

Wholeness — (שלום ~ Shalom)

Our Missional Purpose is to be a beacon of inclusive welcome and compassionate caring, reaching out proactively through the gifts and resources of our people to administer wholeness in a fragmented world.

But, what is "wholeness?" There is a New Testament word translated, "wholeness"; but it's used only once in Acts 3:16. Peter heals a crippled man on the Temple steps, and says it's through the power of God that the man is "made whole." Here, the reference is to health—wholeness and soundness of body.

There is another word—and Old Testament word—that captures the intent of our Missional Purpose. The word is "Shalom", and it's meaning is expansive.

Usually translated, "Peace", it's a greeting, a farewell, a blessing, etc. Peace: not a passive absence of external disturbance; not a personality free from strife. Shalom is an active presence of completeness and wholeness.

(1) "To live well:" to enjoy wholeness of life or body. (2) Right relationship or harmony between persons or parties (often established and maintained through covenant [e.g., Israel's covenant with God was maintained with "peace offerings."]) (3) Prosperity, success or fulfillment.

Shalom sometimes is translated, "Salvation"; and occasionally even is used as one of the names for God.

God is "Yahweh Shalom" (Judges 6:24)—the source of peace. God came to humankind, desiring and initiating a relationship with them and establishing a covenant of peace, which was sealed with God's presence (Numbers 6:24-26). Participants were given perfect peace (shalom shalom). The covenant relationship is never broken; however, when the peace—the *Shalom*— of the covenant is broken through human sin, a "peace offering" will restore the Shalom.

Sometimes we can gain understanding of a word or an idea by looking at its opposite. If Shalom, then, means fulfillment and complete harmony; the opposite of Shalom is to be incomplete and chaotic.

One of six Hebrew words translated "sin" comes from archery: an archer fires an arrow and the arrow "falls short of the target." One understanding of sin is to fall short—to fail to fulfill the image of God created within us. In incompleteness, Shalom is broken.

In the creation, God brought order (Shalom) out of chaos; sin is the collapse of creation, a return to chaos, a miscarriage of the Creator's original intention of a world of shalom, in which the lion lays down with the lamb. Wholeness/Shalom is inherent in creation. It is grounded in peace with God and extends itself toward every aspect of God's creation.

Seeing all creation through the lens of Shalom, we are called to administer wholeness in a fragmented world. We are called to be peacemakers, working toward bringing the world back into harmony (Shalom) with its Creator. We are challenged to stand against all the forces of chaos, fragmentation, separation and dissention. We are exhorted to seek unity. Where we find brokenness, we are asked to heal. Where we find heartache, we are asked to comfort. Where we find division, we are asked to repair. We are called to be "Shalom Makers".

David Cooper is a Community Development consultant who has built his life and his business on the Old Testament principle of Shalom Making. The Hebrew word for community well-being is "shalom". It is manifested when there is shared power, equity and mutual benefit within physical, social, economic, political and spiritual systems. Shalom is not simply a mystical hope. It is a concrete, tangible, proactive, investment of all resources, working collaboratively to bring Creation back into harmony (Shalom) with its Creator.

Cooper shares some of his grandmother's stories of the Great Depression. She described a community whose people graciously shared their meager resources in order to survive: "neighbors shared what they had and gathered round evening fires to tell stories of hope, imagination and determination". She called it "Shalom Making": wholeness in a fragmented world.

Rebecca Solnit an American free-lance writer, writes "After the Macondo well exploded in the Gulf of Mexico, it was easy enough (on your choice of screen) to see a flaming oil platform, the very sea itself ablaze with huge plumes of black smoke rising, and the dark smear of what would become five million barrels of oil beginning to soak birds and beaches. Infinitely harder to see and less dramatic was the vast counterforce soon at work: the mobilizing of tens of thousands of volunteers, from passionate local fishermen from the Louisiana Oystermen's Association to an outraged tattoo-artist-turned-organizer; from visiting scientists, activist groups, and Catholic Charities to Vietnamese fishing families to the journalist and oil-policy expert Antonia Juhasz, and Rosina Philippe of the Atakapa-Ishak tribe in Grand Bayou." *Out of chaos: "Shalom": wholeness in a fragmented world.*

In July last year, five Dallas Police officers were killed and nine others wounded by a sniper; six police officers were shot in Baton Rouge, three fatally; and in St. Joseph, Michigan, two officers were shot, one fatally. In the same month police in several cities shot and killed civilians—and all the shootings carried racial implications. The nation was in shock.

A woman in Conway, Arkansas—an African American named Tiffany Block—was moved to reach out and have a conversation with white Conway Police Officer, Heath Edens. Out of that simple conversation, a movement was begun: #Love Matters went viral. A spin-off in Conway is an on-going peace-making task force made

up of community leaders, educators, business people and religious leaders. *Out of chaos: "Shalom": wholeness in a fragmented world.*

Maybe you've heard or read about Tom Cousins, the big developer in Atlanta, and a strong churchman. During the mid-1980's—he redeveloped the old East Lake district in Atlanta, built around a golf course. He redid the golf course, but the housing around it had become a center of crime and drugs. He got permission to bulldoze all that and to build new housing. The whole idea was not just to rebuild housing, but to change the way people think about life, especially the young people. In the old housing project, the only model of success the kids ever saw was the drug dealer who came around in a stretch limo, parking at the corners and making his sales. And did he have the money, did he have the money! All those little kids saying, "Now there is success."

The new project is intentionally inclusive. There's a family on welfare, and next door there's a working family—nurse, doctor, school-teacher, policeman, insurance salesman—and then you have another welfare family, and another working family, another welfare family, another working family; and the children are seeing people who are successful and not dealing drugs, holding up a different image before those young people. *Out of chaos: "Shalom." Wholeness in a fragmented world.*

That's how some communities and some individuals have used their resources—their gifts and abilities—to administer wholeness in a fragmented world.

Where do you see fragmentation as you move around this community? What resources do you have - what resources do we have as a congregation - to become Shalom Makers? To administer wholeness in a fragmented world?

I usually begin with a Scripture text—sometimes after an introductory story or comment. Today I end with Scripture:

JAMES 3:13-18 (MSG) *Do you want to be counted wise, to build a reputation for wisdom? Here's what you do: Live well, live wisely, live humbly. It's the way you live, not the way you talk, that counts. Mean-spirited ambition isn't wisdom. Boasting that you are wise isn't wisdom. Twisting the truth to make yourselves sound wise isn't wisdom. It's the furthest thing from wisdom—it's animal cunning, devilish conniving. Whenever you're trying to look better than others or get the better of others, things fall apart and everyone ends up at the others' throats.*

17-18 Real wisdom, God's wisdom, begins with a holy life and is characterized by getting along with others. It is gentle and reasonable, overflowing with mercy and blessings, not hot one day and cold the next, not two-faced. You can develop a healthy, robust community that lives right with God and enjoy its results only if you do the hard work of getting along with each other, treating each other with dignity and honor.