

Shalom! Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace. Shalom is used as a word of greeting and farewell. Shalom is not only about peace, it is about a healing wholeness, completeness and well-being. The peace of shalom is not limited to the political domain and it is not a peace that is just about the absence of war. It is not limited to the social domain and is not only about the absence of quarrel and strife. Shalom is about a peace that covers many contexts and includes this cosmic principle – the manifestation of divine grace. Shalom is the blessing of well-being and wholeness God desires for **all** people. Shalom is all about God's dream for this broken world.

As I have been thinking not only upon the experience of our mission trip, but also current events in our present culture and all that is happening around the world, I am again reminded of how desperately this world needs to hear of God's healing grace, God's healing love, God's healing peace, and God's healing message of shalom. Healing was a major focus and aspect of Jesus' ministry. Jesus **lived** this sense of shalom as he healed people with all kinds of diseases and ailments. Jesus **lived** this sense of shalom as he proclaimed God's dream for this world wherever he went.

As Jesus encounters us in today's gospel reading, he has just been teaching in the synagogue. While there, he was rudely interrupted by a man possessed with an "unclean spirit." Jesus had then ordered the unclean spirit to leave this man and the man was healed. It was Jesus' first miracle in the gospel of Mark. And, it was an action that was all about healing and enabling that man to again be restored to life and full participation within the community.

This morning, we find the gospel writer continuing this narrative by connecting that story to what we have as today's gospel reading. Jesus leaves the synagogue and he "immediately" goes to Simon's house where he finds Simon's mother-in-law sick with a fever. It is still the same day, the same Sabbath, only a matter of hours later, and we find Jesus again giving life by healing Simon's mother-in-law. He walks over, touches her – an action that was considered unclean – then, he takes her by the hand, and lifts her up, or "raises her up." The Greek word Mark uses for "lifted up" or "raised up" is the same word used to tell of Jesus being **lifted up** on a cross. And, it is the same word used in the gospel narrative describing Easter morning when we hear the words "he is not here, he is **risen!**" This is not coincidence. Simon Peter's mother-in-law is **raised up** from her illness. And, what does she begin to do? She gets up from her bed and

begins to feed people. She begins to **serve**, to **minister to others**.

Healed from her illness, she begins to live into a sense of purpose and a sense of vocation. This woman who has been touched and healed by Jesus becomes the first active witness to what a healed and resurrected life in Jesus looks like.

Healing, deliverance from pain and illness **and setting people free** are the hallmarks of that great prophetic dream called the Reign of God. That dream of God is expressed in one way or another as it is threaded throughout the entirety of scripture. The dream of God is always describing a reality where **no one** goes hungry, the ill and grieving are **healed**, and those in various kinds of prisons are **set free** to live abundant life, **life that truly matters**. Over and over again, we hear that Jesus “went about healing many who were sick or possessed by demons.” Healing and setting people free were foundational to Jesus’ ministry. And, healing and setting people free are foundational to the ministry **we** share as members of the body of Christ. This image of healing and setting people free is something we share because, in baptism, we **too** have been raised to new life. We **too** have been set free. We **too** have been raised to live life that truly matters and live into the ministry of serving others.

As I was growing up, my mother would frequently remind me about the fact that **we** are the hands and feet of Jesus in this world. Our very bodies, the way we use them, what we **do** and the way we **live** enables us to become God's instruments of healing in this broken world. I was reminded of this on the Mission Trip as I listened to people's stories about loss, the loss they experienced during Hurricane Irma. The devastation and loss were enormous. In the mobile home community in which we worked, 27 homes had to be totally demolished, 34 homes had already been restored, and many more need to be either demolished or restored. Our work supervisors estimate they will still be working on this two years from now. And, the work we did was just a small portion of a much larger effort to bring restoration and healing to that community, a community that needs to be raised up.

We live in a world that is desperate for healing. The need in this world is so great. We live in a world where people desperately need and long for the touch of a caring hand. I think each one of us has probably experienced that need at some point in our life, and we will likely experience that need again. I also know that God's healing, life giving presence is closer to us than the air we breathe. And, as we live together participating in the community of faith, we live into God's healing, gracious

love, that sense of shalom. Gerald May was a medical doctor who practiced psychotherapy in Washington, D.C. He wrote of the importance of community in the healing process. He writes:

God's grace through community involves something far greater than other people's support and perspective. The power of **grace** is nowhere as brilliant nor as mystical as in **communities of faith**. Its power includes not just love that comes from people and through people but love that pours forth **among** people, as if through the very spaces between one person and next. Just to be in such an atmosphere is to be bathed in healing power. (Gerald G. May, *Addiction and Grace*, 173.)

Friends, this week we begin a whole new ministry as we welcome our first refugees to the parish house. This ministry is a form of healing, reconciliation and shalom as we share God's boundless grace with the young men who will live in the parish house. This is just one way that we, as a community of Faith, continue to live into God's healing, gracious love. And, as we participate in this reconciling work, God is not only raising up these young men to a life of hope, God is also raising us up, just as he did Simon's mother-in-law. God is raising us up, lifting us up so that we can live shalom, so we can live lives of service to others and bear God's creative and redeeming love in this world.

Frederick Buechner, an American pastor and theologian, has said something that has meant so much to me in my life, and I think it will mean

something for us as we think about this new ministry to which we are called. He writes, "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Each one of us has been called. Live into God's healing and wholeness. Live into God's shalom!