

Righteousness and Peace
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First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Psalm 85:8-13

- ⁸ Let me hear what God the Lord will speak,
for God will speak peace to God's people,
to God's faithful, to those who turn to God in their hearts.
⁹ Surely God's salvation is at hand for those who fear God,
that God's glory may dwell in our land.
- ¹⁰ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
¹¹ Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
and righteousness will look down from the sky.
¹² The Lord will give what is good,
and our land will yield its increase.
¹³ Righteousness will go before God,
and will make a path for God's steps.

Shhh! Listen! Let me hear what God will speak for God will speak peace! The people of Israel had recently returned from exile and thought they would find God had come home with them but they could not find God. Our psalm is both a plea for God to show God's self and a profession of confidence that God would do exactly that. Shhh, stop complaining about how God is missing and listen! Listen closely! God is coming near! Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. For now, they are nearing one another.

In the time before Christendom, before Christ, the Israelite people could only imagine what this would look like, steadfast love and faithfulness meeting, righteousness and peace kissing. God came as one of us and embodied these very things. Jesus steadfastly loved those we would imagine were unlovable, or at least less lovable: like tax collectors, those Jews who worked for the Romans collecting from Jews who already had so little, and added their *own* fees on top! Unfailing and unwavering love which broke societal norms. Faithfulness to God? To the point of death on a cross. Righteousness – who could claim greater righteousness than Jesus, doing everything that was right in the sight of God? And peace. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives.”¹ This Hebrew peace, *shalom*, is not calm but wholeness. In every healing, Jesus restored wholeness. In every offering of dignity, Jesus offered wholeness. In every righting of misunderstandings about God and God's desires, Jesus brought wholeness.

¹ John 14:27.

We know that in Jesus steadfast love and faithfulness met, and righteousness and peace kissed. We have confidence that, because this has happened, it will happen again; we believe that God's rule has already begun, in his coming, but is not yet completed, until his return. In a way, we are exiled, too, in this place where steadfast love and faithfulness are but nearing one another and righteousness and peace are but approaching. Just as with the Israelites, God is drawing us out of exile, and we must choose to move our feet. Christ has led, is leading, by example. That righteousness which goes before God, making a path for God's steps, is ours to live into, as are the faithfulness and steadfast love and peace, for **we** are the body of Christ in this time and place.

You might feel at a loss with such a big responsibility. Professor Edwin Chr. van Driel helpfully suggests, "If we want to know exactly how justice and peace can kiss, we do not start from whatever we think justice and peace are and try to determine how they can hold together. We start from how this kiss is embodied in Jesus."² What Jesus did was repeatable, attainable... simply, doable. He didn't launch letter-writing campaigns or protest or fight for legislation, although those are all good and necessary things. He went person-by-person, expressing love and offering *shalom*, which in themselves were righteous before God and expressed faithfulness to God, as well as faith in God. Pastor Tom Are Jr. says, "The good news is that it is God's promised future, and not any present circumstance, that governs our lives."³ **This** is faith in God, trusting that God is moving and acting well beyond our small actions of love and wholeness.

Our small actions of love and wholeness are making a path for God. How could the one little thing I do make a difference, you might ask? Think back to grade school social studies. The massive pyramids are believed to have been built by rolling each weighty stone on a system of logs. Step one: Roll a little forward. Step two: Take the log that has just been cleared and move it to the front so it is the next log the stone rolls across. Repeat steps one and two until a pyramid is built. Or remember the old joke: how do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time.

These seem valuable reminders as we send the youth from Westminster Presbyterian on to their mission trip and as we get ready to commission our youth for their trip to West Virginia. Of course, we all can benefit from these reminders. The problems we encounter – poverty, hunger, racism, addiction – may seem enormous, and they are, but, with faith that God is moving and acting well beyond our small actions, person-by-person, we love. Person-by-person, we offer wholeness, affirm wholeness, we honor wholeness. Person-by-person.

² *Feasting on the Word: Year B, Volume 3*, p.228.

³ *Ibid.*

And if a whole bunch of us, a youth group, a church, a denomination, each engage one person at a time, we build the pyramids, eat the elephant, make a path for God Almighty. And if we continue, person after person, we extend that path, bringing steadfast love and faithfulness nearer, bringing righteousness and peace closer. And if faithfulness will come up from the ground and righteousness down from the sky then all four will meet and God's glory will be everywhere. So may it be for you and for me and for all God's children.

Let us pray: O Lord our God, give us ears to hear for we are listening for your peace which is surely drawing nearer. Amen.