

SHALOM – Peace with God

First century people who professed faith in Jesus as the Messiah were identified by names that placed a greater emphasis on becoming like Jesus, and not just believing in Him.

His **character** is supposed to come alive in us – the is focus of Praxis.

His **belief** is supposed to come alive in us – this is the focus of Doxa.

His **obedience** is supposed to come alive in us – this is the focus of Shema.

In this series – Shalom – we’re talking about the way of Jesus’ peace.

And in this series Shalom we are asking four questions:

Are you at peace with yourself? Are you at peace with others?

Are you at peace with creation? Are you at peace with the Creator - God?

Last week talking about peace with yourself - Pastor Fred hit on our unchangeables.

I would tell you tonight that peace with God is found when we are at peace with His **unknowables**. Shalom is found when I’m at peace with God’s divine incomprehensibility

Isaiah 26:3:

You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, all whose thoughts are fixed on you.

In Hebrew what we translate “perfect peace” is “**shalom shalom**,” because in the Hebrew repetition communicates intensity.

Our current culture says that to trust in something you don’t fully understand is folly.

But the problem is we’ll never figure God out.

God is almost exclusively described or spoken of through analogies. Why? Because human language breaks down when it comes time to describe what isn’t just unfamiliar, but undefinable.

There was a monk from Holland who once said:

“Twenty one years I have prayed and meditated with the monks of the abbey.

Hours and hours of the day and night. And yet...

I hope that I do not shock or scandalize anybody: God was really unknown to me.”

Thomas Aquinas said: **“the highest knowledge of God is to know that we don’t know God”.**

Isaiah 55:8-9 - *“My thoughts are nothing like your thoughts,” says the Lord. “And my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways, and my thoughts higher than your thoughts.*

Isaiah 40 – *“To whom can you compare God? What image can you find to resemble him?*

God sits above the circle of the earth. The people below seem like grasshoppers to him!

He spreads out the heavens like a curtain and makes his tent from them.

Have you never heard? Have you never understood?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of all the earth.

He never grows weak or weary. No one can measure the depths of his understanding.”

Now.... contrast these verses with the inclination in our culture to speak with ludicrous levels of familiarity with God. *“Well... I could never see God doing that.”*

“The God I worship would never allow that.”

...are you sure about that?

We are all too quick to let go of God’s overwhelming otherness.

We like God as “Good Good Father” as we sang eleven trillion times not long ago in worship.

The bridge of that song proclaimed ***“You are perfect in all of your ways.”***

That’s easy to sing when God’s ways are our ways.

But God tells us in Isaiah – ***“my ways are far beyond anything you could imagine.”***

And when we walk in that... let me tell you... that bridge becomes a sacrifice of praise.

I remember listening to that song as Steph and I were confronted with the reality of infertility and God asked *“will you still call me a good good father if you never have a kid who can call you the same?”*

It was coming to peace with my portion. But it also a step toward peace with God.

What happens to your trust and faith when God’s ways prove higher... when his plan is altogether OTHER.

He is imminent and intimate– he promises us **his presence**. *“I will never leave nor forsake you.”*

Yet He’s transcendent – we see in scripture he withholds his **essence**.

He tells Moses flat out *“you cannot see my face, for no man can see me and live”*

Even God’s **LOVE is LOFTY!!**

Billy Graham once said: *“God loves you. And He loves you with a love that you don’t know anything about, because there is no human love comparable to divine love.”*

And image of God’s love given to us in scripture: **Clay in the hands of the potter.**

Isaiah 64:8 – ***“We are the clay and you [God] are the potter. We all are formed by your hand.”***

And in Isaiah 45:9 he asks as people were questioning God –

“Does the clay dispute with the one who shapes it, saying, ‘Stop, you’re doing it wrong!’

God loves this imagery... It’s not just Isaiah...

In Jeremiah 18 God calls Jeremiah to go to a potter to watch him work as prophetic imagery for the Israelite people... and it talks about the potter– ***“shaping it as seemed best to him.”***

It echoes Jeremiah’s call – ***“before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I set you apart”***

The same Hebrew word is used for both verses in Jeremiah. God shaped us in the womb. That’s calming. The similar verse in Psalm 139 is one of our most quotable... he formed us in the womb. But you see.... He doesn’t stop. We begin on the potters wheel. We don’t hop off this side of eternity. I’m in the hands of the potter, being shaped and formed into Christ’s likeness until the day I die.

In fact, on the day Christ died on the cross, his last words were:

“Into your hands I commit my spirit”

And these words spoken at his death are words we should speak every day of our lives.

“Into your hands I commit my body, mind, and spirit.”

Not just the hands of The Father who loves us unconditionally.

The hands of The Potter who shapes us and molds us into His image again.

See we like God the Father who comforts.

We don't always like God the Potter who conforms us.

Romans 8:29 - For those he foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed into the image of His Son [Jesus].

Pastor Fred asked at the end of last week – *“Is it possible that as Christians we are trying to change things about ourselves that are supposed to be part of our Imago Dei?”*

I'd ask: ***Are we being made in the image of God? Or have we shaped “god” into our image?***

To be at peace with God? To be at peace with the Potter? To be at peace with that process?
That takes trust.

