THE NEW SHOFAR

If the church does not identify with the marginalized, it will itself be marginalized. This is God's poetic justice. (Tim Keller)

Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act.(Bonhoffer)

August 9, 2026

[8] I listen carefully to what God the Lord is saying - he speaks peace

I love today's responsorial psalm, Psalm 85, a psalm that sings of Hope, forgiveness and sets out a vision of a New reality in Christ. All too often I struggle in listening *carefully to what God is saying (***v. 8a).** There never seems to be a shortage of things to distract, to soak up my time and energies. Many of these things are good, lots of actions of which God would no doubt approve. But they all soak up my time, my ability to listen *carefully to* all that God is saying to me. Note how the verb here *to listen carefully* is not meant to be a one off, an occasional turning our ears towards God. It is a call to listening daily, to a listening way of life.

What God is saying is to us, offering to us is divine Peace (Shalom). And what an offer that is for the conflicted world we find ourselves living. Surely this Shalom-of-God is a gift we need more than just about anything else. But from where will it come? The enduring Ukraine – Russia war reminds us that an enduring Peace is impossible for human beings to achieve. The same goes for the Middle East. There we find Shalom entangled with religious traditions, an extended history of conflicts and a hatred that not even the might of the largest and most powerful army in the world can overcome. We can add to this a wide range of acts of violence in our homes, on our streets and in the hearts and minds of many of our fellow citizens as they struggle to overcome a myriad of personal and social challenges.

What will we hear in our listening?

The most expansive message we will hear is that we are forgiven, that we are invited to walk more faithfully in the Way of our Lord Jesus Christ. Peace in every part of the world begins with taking up the Shalom God is offering me. In my own experience and conversations, it seems as though many of us first need to find some peace within our own selves. We need to give ourselves a break and let the words of our Savior sink in, *You are alright! I love you, warts and all. Relax. Stop beating yourself up. We'll deal with all your personal garbage later. Just know I love you and I'm with you. I enjoy you and I love you. Let my peace invade and live in your heart*. That is what the Lord God says to his people in and through Jesus.

But the psalmist also warns us and rebukes us as emphatically he comforts us - *Don't return to your foolish ways* **(v. 8c).** What foolish ways? Primarily it is about living our days bombarded by every voice and perspective except God's. It's foolish to seek inner peace through other's beliefs, perspectives, experiences and the like. Those ways of living have no history of bringing about an enduring Peace. Stop returning to those foolish ways of seeking peace and meaning and, yes, even salvation. When we *sweat* Peace in all things we will find it contagious. Others will ache for what God is doing to us and through a process of spiritual osmosis draw that Shalom into their own lives. We are called to *listen to God* rather than continue listening *to foolish ways*. In these things, God matters! But the world is not listening and remain convinced that they can "go it alone". Where has that ever truly worked?

Our God is a listening God – He cares about us

Where then do I look for salvation and inner peace? **Answer**: God has set up *a river of blessings in the middle of our desert life* (**Psalm 1**). But we need to make our way to that river, and plant our lives next to it and be watered by His life and blessings and Presence that overflows the banks. God invites but it is up to us to make the hard yards and come to Him.

While God certainly does come to meet us in the middle of our daily grind, it seems He also longs for us to step out of our busy obsessions and preoccupations and approach Him as we would approach a desert oasis or refreshing stream in a desolate valley — that is, come desperately and with a sense of awe and reverence. The Bible calls this reverent approach "fear of God." *Surely his salvation is near to those who fear him*" (v. 9a) and we "fear him" by humbly orienting our lives around Him.

None of this makes any sense at all if it is not infused with an abundance of repentance, or as the psalmist warns…*do not return to our foolish ways*. If God's salvation (which in the psalms is not limited to eternal life, but the full blessings of God here and now) is *near to those who fear him*, then I suspect these blessings are far away from those who do not fear him and instead give God a convenient slot in their busy schedule or treat Him like a cosmic vending machine or divine custodian to call upon only when they need help.

Glory to God in the highest and Shalom…

Our world is filled with everything but the glory of God. Yet Jesus came to set up a Kingdom that reverses and topples all of our Tower of Babel projects, priorities we set in our lives that seek human glory, satisfy our own priorities in life and we turn to our Almighty God when we feel we need Him. Followers of Jesus should make it our life's desire to see that *our land will be filled with his glory* (**v. 9b**).

The Prince of Peace himself wants to teach us concerning His ways, that we may walk in His paths (**Isaiah 2:3**) and the psalmist provides the curriculum. Jesus wants to teach his people that in Him *unfailing love and truth have met together* (**v. 10a**), have joined on his cross. Our world lives under the spell of an empty, self-centred love that is a "feeling" coming and going like the tide, love that says more about the self than what God requires. Jesus wants to reveal, no, deeper than that, he models for us, and teaches us a deep, committed, covenantal love that sacrifices for the other and remains faithful to the other even as the feelings fade.

Likewise, our world is teetering on the edge of moral chaos and meaninglessness, having traded any hope of finding any enduring Truth in the marketplace of ideas, and settling for a dizzying barrage of opinions and spin, empty rhetoric and self-serving talking points. We are drowning in a sea of unfiltered information, data, tweets and texts, points and counterpoints, and no one trusts anyone anymore. Into this miasma of naked facts and fiction, news and fake news, all smothered with a heavy dose of suspicion and weariness, perhaps we need an encounter with Truth that is more than just words. In Christ *unfailing love and truth have met together* **and** then through his life's mission and activities *justice and peace have kissed* and God declared *Let there be peace on earth* to which we respond *let it begin with me*. And let our constant refrain be *show us Your lovingkindness, Yahweh, grant us Your salvation!* So how then can a sinner get right with this Holy God of Justice? *The cross of Christ*.