

John 14:25–27 (NRSV)

²⁵“I have said these things to you while I am still with you. ²⁶But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you.

²⁷ **Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.** I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.

John 16:33 (NRSV)

³³ **I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace.** In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”

Galatians 5:22–23 (NRSV)

²²By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, **peace**, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

1 Peter 3:8-12; 4:7-11 (NRSV)

⁸Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. ⁹Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. ¹⁰For

“Those who desire life and desire to see good days,

let them keep their tongues from evil

and their lips from speaking deceit;

¹¹let them turn away from evil and do good; let them **seek peace and pursue it.**

¹²For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer.

But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”¹

1 Peter

Writing from Rome (see the reference to “Babylon” in 5:13) in the early 60’s AD, Peter encourages the Christians in Asia Minor who “have had to suffer various trials” (1:6) and are living as “aliens and exiles” (2:11). He reminds them that they are “a chosen race, a holy nation, God’s own people” called to “proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9).

These Christians are not exiles in a literal sense; rather, as Achtemeier et al write, they are “people whose commitment to the lordship of Jesus Christ have led to transformed attitudes and behaviors that place them on the margins of respectable society. They have become victims of social ostracism, their allegiance to Christ having won for them slander, animosity, reproach, scorn, vilification, and contempt.”¹

As difficult as such ostracism might be in our world, it was much more powerful in the NT world, a social world driven by status and community, a world in which the goal of life was to acquire honor and avoid shame. It is hard thing for us to grasp the societal alienation that came with a commitment to Christ in the first centuries after Jesus.

1. Achtemeier, P.J., Green, J.B., & Thompson, M.M. 2001. *Introducing the New Testament: Its Literature and Theology*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans. This is an excellent survey text on the New Testament.

Peace can seem so very far away from us.

¹In verses 10-12, Peter quotes from Psalm 34:12-16

The truth is that peace eludes us. Despite Jesus' repeated reassurances that God can take care of us just as well as he takes care of the flowers, we are an anxiety-ridden people. Granted, we live in a difficult and dangerous world where a little anxiety is understandable. Yet, when hasn't this been the case? As I write this, nearly 200 ballistic missiles have been fired at Israel. And the fighting rages on. So let's begin with taking a look at the biblical meanings of peace (from the Harper-Collins Bible Dictionary):

Peace. The concept of *shalom* (the Hebrew word usually translated "peace" in the Bible) implies much more than mere absence of conflict. At root *shalom* means wholeness or well-being, and the word can be used in both religious and secular contexts. It is also used as a general greeting (Judg. 6:23; Ezra 5:7; Dan. 4:1) and as a farewell (Exod. 4:18; 2 Sam. 15:9). In those cases, it seems to express good wishes for the people addressed and friendly intentions on the part of the speaker. The term comes to mean peace in the more conventional sense of the English word by extension; *shalom* implies absence of conflict due to an absence of those things that cause conflict. At a political level, for instance, *shalom* connotes peace between nations in a sense that implies those nations would have no cause to wage war (Josh. 10:1, 4; 1 Sam. 7:14; 1 Kings 5:12).

Peace (*shalom*) is often associated with other terms. The Hebrew Bible speaks of "peace and security" (2 Kings 20:19; Ps. 122:7) and "peace and prosperity" (Deut. 23:6; Ezra 9:12). Here, peace is associated with material well-being, good harvests, and safety from wild beasts and enemies (Lev. 26:6–10; Zech. 8:12). . . .

Peace is described as the gift of God (Lev. 26:6; 1 Kings 2:33; Pss. 29:11; 85:8; Isa. 26:12). False prophets cry, "Peace, peace," at times when true prophets know that God is not sending peace (Jer. 6:14; 8:11; Ezek. 13:10, 16). . . .

In the New Testament, the Greek word for "peace" (*eirēnē*) acquires much of the range of *shalom*, albeit with specifically Christian understanding. Like *shalom*, the Greek word *eirēnē* is used in the Gospels as a greeting and farewell (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50; John 20:19, 21, 26). This peace appears to be a concrete blessing the disciples can give to others, but, if the others are unworthy, it returns to the disciples (Matt. 10:13; Luke 10:5, 6). Virtually all of the NT letters include "peace" in their opening greeting, usually paired with "grace" (e.g., Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:3; 2 Cor. 1:2; Gal. 1:3).

The term "peace" (*eirēnē*) is also used in the NT with reference to absence of strife among individuals or nations (Luke 11:21; 14:32; Rev. 6:4). It is used to express order and concord within the Christian congregation. Paul frequently exhorts Christians to be at peace with one another (Rom. 14:19; 1 Cor. 14:33; 2 Cor. 13:11; 1 Thess. 5:13; cf. also Mark 9:50). Christians should strive for peace with all people, Christian or not (Heb. 12:14). This is probably the sense of Jesus's Beatitude on "the peacemakers" (Matt. 5:9)

Finally, in the NT, the notion of individual spiritual peace or peace of mind is found in a few passages. The peace of God (Phil. 4:7) or the peace of Christ

(Col. 3:15) may rule people's hearts; a mind set on the Spirit is life and peace (Rom. 8:6). The God of hope may fill one with joy and peace (Rom. 15:13).²

"Seek peace and pursue it"

Certainly, the Christians to whom Peter writes had good reason to be anxious and fearful. They were ostracized by the communities in which they had grown up and lived. Many were shunned even by their families. After coming to faith in Jesus Christ, these people found themselves to be aliens, strangers in a familiar land.³ They had not been sent into exile, they had chosen it for themselves. Yet, Peter urges them not to return the hurts, but to love and to serve, to seek peace and pursue it.⁴

The peace we seek won't come by accident; we won't stumble onto it or discover it thrust upon us. Rather, Peter reminds us that the pursuit of peace takes seriousness and discipline. Indeed, Peter calls the Christians to disciplined lives three times in this short letter (1:13; 4:7; 5:8). Now, this isn't about leading stern, joyless lives. But it is about seriousness of purpose and the application of our time, talents, gifts, and services to the work of God's kingdom.

