

"Peacemaking Servants of Christ"

Psalm 133:1 John 20:19-31

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+133:1

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March 29, 2009

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How good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity. (Psalm133:1)

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=psalm+133:1

The psalmist, King David, writes of the beauty and the joy of God's gift of shalom within the family. In the context of this poem, we understand that God's blessing of peace between brothers and sisters is as wonderful as the anointing of a high priest and as marvelous as the watering of hot summer fields with cool mountain water.

The image given here needs some clarification for those of us who automatically think father, mother, and children as the family. Such is not the case in the early Hebrew society. The family is the extended family of grandparents, father and mothers, aunts and uncles, children and grandchildren who live together in the same village. When David writes of the family he is including a great many people.

Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so send I you."

(John 20:21 NRSV) www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+20:21

After Jesus' resurrection he met with his disciples and challenged them to actually live the peace of God in all they did. The Christian community following the amazing resurrection of Jesus sought to live out his teaching of peace and became a blessed family. In the early days of the Church the Christian peace makers witnessed the power of the Holy Spirit uniting them into one great family.

King David wrote of the blessed community of God, but he never experienced it. The early Church under the power of the Risen Christ actually knew, "*how good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity.*" Listen as Dr. Luke describes the basic Christian community of the resurrection:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles feet and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4: 32-35)

www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=acts+4:32-35

The vision of Psalm 133 was realized for a time in that basic Christian community in Jerusalem. I say for a time because the unity did not last long. Unfortunately the truth is that:

- Human beings are more at home with disharmony than harmony;
- We appreciate discord rather than a close concordat.
- We practice war while we talk of peace.

The Scripture does not present rosy colored, sweet romantic pictures. The dream of God's community of peace is presented as a vision given by God to those who are open and willing to accept it. Scripture also amply documents the reality of human nature. I only need mention:

- The jealousy between Cain and Abel.
- The sibling rivalry for parents love that lead to the deception and betrayal of Jacob over Esau.
- The pride that broke the relationship between Joseph and his brothers.
- The lust for power and control that destroyed King David's sons Absalom, Amron, Solomon, and Abanijah.
- The judgemental discord that split up the first Christian missionary pair, Paul and Barnabas.

- The intense legalistic arguments in the early Church over acceptance of gentile Christians who would not follow the Mosaic law.

The Bible tells us the truth about ourselves. We dream of peace and practice self serving conflict. Let us not fool ourselves. We can live within God's blessing of peace. Yes, Jesus gives us a dream and the strength to realize that dream of peace. And, God gives us the freedom to use our power to live within the hell of unresolved conflict. Fortunately, Holy Scripture actually teaches us what will destroy God's peace.

Factors that destroy God's peace.

Let us be as honest as the Holy Spirit is within the Scriptures. There are emotions and habits that destroy God's peace. There are long held, unconscious practices that disturb God's family. Let us list the major factors that disrupt the family and destroy God's blessed shalom.

- **Jealousy**

We all fall into the sin trap of comparison thinking. When brothers and sisters compare, there is sibling rivalry and discord. Who of us has not felt that our siblings received more love and better gifts from our parents. The sin of jealousy is at the core of sibling rivalry. When marriage partners compare, they are sliding on a slippery slope of destruction. Comparison thinking spawning jealousy is a practice spawned in hell for the destruction of God's community of peace.

- **Pride**

When we need to be constantly recognized for being the great person that we are, then we are creating an environment that destroys God's peace. Are you familiar with phrases like: My rights are most important. Why can't they see how good and wonderful I am? Don't they know this church will fall apart if I'm not here? They'll sure be sorry when I'm gone! My friends, pride is a subtle form of bringing the focus to myself. When we practice poor me, we are caught in snare of pride. When we boast and gloat, we are trapped in pride. Pride is a human practice first identified in Genesis with Adam and Eve. The sin of pride has been destroying God's peace from the beginning. In the Shack God continually reminds Mack of his independent choices that are rooted in his pride.

