

## The Peace of God in its Fullness

Rev. Brad Highum and Rev. Lynnae Sorensen  
Sermon Series on Peace Abiding Love Lutheran Church  
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### Abstract:

*This article begins the symposium on peace using a dialogue between Rev. Highum and Rev. Sorsensen. Their dialogue captures the many dimensions of peace found in the Christian tradition. They also call upon the People of God to be peacemakers – to intentionally engage in the expression and promise of peace.*

**Key Words:** Peace, Peacemaking, Christian tradition

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**Pr. Brad** – As we begin our reflection for tonight and for the coming season of Lent, our focus is peace. On its face, a focus on peace may even seem absurd based on what we see in the world around us every day, in the news and online, in our midst. As we start, I invite you to begin to embrace this idea, this concept, this condition that is peace. Let's think about it for a moment and reflect openly with one another about what this word means to us. What images does it bring to mind for you, in a word or two or a phrase? What is peace? We'll repeat these so all can hear. "Calmness." "Love, no war or fighting", "no more arguing, " "happiness", "an inner contentment", "harmony", "quietness", "stillness", "no fear", "joy", "connection", "serenity." These are beautiful words, conjuring words; they can bring us peace simply in speaking them – serenity, harmony, and stillness.

**Pr. Lynnae** – The "Peace of God" is the theme we have chosen for this season of Lent. We actually were given this challenge because Pat Shields has authored an article titled, "Peaceweaving: Jane Addams Positive Peace and Public

Administration” (Shields & Soeters, 2015). She suggested that “peace” would make a really good sermon series. We jumped on it – *peace* and *peaceweaving*.

Whenever we offer a sermon series we try to think about environment. So, we decided that we needed to have our own olive grove. These are olive trees. The olive branch was used by the ancient Greek culture as a symbol for peace. The Romans would wave the olive branch when they wanted to work for peace instead of violence. And, we know from Scripture that the olive branch was what the dove brought back to Noah. The dove went and found that God had quit the war on the world with the flood. And, now there was land for them to live upon. Each night as we have people speak on peace, we hope that they will be able to come out of the olive grove to preach. And you know on the last nights – Maundy Thursday and Good Friday, we will know also of the olive garden.

**Pr. Brad** – Peace is essential to God's calling in Scripture, throughout the Hebrew Testament and throughout the Christian Witness. It is central not only to Christian and Jewish Scriptures but to every sacred writing of every faith tradition and spirituality the world has known. Peace is a common denominator among people of all faiths. And I venture to say that even people who claim no faith still place central priority on peace. As we engage in our own sacred writings we encounter a couple of words.

Peace is *shalom* in the Hebrew Testament. We translate it as *peace*. It's actually a word with some mystical connection. Shalom might best be translated, might best be defined as “everything ordered according to the will of God” – a world ordered according to the goodness and loving intent of God – and the peace that comes from that. So peace is a condition, an observed quality, of a world ordered according to God's dream of creation. When God creates in the Hebrew creation stories – when God creates the heavens and the earth and everything therein – God looks on it all with satisfaction and happiness. God expresses delight with the creation. Everything is Shalom -

just as God intends. And this is echoed in the Christian Testament. When we start to look at the Greek translation of the Old Testament and the Christian writings, all of which are in Greek, *eiréné* is the word that we translate as peace. It has more of the Greek classical understanding of perfection, of a beauty and wholeness of form. It has that same connotation that Shalom does - the world at its best, people at their best, creation in its place of perfection – *shalom*, *eiréné*, *salaam*! Sadly, in Jesus' time there's another peace that prevails. It's a perversion of those words and everything that they mean: the *pax Romana*. The *peace of Rome* is everything ordered according to the will and demands of the Caesar, everything ordered according to the Empire and its regime - peace at the end of the sword.

**Pr. Lynnae** – Jesus had quite a bit to say about peace. “My peace I give to you, My peace”, he said. There was something different about the kind of peace that Jesus gave. He gives peace so that we don't have to have our heart troubled or be fearful. He says in Matthew, “Blessed be the peacemakers.” (Matthew 5:9) Not those who sit in peace or those who know peace. But “Blessed be the peacemakers.” In fact it is sometimes hard for us to understand what Jesus is saying because he says “I do not come to bring peace to the earth; I did not come to bring peace but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34) And, if you take that out of context it doesn't make sense for us. But when you see those verses in the whole story you know that Jesus is talking about the message of the Good News that will divide people. We know Jesus wasn't condoning violence because he said later in Matthew to Peter, after Peter had cut off the ear of the servant: “Put your sword back in place. For all who draw the sword will die by the sword. Do you think I cannot call on my father and he will at once put at my disposal more than 12 legions of angels.” (Matthew 26:53) Peace, the *eiréné* that Pastor Brad is talking about, is God's wholeness that we can know through Jesus.

