

Luke 24:1-12 [NIV]

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. ¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away wondering to himself what had happened.

Our scripture today is Luke's account of the discovery of Jesus' resurrection. Luke 24. You could turn back there, if you like.

Of course, we come to worship today *expecting* to celebrate a living, resurrected Christ.

But those women who went to the tomb: they did not. They did *not* say to each other as they got up that morning, "Well, He probably won't be there, but let's take burial spices just in case He is."

No, they fully expected Jesus to be lying there, dead, in the tomb. That's why they were beside themselves with grief and confusion when He was not, and that's why the angels said to them there in verse 6, "Remember what He told you? He said all this would happen."

Jesus predicted His death and resurrection over and over again—it was a centerpiece of His purpose, but those who followed Him just did not hear.

Until *this* day, until those angels said, "Remember, He told you all of this."

And then, verse 8 there says, they *remembered* Jesus' words. And that's when their *peace* returned.

Peace has been our theme for weeks now in morning worship—as we've prepared for today—Resurrection Day—and I think for good reason.

Just like those women at the tomb on that first Resurrection Day, peace is something everyone needs; it's something many are searching for, but few in our world seem to find.

It is ironic to me that, while Jesus introduced much contention in our world throughout His life, and then was put to death in one of the most violent ways possible—on a Roman cross—Jesus is also easily the greatest bringer of peace the world has ever known.

Those who find real, lasting peace in this world—by that I don't mean just a quiet moment such as anyone can find easily on a walk in the woods; no, by "peace," I mean a deep, lasting, soul-level, gut-level peace—those who find *that*, find it just as those women did: in Jesus.

The Hebrew word for the kind of peace I'm talking about is *shalom*. No single English word captures it. It technically means an all-encompassing, pervasive well-being.

About 100 years ago, Danish theologian Johannes Pederson captured it in a way that spoke to me. He wrote, "the idea of *shalom*, for a group of ancient near eastern Israelite nomads, meant a mutual acceptance into one another's camp."¹

Being accepted into the camp of the other: what a great image!

To achieve *shalom* with another means you've achieved such a level of openness and trust that you are welcomed—completely and comfortably embraced—in the camp (in the sphere or the world) of the other. It's a calm, comprehensive wholeness of existence.

That is *shalom*. That is peace.

Of course, persons and families and tribes and nations can experience a degree of peace with other persons and families and tribes and nations.

But the *real shalom*—that deep, lasting, soul-level peace—has to do with a person's relationship with God and literally nothing else, because nothing else even approaches that level of *endurance* and *importance*.

Even if we are at peace with everyone else in our world, we will still not sense true *shalom* if we are out of peace with God.

Which means true *shalom* will never come to us from any of those things our culture tries to convince us matter so much—those things our society pushes us to chase after, supposedly for the sake of peace.

The *true shalom* we all seek will never be found in the person we date or marry, nor in the children or grandchildren we have.

True shalom isn't found in the schooling or career we pursue, nor in

the sexual conquests or choices we explore,
the ways we alter our bodies,
the amount of money we earn,
the fame others ascribe to us—nor in anything else like that in our world.

Now, what we *do*—how we *act* and how we *live* in those areas *matter*—quite a lot, actually.

But none of that will ever satisfy the deep yearning we all have for peace, because all of that is ultimately temporary, you see?

It's all *earthly*.

¹ Pederson, Johannes. *Israel; Its Life and Culture*. Oxford University Press. 1926. 263-322

It's *not* that those things are *unimportant*. It's just that they end with death.

But we have an unsettled, unfilled, peaceless void within us, because we are no longer born into that right connection with our Creator that we were all made to have; we are missing that connection and relationship that transcend this life.

The ability to live together with God where we were made to live – in His camp: that is what brings true *shalom*.

And, interestingly, it is a two-way street.

You see, no one covenants with another – no one lives in the camp of another – unwillingly. If we do, then we're a hostage or a slave – we're imprisoned.

And there's no *shalom* in that.

God does not force Himself into our camp. We must invite Him.

How do we do that?

Well, in a nutshell, we extend *shalom*. Entrance into our camp is extended to God when we accept as a fact, and then build our lives around the idea, that *He*, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, is *God* – and that *we* are *not*.

To begin to be at peace with God requires that much on our part: embracing the fact that God is God and we are not, and then, of course, living out what that means, practically speaking, from day to day.

And, let me say that to let God be God, day to day, means a lot more than most people think.

It means more than most *church* people think.

It actually means that, sooner or later, nearly everything about us changes because, now, God is running our life.

To admit that we are *not* God and to accept God as God in our life, in our choices, in our decisions: that's *our* part in finding *shalom*, in finding peace.