- **Lust for power and control**

When a husband declares himself to be the captain of the house and the lord of his wife. When a man must know where his wife is at all times. What she is doing every minute. How much money she is spending. Who her friends are. In other words, when he must control every facet of her life, then that family is headed for destruction. A wife can be as controlling and as power hungry as a husband. When a family is involved in power and control games, God's peace is not present. When a church is embroiled in power and control games, then God's peace is destroyed. When it is more important to play a win/lose game than to honestly interact, then relationships are destroyed and God's peace is impossible.

- **A judgmental and self righteous spirit**

The habit of judging others grows more out of fear than anything else. When a family, or a church family, adopts an attitude of being superior to others, usually that means they are afraid of someone finding out how inferior they feel. But, we all know the destructiveness of attitudes expressed in phrases like: We are the true church. Our family is so much better off than yours, after all we have the latest digital television set. Isn't it too bad that they are so poor? I'm so glad that I was born white in the suburbs. Whether we want to admit it or not, most of us have a judgmental demon lurking in our closets just ready to pop out and stop the opportunity of God's peace developing.

- **A legalistic mindset**

A family, or a church, that majors on the minors is doomed to destroy God's shalom. You cannot have the law book read at every meal and expect people to be excited about coming to the table. When a wife insists on everyone doing everything exactly as she must have it or else they will pay the consequences, then love is broken. When a church expects everyone to live perfectly or be publicly shamed, then people go underground and play the look good on Sunday game. Legalism of any kind breaks down God's shalom, it does not build it up.

- **Greed**

When a group of people are organized around the question, "What's in it for me?" then you have a community of individuals ready to explode at the slightest difficulty. Greed is the companion sin of pride. Self indulgence connects with self centeredness to destroy God's dream of peace. When your wants outweigh your giving to God, then you are involved in the sin of greed! And, greed chokes off the life blood of a community. That first Christian community had to deal with the sin of greed when Ananias and Sapphira held back from the community a promised gift to God.

The Dream of God's Peace vibrantly alive in God's Beloved Community.

We do not need to be controlled by the human factors listed above. Yes, they are strong. Yes, we know that they can be habitual. Those factors are cardboard boxes in which some people unfortunately choose to live. The good news in the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that we can overcome those factors that destroy God's peace. We do not need to focus on what has been, or even on what is now. We can take heart and joyfully focus on what the Risen Christ can do in our families and in our church. Jesus' dream of a community of peace is a real and powerful dream. Jesus says to you, "Peace be with you", meaning you can live in God's peace! Jesus' dream of peace can live within our lives!

Don Quixote, the hero of *Man of La Mancha* can teach us how to allow Jesus' dream of peace to move us toward realizing God's new community of peace. Don Quixote says: *I have lived nearly fifty years, and I have seen life as it is. Pain, misery, hunger... cruelty beyond belief. I have heard the singing from taverns and the moans from bundles of filth in the streets. I have been a soldier and seen my comrades fall in battle... or die more slowly under the lash in Africa. I have held them in my arms at the final moment. These men who saw life as it is, yet they died despairing. No glory, no gallant last words.. only their eyes filled with confusion, whimpering the question: "Why?"*

I do not think they asked why they were dying, but why they had lived. When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams--this may be madness. To seek treasure where there is only trash. Too much sanity may be madness. And the maddest of all, to see life as it is, and not as it should be.

Don Quixote's theme song, "To Dream The Impossible Dream." Can be our theme song! He challenges us to go beyond just what we know, step out of our cardboard boxes, and realize God's dream for us; for our families, and our church family. God's dream of a peaceful community can take us beyond this culture of fear. Let us Dream The Impossible Dream of God's peace, God's wonderful, beautiful peace available in our families and in our church.