Grabbing an occasional bit of Bible reading when we have a spare moment or two won't get us where we want to go. The same goes for haphazard prayers and for worshipping when it is convenient. And it is just as true when it comes to our money. Giving out of our leftovers is never going to help us to grow in our faith or to find the peace we seek. Rather, growing to maturity in our Christian life takes disciplined prayer, regular Bible reading, rain-or-shine worshipping, loving service, sacrificial giving, and so on.

Good stewards, serving one another

In 4:10, Peter urges the Christians to be good stewards of God's grace, serving each other with whatever gifts God has given them, understanding that their ability to serve at all comes from God's strength, not their own.

Our life at St. Andrew is to be just this – mutually encouraging, serving, and caring. We are to represent the life of God to each other. PHEME PERKINS writes, "Passages like this one remind Christians today that faith requires community. Believers should be active members of local churches that are gathered for prayer, for mutual support, for celebration. They are also reminded that local churches should be places in which all members of the church share the

² Joanna Dewey, "Peace," in *The HarperCollins Bible Dictionary (Revised and Updated)*, ed. Mark Allan Powell (New York: HarperCollins, 2011), 763.

³Contrary to what many Christians believe, there was no empire-wide persecution of Christians until about 250AD. Instead, in the first centuries of the church's life, persecutions were localized and varied in intensity from time and place to place. Even the horrific persecutions of Nero in the mid-60's were limited to Rome. Still, most Christians, at one time or another, were persecuted (1) for their unwillingness to worship Caesar, and/or (2) their "anti-family" philosophy, and/or (3) their strange religious practices. Roman governors were focused on keeping the peace and because the Christians tended to stir things up, though it was not always of their own doing, they were often at odds with the authorities. Rumors and legends about the Christians' weird practices made them easy and tempting targets.

⁴If you look at 3:11, you'll see that, being a quotation from a psalm, this is Hebrew poetry. Their poetry was not about rhyming sounds but rhyming thoughts. Each two-line couplet is a single idea, expressed in two different ways. Thus, in verse 11, turning from evil and doing good parallels seeking peace and pursuing it. In these studies, I've often talked about Christian love being about the doing, not the feeling. Here, the pursuit of peace is grounded in doing good.

particular gifts that God has given them.”⁵ In this, we will find the peace we seek.

Our Peace

Peace so often escapes us. We find ourselves to be anxious and uncertain, unsure of where to turn next or how to go about finding the life we seek. The ancient Jews understood that the peace we seek can be found only in our relationship with God. They had a word for this: *shalom*. It cannot be translated with a single word. *Shalom* is prosperity, health, peace, wellness, completeness, safety, harmony, satisfaction, fulfillment, unity, victory, restoration.

Though we usually think of peace in the sense of our own inner peace, *shalom* for the ancient Jews was often a relational word, nearly synonymous with justice. It was about two persons living in an equitable, often covenantal, relationship. Thus, in the Old Testament, *shalom* can come when a payment is made or an obligation is met, for equity is restored between the two parties. Payment of the tithe, what was to be returned to God, was crucial to maintaining the Israelites’ covenantal relationship with YHWH.

Simply put, *shalom* is the restoration of wholeness. It is well-being and is bound up with our relationship with God. Only when we love God and love neighbor, which is the heart of that relationship and which is grounded in action, can we find the peace we seek and that God desires for us.

But we cannot expect to find this peace so long as we hold back any portion of ourselves or our life, as if what matters is only our time or our talents and not our money. And it won’t come if we give from the leftovers, rather than from the first fruits of our work. The wholeness that is *shalom* is just that, encompassing all that we are and have, holding nothing back.

Scott Engle’s Bible Classes

Monday Afternoon Class

Current study: *Judges*

This class will continue our study of the book of Judges.

Meeting on-line at 3pm Monday on Scott’s Facebook page. Search for “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC.”

Tuesday Lunchtime Class

Current study: *Acts*

This class will continue with our study of the book of Acts.

Meeting at 12:00 noon Tuesday in person in Piro Hall and on-line on Scott’s Facebook ministry page. Search for “Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC”.

About the weekday classes:

Join us whenever you can. Each week’s lesson stands on its own. This is very “drop-in.” Both classes are recorded and are available each week in my podcast at scottengle.podbean.com. They are also available on Apple podcasts and elsewhere. Search by “Scott Engle Bible Studies”.

Scott’s Sunday Class

⁵From her commentary on 1 & 2 Peter, James, and Jude in the *Interpretation* series.

This week: Continuing *The Old Testament in Seven Sentences*

Meeting on Sunday at 11:00 in Smith Worship Center and on Scott's Facebook page. Search for "Scott Engle - St. Andrew UMC."

Videos of all three classes are posted on Scott's YouTube channel. Search for "Scott Engle." These videos are posted as soon as possible after class.