Two factors in my life's journey, and no doubt to factors also present in yours...

That often try to rob me of my shalom shalom, my perfect peace...

How? By robbing my trust in God.

THE PRESENCE OF CRUELTY

THE ABSENCE OF CLARITY

THE PRESENCE OF CRUELTY – pain and suffering.

Job 10:8-12 (MSG):

You made me like a handcrafted piece of pottery... Don't you remember how beautifully you worked my clay? ... You gave me life itself, and incredible love.

The root of our trust in every season is the revelation of that incredible love of God that allows us to trust in him, and have peace with God... even in the presence of cruelty and suffering.

The revelation of Job 10 is what allows Job to say at the peak of suffering in Job 15:

“Even though he slay me, yet I will trust him”

If God is powerful and transcendent enough to call into question for suffering, shouldn't he also be transcendent enough to have a higher vantage point, a higher perspective and a higher reasoning than we do?

I can't have it both ways. And in the end his ways are higher than my ways.

C.S. Lewis – admitted in his writing that he originally rejected God because of the presence of “the cruelty of life.” He lost his mother to cancer when he was young so he disavowed Christianity’s “good God” and became a self-proclaimed atheist.

We know C.S. Lewis didn’t stay in that place.

He became one of the most famous Christian authors of both fantasy and apologetics.

But later in life he tasted the cruelty of suffering again. He wrestles with it in his short book a ***Grief Observed*** after the cruel loss of his wife to cancer. He wrestles with the questions we all do: how can God be good and allow this cruel suffering to happen? He wrestles chapter after chapter of this journal, representing months of his life as he would write them.

Toward the beginning in raw anger and emotion he laments that there’s no explanation, no answer to his questions “how” and “why.” But toward the end of the book he says...

“When I lay these questions before God I get no answer. But a rather special sort of no answer. It is not the locked door. It is more like a silent, certainly not uncompassionate, gaze. As though he shook his head not in refusal, but waiving the question. Like, “Peace, child; you don’t understand...”

Heaven will solve our problems, but not, I think, by showing us subtle reconciliations between all our apparently contradictory notions. The notions will all be knocked from under our feet. We shall see that there never was any problem.”

THE ABSENCE OF CLARITY

The professor and author John Kavanaugh recounts in his one of his books that when he went to work for three months at “the house of the dying” in Calcutta. He was in a search for how he should spend the rest of his life. When he had the once in a lifetime opportunity to meet Mother Teresa and she asked him, “what can I do for you?” He quickly asked her to pray for him.

She asked, “What do you want me to pray for?”

He replied, “Pray that I have clarity.”

She said firmly, “No, I won’t do that.”

“Why?” He asked.

“Clarity is the last thing you are clinging to and must let go of.”

He commented it’s one thing she always seemed to have.

“I have never had clarity; what I have always had is trust. So I will pray that you trust God.”

The way of trust is the life of the follower of Christ. Not clarity.

When folks said they would follow Jesus in Luke 9, he didn’t give them a clear itinerary.

He said look, *“I don’t even have a place to sleep lined up... a place to lay my head.”*

That scares me. Why? Pride. I want control.

When I ask for clarity... so often my underlying desire is actually control.

I want the life of the famous poem Invictus.
To be captain of my ship. To be master of my fate.
But life's curveballs remind me... and they remind us how much control we truly lack.
That can be truly terrifying.
But trust helps me remember who is truly in control and put my life in His hands again.
Not in a way that strips me of agency, but one that is at peace with God's sovereignty.
I may still be captain of my ship...
But he controls the wind and the waves.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The LORD our God has secrets known to no one. We are not accountable for them, but we and our children are accountable forever for all that he has revealed to us.

This verse reminds me there are some lofty mysteries about God that I'll never truly understand. I can get so caught up in the **obscure** that I miss the **obvious**, so caught up in the **mystery** that I lose grip on what's **mandatory**.

Like the series Shema – there is a way of reflexive obedience we're called to, to obey what God has made clear.

But in this series Shalom – there is a peace with God we will find only when we are at peace with his unfathomable essence. His mystery.

John Wesley once said of Deuteronomy 29:29:

"...the ways and judgments of God... are often times hidden from us, unsearchable by our shallow capacities, and matter for our adoration, not our enquiry.

The song once said:

*"You are beautiful beyond description Too marvelous for words
Too wonderful for comprehension / Like nothing ever seen or heard
Who can grasp Your infinite wisdom? / Who can fathom the depth of Your love?
You are beautiful beyond description / Majesty, enthroned above
And I stand, I stand in awe of You
Holy God, to whom all praise is due / I stand in awe of You"*

Beholding Creation and beholding the Creator is a common command in scripture.

Because beholding sparks awe.

And awe produces worship.

In Romans Paul puts a bow on his thoughts on salvation history and God's plan for redemption by leading the reader into what amounts to an outburst of amazement, awe and worship.

Romans 11:33 - *Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!*

The MSG version of Romans 11:33 reads –

"It's way over our heads. We'll never figure it out."

Again Deuteronomy 29:29 reminds me...

I want Shema – reflexive obedience to the things God has made clear.

But I need Shalom – peace with the things that are a mystery.

In my favorite quote about the mystery of God, Dennis Covington once said:

“Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning than we can comprehend.”