Until we do that, until we grant God the authority He is due, we will be at war, both within and without, because we were born into sin, and we, by default, work and operate *against* how God made us to work and operate.

And you see the evidence of that growing exponentially, it seems, in homes, families, communities, and even churches all around us, especially in these last few decades in our culture.

Did you see that picture that was rediscovered just this past week? On Good Friday, 1956, the interior lights of three skyscrapers in New York's financial district were lit up in the shape of crosses 150 feet tall – an incredibly public display of Calvary and of Christian faith – in New York City, of all places!

Can you imagine that happening today, just 70 years (two or three generations) later?

Now, our nation was far from perfect in 1956 – certainly.

But there's no doubt that we, by and large, in every way, were a much more *peaceful* people then than we are

today in every way, because far more of us then understood who *is* God and who is *not*.

Far more of us *then* accepted God into our camps, you see?

Today, our world, our culture especially, is full of people who think and act as if they are God, and they expect everyone else to *treat* them as God.

So, unless something changes in them, people like that will never invite the true God into their camp, so not only will they never find *shalom* – *peace* – themselves, but they will *also* keep on contributing to the greater chaos around them.

That's the world in which we live. We all know that. I don't have to tell you that.

What I do want to tell you, though, is that God knows all this about us. He knows all about stubborn human hearts.

Amazingly, He called the very people He chose to represent Him to the world (the family of Abraham), "stiff necked." He describes them like that over and over again.²

It means one that will not listen; one that won't be directed.

Literally, it is one who won't turn their head and go in a different direction when told to do so. It was originally used to speak of an animal, probably an ox, that wouldn't respond to the command of the farmer.

That was Israel, and that is humanity.

And God knows it.

But even still, because He loves us so much, God sent His Son, Jesus, to pay the price for our sins so that through Him, we could be forgiven.

So that, through Jesus, *a way into God's camp could be made for us*.

Jesus is God the Father's living offer of *shalom* – of peace – made to us and to our world.

In spite of anything and everything we have done...

In spite of our stiff-necked resistance to Him, God sent Jesus as a living invitation to us to come into His camp.

God sent Jesus to be the way to Himself,
for anyone who will receive Him,
for anyone who will accept Him,
for anyone who will follow Him.

For anyone who will admit – who will humble themselves and truly confess – that *God* is God and *they* are *not*.

That's what it takes for *us* to accept *God* into *our* camp.

For any who will do *that* – for *any* who will accept God into *their* camp, God, because of Jesus, will accept *them* into *His* camp.

And then – that person will finally find *shalom*: deep, lasting, soul-level peace.

² Exodus 33:3; Deuteronomy 9:13; Nehemiah 9:16; Acts 7:51

Shalom:

Our world needs it.
Our nation needs it.
Our politics needs it.
Our businesses need it.
Our races need it.
Our cities and towns and neighborhoods need it.
Ironically and tragically, many churches need it.
Families and marriages need it.
Our souls need it: *shalom*. Deep, lasting, gut-level peace.

What about you? Do you need it today? Are you looking for *shalom* — for peace with God, your Creator?

If so, then hear this good news: Jesus died on Good Friday, and God the Father raised Him to life on this day two thousand years ago to make that peace, true *shalom*, possible.

If you'll just admit, *really* admit and *embrace* in every part of your life, that God is God and you are not; if you would have the courage and humility to declare that, then you will have, because of Jesus, a standing invitation into God's camp — and into real, *real* peace.

The invitation was made possible on that first Resurrection Day, and it still stands today. And it's an offer worthy of celebration.

Let God be God. Invite *Him* into *your* camp.

Receive Jesus, and enter into *God's* camp.

I promise you, that's where you'll find the *shalom* — the deep, lasting peace — you're looking for.

Closing Prayer:

Father, may your invitation of true peace fall on fertile ground today, right here in this room and in rooms like this around the world. As your Church remembers and celebrates what you did for Jesus, and all that Jesus did for us, may many, many enter into the *shalom* — the peace of Your camp.

We thank you for your love for us, for the grace of Jesus, your son, and the leading of Your Spirit that makes it all possible. Amen.

Closing Song: *Hallelujah Chorus*

Benediction:

And now, may the God of *shalom*, the God of peace:
God the Son — who made peace with His own blood shed on the cross,

God the Father — who raised from the dead our Lord Jesus,

And God the Spirit — the bringer of righteousness, joy and peace —

May God equip you with all you need for doing His will, and may He produce in you all that is pleasing to Him — all for the sake of *shalom*, peace with God — for us and for our world.

To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen.

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