SHOFAR -1

Shalom שלום سَلام. 和平 शान्ति εἰρήνη **Peace**

EASTER 6

SHALOM – Peace, "My" Peace I give to you.

The Hebrew word *shalom* does not occur in the Greek New Testament. There is a Greek word, however, which is almost identical in meaning: *eirene* (pronounced eye-RAY-nay). While this word is usually translated as *peace*, when the New Testament writers wrote ***eirene***, they were thinking ***shalom***.

As with ***shalom***, the term includes a broad vision of human flourishing that comes with God's saving work through Jesus Christ. God's redemption of Israel and the church as the reconstituted Israel, is rightly described as ***shalom/eirene*** because both are reflections of true human flourishing.

Eirene is an important word in the New Testament and out of its many applications, there is one that stands out as we approach Pentecost is found in **1 Corinthians 14:33** which reads, *for God is not a God of confusion but of peace (eirene*). What Paul is stressing is how God is a not a God of confusion, chaos or instability. God is the Shalom-***creato****r,* or more accurately, the Shalom-***restorer.***

The Kingdom Vision of Shalom/Eirene

According to the Old Testament prophets, **shalom/eirene** will be an essential, defining characteristic of the Messiah's kingdom, and so it is therefore used almost synonymously with the idea of salvation through Christ (**Eph. 2:17…** *He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near.* In fact Shalom describes both the content and the goal of the New Testament Christian message which is called the "gospel of peace (eirene)" (**Eph. 6:15**… *So stand firm! Put the belt of truth round your waist; put on justice as your breastplate; [15] for shoes on your feet, ready for battle, take the good news of peace.* This is the gift Christ's disciples have to offer the world: ***Shalom***

The Garden of Shalom

The Bible (Genesis) opens with an image of the world that was chaotic, without shape or form. It is characterised as **Tohu va-Vohu**, wild and waste, uninhabitable chaos. Into this came the command of God spoken into the dark, into the watery anarchy which he then ordered according to his good pleasure. Light, land, and living things all appeared exactly where God told them to be. He gave form to the wild, he gave purpose to the chaos. He shaped the shapeless according to his own infinite wisdom (**Proverbs 8:22-31**). After six days of creative activity, the divine assessment of those works was: it was Good. Tov!

The way the biblical narrative reads, God was creating the kind of "home" he wanted for his creatures, in particular the man and the woman who would be created in his

own image and likeness. They would be enlivened by his own breath. It was to be a "home" in which he would be dwelling. And what a "home"! This first holy house in which God was to dwell was a luxurious garden, the Garden of Eden. There was no "house", just a garden. And, up until the Fall, life in the garden was characterised by Peace-shalom. It was the reality that comes when everything is God-centred.

But what exactly is Shalom?

Eden is a place of complete, holistic wholeness. Adam and Eve have everything they need. They have an abundance in every sphere of their human existence. They have been given all the physical provisions they could ever need, they have deep, harmonious and loving relationship with each other, and in Eden they dwell in the life-giving, soul-nurturing presence of God - and thus their spiritual needs are met.

Adam and Eve were created to live this place in such a way that they are set up to flourish and to fully thrive. In chapter two of Genesis, after the creation of the woman, they are truly, fully human. All of this forms the paradigm, the trellis on which shalom thrives and spreads. Everything is working as is ought to – meaning everything is working as God has ordered it to be. That is what engenders **Shalom**.

The Unravelling of Shalom

But this is certainly not the way we would describe the human experience at today. We all desperately want it, but few of us have it, and it rarely endures. Many promise they have the "secret" to lasting Shalom, but few come even close to delivering.

In chapter 3 of Genesis, everything goes terribly, miserably wrong. Discord is sewn, lies are believed, and what was forbidden is consumed. Beneath the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil God's well-ordered world is being ripped apart in act of pretentious self-serving rebellion. God's goodness is rejected, and man comes together with the Evil One and together they initiate a programme of de-creation. The ***tov*** (the Hebrew for good) is exchanged for the ***lo-tov*** (the not-good). What a choice!

Choices have consequences and so God exiles humanity out of the Garden of Eden, The Garden of Shalom, the place of complete wholeness, and into the wilderness. Relationships are marred, physical needs are hard to satisfy, and spiritual death is at hand…with physical death soon to follow.

Before the first two humans could begin to increase, multiply and fill the earth, they lost **shalom**. Choosing their way over God's way led to chaos, not life. **Genesis 3-11** is a dese-creation story. An unwinding. The wild and waste, the Tohu va-Vohu, that God tamed and ordered for our good and his glory was reappearing, this time in the hearts of humans.

It is time now for us to make significant decisions for the future, ours and those of our faith communities. The world can be different, and we are the hands of God at work, collaborating with the Spirit of Pentecost, in growing Shalom in our world.