**Pr. Brad** – Peace is threaded throughout the Hebrew Scriptures, as well. It's actually a common way for people to inquire about one another's well-being, by asking them, “How is your Shalom?” “How is your peace?” It is an invitation to share. And

it is an invitation to reflect – How is my peace? How is your peace? How centered are you? Do you feel well and in right relationship with other people, with the world around you, with the God of your life? How is your *shalom*?

As much as we seek this peace – this wholeness of God in the world – the Scriptures are filled with stories about places and times where peace is hard to find – not unlike the times we live in. As the prophets say, “You will call for peace, peace, but there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14) - at least in a world that is fought over and contested among the powers of humanity.

But God's promise, in fact God's calling on all people, in the Hebrew Scriptures is for *shalom*. “I make a covenant of peace with you,” (Ezekiel 37:26) God says. And that peace is a life ordered according to the commandments of God; ordered according to the teachings and wisdom of God, which enables us to be in that right relationship with one another, with our world, and with God.

**Pr. Lynnae** – Sometimes we put peace and law together. It was Albert Einstein that said, “Peace is not merely the absence of war but the presence of justice, of law, of order – in short, of government” (Einstein, 1968, p. 371). But the peace that we are talking about is more like that of Baruch Spinoza, the Dutch philosopher who said, “Peace is not an absence of war. It is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition of benevolent, confident justice.” (Spinoza, 2015). It is an unending source of strength in the midst of difficulties. It's about having restored relationship with God. It is a quiet goodness. It is to sit down in one's heart. It is a goodness of life that is not touched by what happens in the environment, or outside, or about circumstances. Peace is a virtue, a state of mind, a disposition.

**Pr. Brad** – Peace is active – kinetic. As much as we know about our ability to make war, we need to discover our ability to make peace. Peacemaking is just as intentional. It is an active, live expression of the goodness at the heart of creation. It is not a theory or an idea. It doesn't exist unless it is materially displayed

and active in the world. So our contrast throughout this series is going to be the difference between allowing status quo and being intentional about making peace. We are going to have a number of people share with us about just how we do that in daily living.

**Pr. Lynnae** – Peace is not about giving up or about winning. It is so much more than that. Next Wednesday night our first speaker will be Pat Shields. She will talk about peaceweaving, which is a fascinating concept. Especially interesting are some of the historical people that she’s has come to study, and therefore I think, to know. These are people who were peaceweavers, people we can look up to and learn about. We invited Javier Alanis, the director at the Lutheran Seminary Program in the Southwest here in Austin where Brad and I both studied. Jay was the first Hispanic to get his PhD in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. He going to come and talk about liberation theology - about freedom, and how that fits with peace.

**Pr. Brad** – We've invited Michael Floyd. Michael is a Doctor of Old Testament Theology and he's going to talk with us about the Old Testament underpinnings of peacemaking. Michael has recently returned from missionary service and pastoral ministry in Central America. He has some fascinating perspective and insights to share on peacemaking.

We’ve invited Rabbi Alan Freedman to come and share about peacemaking from a Jewish perspective and contemporary context. There is that a profound concept in Hebrew theology known as “*tikkun olam*.” It means the *healing of the world*. It is the calling, the mission of all the people of Israel, for all people to be about the “*tikkun olam*,” in their own place and time: the restoration of the *shalom* of God.

**Pr. Lynnae** – I don’t know if you are aware of this but there is a contemplative retreat center very close to our congregation. It is called Eremos. There is a Roman Catholic sister there named Jean Springer. She is just now getting ready to welcome speakers about what’s called “spiritual activism”. Jean is a spiritual director and is going to come and talk about peace and spiritual

activism. We have a wonderful line of ministers of the Gospel that are going to be coming and talking to us and with us on these Wednesday nights – as we are about the peace of God.

**Pr. Brad** – In his letter to the church at Philippi, Paul talks about “the peace of God that passes all understanding.” (Philippians 4:7) There's a wonderful absurdity and a profound promise in that language. As little as our world, and even our own lives at times, can appear peaceful, peace is both promise and a calling from God. If we will reach for it we will find it. God is continually proclaiming peace among us. So as we begin this exploration together, may the peace of the Lord be with you all.

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Biblical texts are drawn from the *New Revised Standard* Version, Division of Bible Translation and Utilization, National Council of Churches. Washington, D.C., 1989.

### Biographical Sketch

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