When the Spirit of the Risen Christ was present among the early Christians, they knew the wonder and the power of the psalmist words, *"How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity."* We too can be so blessed! The Scriptures tell us how. We must witness to the power of the Risen Christ in our lives together. We must cultivate, grow, develop, and nurture spirits of generosity. We must celebrate God's great grace that is upon us.

- **We are witnesses of Jesus' resurrection**

The Scripture tells us that the early Beloved Christian community witnessed the awesome mystery of Christ's resurrection. The Risen Lord Jesus walked among them. They saw Him. They touched Him. They knew He was alive. They spent more time testifying to the miracle of God than they did comparing who was the better witness. They spent more energy sharing God's good news, than they did trying to be noticed in the family.

When Jesus Christ is the Captain of your soul, you do not need to be concerned with who is going to be first among you. When Jesus Christ is head of your family, you do not need to be involved in power and control games between yourselves. Christ brings the wisdom and power to forgive the past, heal the present, and move your family into a joyous future. There can be no peace in a family or church without the presence of the Risen Lord. Another way of saying it, is that when your family is torn apart by discord, someone has walked away from the Lord. The root of God's peace in the Beloved Christian community of peace is the joyful witness to the presence of the Risen Lord.

- **A Christ filled, vibrant, spirit of life!**

Too many people think of God's dream of peace and dismiss it as impossible for today. They read Holy Scripture but do not believe it is possible. I want us to read the Spirit within the Scripture and grow in our practice of it. What is called for all through the Holy Scriptures is the cultivation of a generous spirit. Jesus does not suggest that you become a door mat. Rather, Jesus guides us in the practice of peaceful assertiveness.

- In peaceful assertiveness, we pray for our enemies, even if they are family members and have hurt us terribly.
- In peaceful assertiveness, we keep the door open for honest, win/win, reconciliation.
- In peaceful assertiveness, we let the takers of the earth have the consequences of their choices without rescuing them.
- In peaceful assertiveness, we maintain standards, principles, and values so that God's community can grow healthy and holy!
- In peaceful assertiveness, we commit ourselves to being one of God's givers: meeting the actual needs of people by honest, humble means.

We remember Jesus' words, "*No one has greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" (**John 15:13**) (www.biblegateway.com/bible?passage=john+15:13) Peaceful assertiveness challenges us to be more and more Christ like in our giving and our living. God's peace brings a vibrancy into our living that grows generosity!

- **A celebration of God's Amazing Grace**

When we allow the Risen Christ to be with us each and every day, then we know that God's grace is real. God's grace is that gift of God's unconditional, no strings attached love that accepts you just the way you are and challenges you to grow better.

When we are living in grace, jealousy makes no sense. We are accepted for who we are. We do not need to compare ourselves to each other.

When we are living in grace, pride makes no sense. God loves you as if you are the only person in the universe to love. You are God's beloved child. You cannot do better than that.

When we are living in God's grace, lust for control and power seems like insanity. When the Holy Spirit's power is flowing within you, you have no need for pseudo power and control games.

When we are living in God's grace, judgementalism cannot happen. God's grace is by definition the unmerited, undeserved, unearned gift of God's love. We are humbled by God's grace. When we are lifted up by God's grace, then we want everyone else to be lifted as well.

When we are living in God's grace, legalism is not an issue. Grace fulfills the law. Grace redeems the lawbreaker. The Spirit of God moves us to a place of love that is beyond the law.

When we are living in God's grace, there is no room for greed. Jesus gave his life for us. We are heirs of God's Kingdom with Jesus Christ. If we already are God's children under grace, what else do we need?

God's Dream of Peace for us!

God's dream for Chilson Hills to be a community where God's peace is realized. God's dream is for our families and our church family is to be families where God's great grace abounds and God's peace is real. We can know and live within the circle of God's peace every day. I invite you to place the Risen Christ within the center of your family. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you grow a generous spirit. Celebrate each day the great grace of God that falls upon you as you live for Christ. God's dream is not an impossible one. God's dream already is becoming a reality. Let us look to what can be and live into it with God's power and God's wisdom!