SHOFAR - 2

Shalom (שלום) سَلام. 和平 शान्ति εἰρήνη Peace

The enduring shame of the Tower of Babel

The next significant engagement with God and human sin comes at Babel. It is at Babel we sought to place ourselves in the heights of the heavens, above God. Ironically, what we thought was the heights of heaven turned out to be our rock bottom as humans. Nothing could be further from Eden. And now, here we are, the descendants of these people, and we have inherited broken hearts and a fractured world. We are scattered and confused and at war with each other. Not sure who said it, but *we are rebels raised by rebels*. The bottom line is that apart from God we cannot access and experience shalom.

Shalom as the Gift of God

It is at this point **Hope** comes into the picture. God knows we cannot find true ***Shalom*** apart from him. He designed this world, from the very beginning, in such a way that his people cannot flourish and thrive if they seek to live at a distance from him. The universe and everything in it have been ordered according to this magnificent plan. Humans separated from God can never find true ***Shalom***, that essential ingredient for life.

This is the Hebrew narrative as it unfolds in the Scriptures. We chose to align ourselves with the Serpent which is why the world around us began to fray. But that is not the full story, for while the Serpent seeks to destroy, God reveals his character as a "mending" God. While we wallow in the wasteland far removed from way we were created, God pursues us. We thought we were distant from God, but we were only blind, unable to find his loving presence. He moved out of Eden to meet us in the wilderness, and it is there, far removed from Eden, that he restores ***shalom*** as an undeserved gift.

There is a wonderful text in Leviticus offering us an insight into the mending ways of God**.** It is too long to record the full text but it is worth reading in full: **Leviticus 26:3–13** …*If you walk in my statutes and you keep my commands and you do them, then I will…*it is one of those ***if***…***then*** narratives, where God promises that providing we walk in his ways, then divine blessings will flow. When we walk in the ways of the Maker, we flourish, we thrive, we begin to experience shalom, wholeness, fullness. But when we walk in the ways of the world, abundant life eludes us. Once more we have a choice and the grace to make the right one. But it is an either/or proposition: fully, totally for God or serving this world.

God rescued his people out of bondage and death in Egypt and then shepherded them into his shalom-giving presence at Sinai. He had them build the tabernacle so that he could dwell with them a source of life and light in the wilderness. And here in Leviticus he is promising to give the gift of ***shalom*** to those who delight in his will and walk in his ways. ***Shalom*** is, always has been, and always will be, a glorious gift from God.

Jesus and the Disciples

In what was an extraordinary turn of events, the ***shalom-establishing*** Creator King in Genesis emptied himself and took the form of a slave and was revealed in human form in the New Testament. The one who created humanity in his own image and likeness, took on flesh and lived a fully human life. The vision of ***shalom*** built into creation is re-established in the person of Jesus. He **is shalom** and he ***restores shalom***.

Just as God tabernacled among his people in the wilderness, promising the gift of ***shalom*** if they walked in his ways, so Jesus "tabernacled" amid his people in the first century. John tells us that Jesus is the Creator, the Maker of all things, and that in him the world was formed and filled. He, along with the Father and Spirit, established order in chaos and set boundaries to the waters. God was fashioning a "house" and making it into a home for himself and his people. He called it God's Kingdom. He is the God of the garden. He walked with the first couple in the Garden of Eden. He is the God of ***shalom***.

Jesus promises us that if we drink his water we will never thirst. If we eat his bread we will never hunger. And that in him we will find full and abundant life. He restores sight to the blind, opens the ears of the deaf, feeds the hungry, cast out demons, cleanses the leper, comforts the afflicted, and raises the dead. It is through Jesus that God is reconciling all things to himself. Jesus extends his healing mercy to the broken. Bringing ***shalom*** through the blood of his cross.

The gift of shalom is found only in God, and to be more specific, in Jesus. If ***shalom*** – "complete wholeness" – being fully human, is found only in the life-giving, ***shalom-***bringing presence of God, then it cannot be found apart from Jesus, who is "God with us" Immanuel. Is this not our greatest message to our world today? Enduring ***Shalom***?

HOPE 2025

With Pentecost upon us, we need to have some clear plans for how we are going to live **HOPE** and to share it with the world. What are those plans? We have the divine guarantees, promises upon which we know we can depend… **Isaiah 26:3-4** *You keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you, because he trusts in you. Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock*. To live in the perfect peace God alone can cultivate, our minds must remain focussed on God, we must live in imitation of Christ in all we do and humble ourselves to be led by the Spirit.

Fulfilling the vocations built into **HOPE 2025** is not going to happen on its own. It calls us into tasking the bold step of decision making, intentionally doing something new. Believing God has created the entire cosmos and that it is restored in Jesus---the believer's work here through the Spirit is to say: *Trust and obey, For there's no other way To be happy in Jesus, But to trust and obey*. What we need to be doing in our last steps of our pilgrimage to Pentecost is first and foremost ensuring this trusting and obeying is visible in our own words and deeds. Then, from our own experiences, invite others to share in this revitalised Garden of Eden that we call the Body of Christ. We are blessed but that means little if we do not ensure those blessings are taken out into the world.