

"Close Enough to Kiss."

Jer. 8:4-12; Ps. 85; 2 Cor. 13:5-13

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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This past Thursday Joyce Osborne and I went down to the Detroit Airport to rendezvous with other Presbyterians from across the Synod who had gathered to meet their Ecumenical Mission Partners and have a time of orientation. That's when we met Pastor Sigita for the first time and then sat together for several hours of orientation.

It was a lot of information for us to absorb and so I really felt sorry for our mission partners, who were all dealing with jet lag on top of language differences. At least one of them did not speak any English. (You will soon learn that Sigita's command of English is very good. As long as you remember to speak slowly she will be able to understand you without too much trouble).

One important part of the orientation meeting covered differences in cultures and customs, what to expect and what not to expect. For instance: how do we greet one another? Hand-shaking is very common among the churches from which our ecumenical partners come. The comfortable distance between us for conversation is about the same: about an arm's length apart.

We don't want to be too far apart, but we don't want to be "too close for comfort" either. Hugging is much less common. Greeting one another with a kiss, as St. Paul invites us to do? Kissing is reserved only for those whom one knows very, very well.

As I thought about these cultural differences it led me to today's Psalm. The Psalmist has a vision of God's salvation, seen in a backwards

glance, as he remembers God's goodness and love and saving grace in other times of need.

In a beautiful expression the Psalmist exclaims: "Righteousness and Peace will kiss each other." (vs. 10). Viewed through the lens of our orientation meeting in Detroit, it seemed to me that our cultural customs discussion was apt: Righteousness and Peace have to know each other very, very well if they are to kiss.

It is not enough for them just to coexist. It is not enough for them to have a passing knowledge of one another. They meet and they know one another. They need to be familiar with each other ways and delight in each other's company. Righteousness and Peace.

These days, however, we hear the word "Righteousness" and often think of it in terms of moralistic, "self-righteousness". That is not the sort of righteousness that leads to peace. It usually leads to resentment and strife. However, when one is focused on righteousness in the Biblical sense, one is talking about "right relations" between oneself and God and between oneself and one's neighbor.

It is the lack of "right relations" between God and us and between each other that Jeremiah is complaining about. He sees how things have gotten off-kilter. Everyone is pursuing their own selfish aims. No one seems to take notice of how shamefully they are behaving, without a sense of the common good. Jeremiah knows it cannot continue. He knows that such behavior leads to personal and national disaster.

By contrast, relations that are balanced and fair and true lead to a sense of well-being and of peace. When justice and fairness are in evidence, they create stability and order.

Eugene Peterson translates the Psalms passage in this way: "Love and Truth meet in the street, Right Living and Whole Living embrace and kiss!" (The Message).

Peace - the Hebrew word is "shalom" - Peace is so much more than the absence of conflict. It is an active presence, a wholeness and a sense of well-being that runs deep and true.

All over the world, on this World Communion and Peacemaking Sunday, Christian brothers and sisters are longing for a time when God's Shalom, God's wholeness and peace will reign in the hearts of all people.

They are looking, as are we, for a time when Righteousness and Peace are the order of the day, rather than the exception to the rule.

As we join with other Christians at the Table of our Lord we, like the Psalmist, are celebrating our salvation by looking backward and remembering God's faithful love shown in Jesus Christ our Lord.

He is our Peace. He alone makes it possible for us to continue to strive and struggle for a better world that is God's original intention and original blessing.

And this is not just a Christian hope or a Christian vision. Psalm 85 can open up our eyes to see signs of God's saving work in many places.

Talitha Arnold recalls something that happened during the 2006 war between Israel, Lebanon and Hezbollah. Two of Motti Tamam's brothers were killed by a Hezbollah rocket. Motti, an Israeli, asked that his brothers' eyes be available for transplant. One of the recipients was Nikolas Elias, an Arab man who was blind.

Later, when the two men met - one Arab and one Israeli - they shook hands, and they even exchanged phone numbers, doing small things in an effort to redeem a loss and to create peace and right relations.

What does it take for Steadfast Love and Faithfulness to meet and for Righteousness and Peace to kiss each other? Perhaps we should ask people like Motti Tamam and Nikolas Elias.

As followers of Christ who strive to be people of peace and of righteousness, let us continue to look for new ways of being constructive and for ways to build bridges of understanding and mutual respect between people so that we too might be part of God's great plan of redemption and salvation, proclaiming peace to those who are far away and to those who are near.

Let us pray.