

Lord, make these words Your Word, that our hearts may become Your heart. Amen.

Ah, peace. Who doesn’t want more peace,
especially when there is so much turmoil around us.
Peace is the why I suggested we focus on this spiritual practice of
sabbath-keeping this Lent – because we have a very special peace to offer
when we get in touch with ourselves and with God one day in seven.

When we say peace, we mean different things, right?
I’ve mostly been talking about the sense of peace that is fostered when we allow
ourselves time to rest; when we allow ourselves to not be governed so much
by time; when we are open and observant of what God is doing around us;
when we become aware of our feelings and are able to process them.
All of those things that go into keeping sabbath foster a sense of peace deep in
our spirit, a peace which Paul said passes all understanding; peace that is a
promise to us as we make our requests known to God with thanksgiving.
That kind of peace is indeed shareable, communicable.

We also use the word peace to speak of reconciliation and ending of conflict.
That sense is also central to our lives as followers of Jesus,
who said “blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be children of God.”
We have people who think they have inherited the world, and are doing their best
to make sure that only people that look like them continue to inherit.
God says, “No no no no. Those who inherit the world are those who look like me,
who are made in my image.” And so we have this story that Jesus told to explain
why to God mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation are way more important
than wealth, or rule following, and being able to say “I was right.”

When the story begins, we see a conflict between this father and his younger son
who decides he wants to take his marbles and go start his own game
even if his father hasn’t died yet.
The father didn’t initiate the conflict, and didn’t even participate in because he
yielded immediately, he gave the son everything he asked for. Free will.
But it wounded him. Conflict always wounds both parties, and sometimes more
than those two parties. We’re not told what this did to the servants in the
household to other members of the family.

The older brother, we start to learn later, was probably like, “Alright. Well, he’s cut our assets in half but at least I don’t have to deal with him anymore.”

The servants might’ve missed him. They might’ve felt that the father brought shame on the whole household by a ceding to such an outrageous request.

We don’t know; there’s no mention of a mother or sisters.

Conflict doesn’t only hurt the person who starts it; conflict hurts everyone.

This conflict that takes place mostly off screen. But when the young man realizes not only that that he has made terrible choices, squandered half his father’s estate and ended up with less than nothing, he wants to come home.

He knows he’s broken his father’s heart,

so he doesn’t seek restoration of the relationship.

He doesn’t think that’s even possible because according to world’s values held by the people Jesus was telling the story to, the religious leaders, according to the worldly values, you can’t repair such damage. No mercy.

But that is not how it is in God’s world; in God’s realm nothing cannot be repaired.

There is nothing, no wound, no injury, no sin, no crime that cannot be repaired.

Just ask John Newton, the successful slave trader who, when he came to see the magnitude of his crimes against humanity, what he had participated in, the degradation, torture and slaughter of enslaved persons for which he was responsible, could have thought that was irreparable.

And he came to understand that God forgive him even a wretch like him.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. He wrote.

I once was lost and now I’m found was blind and now.

’Twas grace that caused my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved.

how precious did that Grace appear the hour I first believed.

Newton came to see that with God all things are reparable, reconcilable.

Jesus shows us this beautiful reconciliation out on the road. This father won’t even wait till his son gets to the house; he runs out to read him.

His son falls on his knees and wants to make his speech, “I’m sorry. Please, just let me be a servant” but the father doesn’t let him get it out.

“You’re not my servant; you’re my son! You have always been my son.

You will always be my son.”

He restores him not only the relationship but all the status he had voluntarily given up; he puts the ring on his finger, gave him authority; and sandals on his feet, a royal mantle around his shoulders. He says, “Let’s go eat and drink and celebrate for the son of mine was lost and was found.” Reconciliation peace.

Only the peace is not complete because there is the older brother,
who very much lived by the world's rules that somethings cannot be forgiven.
Some things cannot be repaired, especially nothing is egregious as his younger
brother taking half the family's assets, and leaving with there.
There was no vocabulary in his world for healing that a breach like that.
So imagine his surprise when, approaching the house after a full day of work,
which he did every day, he hears music and smells roast beef cooking on a spit.
"What's going on?" "Well, your brother's back and your father has killed the calf
he's been fattening up for a feast." Just imagine what went on in him.
This violated every code! He is livid. He refuses to go in, so father goes out a
second time that day to go out to where a son of his is and he pleads with him.
"I would've given your party any day." "I didn't know I had to ask."
They speak of "your son" and "your brother," and the older son is so bitter.
Jesus doesn't resolve that particular story; we don't know was he able to turn like
John Newton and see that, though he thought he was just an upstanding
member of society and a successful businessman, in fact, he had broken God's code

The father loved that son no less than the younger son,
but the older son left him no room to make peace.
The love wasn't gonna quit, but the reconciliation had to wait. It takes both people.
What conflicts like that are you aware of, in this time when families are divided?
As we become steeped in God, in Sabbath peace, we can share peace.
We can help make peace being that forgiving center around which people who
disagree or have wounded each other or even hate each other can find ground to love.
When we say it is our mission to connect people with the fiercely accepting love
of Jesus, that's what it means. That mission will lead to people we do not accept.
The "lost sheep" we are to seek are those about to fall to their deaths or be
snatched away by a predator. "The Lost" may include people who struggle
not only with addiction but with all categories of mental illness,
who are manifesting the toxicity in our culture that affects all of us.
They include people fomenting violence, or itching for civil war to break out.
They include people who perpetuate white supremacy and homophobia.
They include people who don't dress like us or think or vote or love like us.
Who do you know, who may not realize how precious he or she is to God?
Who needs to be reminded of grace and forgiveness?
Maybe you're the one God is asking to find that person, carry that news, remind
them that there is nothing we can do or think or say that God cannot forgive.
That is Sabbath peace. *Amen.*

Luke 15:11-32

All the tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus. And the Pharisees and the scribes were grumbling and saying, "This fellow welcomes sinners and eats with them." So Jesus told them this parable:

"There was a man who had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me.' So he divided his property between them.

A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and traveled to a distant country, and there he squandered his property in dissolute living. When he had spent everything, a severe famine took place throughout that country, and he began to be in need. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, 'How many of my father's hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and I will say to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; treat me like one of your hired hands."' So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe--the best one--and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his elder son was in the field; and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. He called one of the slaves and asked what was going on. He replied, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fatted calf, because he has got him back safe and sound.' Then he became angry and refused to go in. His father came out and began to plead with him. But he answered his father, 'Listen! For all these years I have been working like a slave for you, and I have never disobeyed your command; yet you have never given me even a young goat so that I might celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours came back, who has devoured your property with prostitutes, you killed the fatted calf for him!' Then the father said to him, 'Son, you are always with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, because this brother of yours was dead and has come to life; he was lost and has been found.'"