

“Finding the Way of Peace”
October 5, 2025
Scripture: Micah 4:1-4; Luke 1:68-73, 78-79

Today is World Communion Sunday, which we celebrate on the first Sunday of October every year. The tradition goes back to 1936, when our denomination adopted it, and was then adopted by the National Council of Churches in 1940. So, it has a long history and plays an important role in our tradition as a call to unity among Christians.

One of the more discouraging elements of the Protestant Reformation in the 1500's was how divided Christians became as different interpretations of scripture were used to define emerging denominations. John Calvin, who was the founding theologian for Presbyterians, spent a lot of time in correspondence with leaders from other movements, including the Roman Catholic Church, trying to bridge those differences and heal the divisions. He wasn't very successful. It turns out governments are very happy to capitalize on religious differences to assert their power over populations.

In France, of course, the monarchy with the assistance of the Church persecuted and attacked French Protestants known as Huguenots. But in Switzerland and Germany, rulers relied on Reformed and Lutheran leaders to aid in doing the same to Anabaptists and Catholics. The same was true in England and Scotland where Quakers, Catholics, and Covenanters were hunted down and arrested, tortured, or killed. Religious differences are a useful tool for governments to maintain control. It's much easier to manipulate people who are in conflict with one another than who are unified.

That's not a very profound insight. You can't turn on the news or scroll through social media without seeing how conflict is more popular than cooperation, unrest more newsworthy than peace. And it's certainly well known to the writers of scripture. The longing for peace, or shalom, is repeated over and over in the Bible. We hear it especially from the prophets who are often speaking in the midst of or shortly after foreign invasions that have left God's people shocked and reeling.

Micah was a prophet who was active during the time when Israel was under siege from Assyria. It was devastating. The destruction was overwhelming. And of course it led to all sorts of accusations and finger-pointing. Who was responsible? How could this have happened? Many of the writings of Micah are dedicated to answering those kinds of questions and I suspect a lot of the answers were not too welcome. At one point he blames everyone in charge: “Hear this, you rulers of the house of Jacob and chiefs of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and pervert equity, who build Zion with blood and Jerusalem with wrong! Its rulers give judgments for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money... Therefore because of you Zion shall be plowed as a field; Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins...” It's a pretty bleak picture. There seems to be no escaping a future of turmoil and destruction.

Micah, as all the prophets do, is reflecting the disgust and despair of the people. They are fed up with their leaders; they're fed up with conflict. They just want to live in peace. And Micah

offers a vision for that, too. He tells of a day that will surely come when wars will end and peace will reign. Using words that can also be found in the opening chapters of Isaiah, Micah describes a time when “they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks...neither shall they learn war anymore.” That’s the dream of every generation that has experienced the horrors of war. But it goes further than that. It’s not just that fighting will end, shalom is more than just an end to physical conflict. In this vision wholeness will be restored: “they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.”

This is the way of peace Zechariah is talking about in his words in Luke’s gospel. Speaking as he does in a time of Roman occupation, Zechariah dreams of a future when peace will be restored and the nation healed. There may be an element of vengeance in his words, although he doesn’t seem to want harm done to their enemy; he just wants to be rescued from their hand. In the birth of his child, who would grow up to announce Jesus’ arrival, he sees the possibility of a new day dawning. He sees light shining in their darkness as clearly as Micah saw the day when implements of war would be re-purposed for farming.

And today we continue to seek the way of peace. We know what kind of world we live in. We know there is division and conflict all around us. But our circumstances are no more challenging than they were for Micah and Zechariah. If they were able to cling to that vision of peace to sustain them and give them hope, then why can’t we? What is preventing us from seeking the way of peace in our world? You might think there are too many complexities today, too many factions, too much anger and hatred. But that’s nothing new. God’s vision for peace has always seemed impossible in a world of conflict. But it’s always relied on people like us being willing to put that vision into action.

World Communion Sunday may seem like an ordinary, routine celebration, but it embodies a vision of peace and unity in a world where we know there are many divisions. Lots of things separate Christians from one another. But we still agree that there is one table and one Christ whom we serve. And if we can begin with that acknowledgement, then maybe we can seek the way of peace together from there. And if we can see that new day on the horizon, then maybe we can move beyond unity among ourselves and find the way of peace with people of other faiths and other traditions.

Finding the way of peace starts with us. It starts with our willingness to accept the vision of peace God instills in prophets like Micah and expresses through Zechariah and reveals at this table of communion. When we put aside fear and arrogance and indifference and, as Micah says, “do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with God,” we step onto the path of peace in the world. And this table is where it all begins. You are called by Christ to see the light shining in the darkness of despair and the shadow of death and allow your feet to be guided into the way of peace. The journey begins here. It begins today. So, come, step into the light and walk a new path of healing, a new path to restore what’s broken, and find the way of peace.

Amen