey into God's purpose for humanity and all creation. It is rooted in the self-understanding of the churches, the hope of spiritual transformation and the call to seek justice and peace for all. It is a journey that invites us all to testify with our lives.*

*Those who seek a just peace seek the common good. On the way of just peace, different disciplines find common ground, contending worldviews see complementary courses of action, and one faith stands in principled solidarity with another.*

In other words

When we seek the peace

As understood through the Prince of Peace

We collaborate with other faith traditions for common good

We don't have to compromise our faith in Jesus to do that.

But shalom begins within each of us.

Accepting the peace of God that passes all understanding.

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And so, the next time you are in Hodgenville KY

Or if you ever get a chance to go to Bethlehem

You might find them still rather small unassuming towns.

Look up in Hodgenville where Lincoln was born sometime.

When in Bethlehem, don't bother

Trying to find the birthplace of Jesus.

You'll not actually find it.

Better yet, seek the birthplace of Jesus within you today.

And begin to experience the richness of shalom

"Peace on earth, good will to all."