



PEACE MONTH CELEBRATION
September 2011

SERMON OUTLINES ON
SHALOM-TRANSFORMATION

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August 11, 2011
Davao City, Philippines

BIBLICAL UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE

שָׁלוֹם

Hebrew *Shalom*.

εἰρήνη

Greek *Eirēne*.

They basically mean "completeness, soundness, welfare, and peace." *Completeness* has the idea of being whole—that is, all the parts are connected with each other. *Soundness* can be understood also as safety of the body and clarity of mind. *Welfare* can be viewed as wellness—that is, holistic health and prosperity. *Peace* can be read as tranquility, contentment, and healthy relationships with God and other human beings, and thus, the absence of any hostility or war.

Shalom can be summarized as the quality of life characterized by harmonious relationship with God, with the Other, with our Being, and with the Creation. Shalom is a vision of life where spirituality, community, identity, and economy-ecology are harmoniously connected with each other.

As a follow-up to the main theme
of the PCEC National Assembly—that is,
Churches Transforming Communities,

I pray that
this set of biblical reflections would help
the various PCEC constituencies practice
Community Transformation
as they celebrate September as

Peace Month.



PEACE THEOLOGY

THE PEACE OF GOD IS CENTRAL TO THE GOOD NEWS



- **Harmony with God**
(Spiritual Transformation)
- **Harmony with the Self**
(Psycho-Social Transformation)
- **Harmony with Others**
(Social-Political Transformation)
- **Harmony with the Creation**
(Economic-Ecological Transformation)

PEACEBUILDING=SHALOMLIVING

SEPTEMBER 04, 2011

PEACE IS HARMONY WITH THE CREATOR

Main Idea: Harmony with the Creator is spiritual transformation-in-Christ.

Text: Colossians 1:15-23

¹⁵ *The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant. (NIV)*

Context: The early band of Jesus' followers in Colossae was facing various challenges in discerning the meaning and implication of their new life in Christ. Some believed that, in Christ, the spiritual aspects of life were more important than the physical aspects (Ascetics).

Paul asserted that Christ is supreme over both the spiritual and the physical realities. In fact, the spiritual and the physical are all part of one creation and one reality under the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Since Christ is Supreme over all of God's creation, then those in Christ have been *transformed* into a new creation and embody God's reconciliation of all things (v. 20; cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). Spiritual transformation is necessarily holistic transformation!

This transformation moves from *alienation* to *reconciliation* (vv. 21-22).

What is transformation? In Theology, it means change in disposition, change of heart, or change of character; it is a process of conversion. In Social Science, it's a process of profound and radical change that orients a social organization in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness. In Biology, it means any change in an organism which alters its general character and mode of life, as in the development of the germ into the embryo, the egg into the animal, the larva into the insect—like metamorphosis.

1. The Standard of Spiritual Transformation: The supremacy of Christ (vv.15-18)

- a. Because all things were created by Christ and for Christ (v.16)
 - a.1 Christ-centered transformation is cosmic—*in heaven and on earth*
 - a.2 Christ-centered transformation is physical and spiritual—*visible and invisible*
 - a.3 Christ-centered transformation is political—*thrones, powers, rulers, authorities*

- b. Because all things are held together by Christ (v. 17-18)
 - b.1 Christ existed before time—*He is before all things*
 :: Christ remains eternally stable in the midst of temporal-historical instability
 - b.2 Christ is the integration force of all creation—*in Him all things hold together*
 :: Christ brings integration in the midst of disintegration
 - b.3 Christ is the Head of the Church; he demonstrated Resurrection Reality—*he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead*
 :: Christ offers Life-Reality over Satan's death-reality! We have to choose.

2. The Purpose of Spiritual Transformation: To please God (vv. 19-20)

- a. God is pleased in revealing the Divine Fullness in Christ (v. 19)
- b. God is pleased in Christ-centered reconciliation (v. 20a)
- c. God is pleased in the eternal-temporal nature of reconciliation (v.20b)
- d. God is pleased in the Cross-centered peacemaking of Christ (v. 20c)

3. The Movement of Spiritual Transformation: From alienation to reconciliation (vv. 21-22)

- a. From being alienated from the Creator (v.21)
 - a.1 We were mentally anti-God—*enemies in your minds*
 - a.2 We were behaviorally hostile against God—*evil behaviour*

- b. To being reconciled to the Creator (v.22)
 - b.1 We are being transformed towards holiness—*to present you holy*
 - b.2 We are being established in advancing the Gospel—*established and firm*

SEPTEMBER 11, 2011

PEACE IS HARMONY WITH OUR BEING

Main Idea: Harmony with our being is psycho-social transformation.

Text: Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (NIV)

Context: Sometime between 50 and 57 CE, the Jewish and Gentile followers of Jesus in the Roman city of Galatia had a conflict. Many Jewish followers of Jesus felt that the Gentiles must follow Jewish religious and customary laws to be acceptable in this new community. Legalism was being imposed on others as a false basis of one's identity, security, and acceptability.

What is the basis of our identity, security, and acceptability as a human being? What are the false bases of identity and security being imposed by today's world for us, ordinary persons, to be accepted in the world's standards?

The Hebrew concept of *being or self*: The Old Testament understanding of the Self (Heb. *nefesh*) is so rich. On one hand, self can be understood as *soul, living being, life, and person*—these refers to the relational-spiritual aspects of our self that we share with other human beings and with God. On the other hand, self can also be understood as *desire, appetite, emotion, and passion*—these refer to basic instincts of the self that we share with animals, characteristics that are focused and centered on one's individuality.

Perhaps these ideas were in the mind of Paul, being a learned scholar of Jewish writings, when he was using his personal testimony in dealing with the discrimination issue in Galatia based on differences in ethno-cultural identity.

What is *psycho-social transformation*? This is the process of change in our *psyche*, which includes changes in how we think, how we feel, and how we make decisions. These changes necessarily affect the way we relate with our social environment. A person who experiences harmony within herself or himself usually is the person who experience harmony with those around her or him. Harmony with the self is psychological-social transformation.

1. Harmony with one's being must start with the crucifixion of self-centeredness.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live...

- a. This is explained by Paul in 5:24: *Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.* This means living a life that have abandoned the aspects of our humanity that are characterized by *soul, living being, life, and person*. This also means that this person has become a slave to human *desire, appetite, emotions, and passions*.

- b. The context of this self-centeredness is the world: *May I never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world* (6:14).
- b.1 In the context of the 1st century, it was the world of Jewish *legalism* that became the false basis of Paul's identity and self-worth.
- b.2 In the context of the 21st century, it is *consumerism* that becomes the false basis of our identity. Our modern world sees the self as an isolated individual consumer who is addicted to commodity. The meaning of one's self is determined by how much goods and services one is able to consume in order to satisfy one's needs and wants. Relationships are mere means to satisfy one's needs and wants. This world-enslaved self, that has been reduced to mere *consumer-in-the-marketplace*, must be crucified!
- b.3 When the self is merely regarded as consumer-in-the-marketplace, we limit our "self-ness" to the basic animal instincts of our humanity. We are then reduced to only one side of our "self-ness." Hence, we are alienated from our own self and we do not experience the shalom or wholeness of our being. This alienated self is the easy target of commercial advertisements that lull and manipulate human beings to become mere consumer-in-the-marketplace. Such advertisements usually appeal to the desire, appetite, emotion, and passion.

2. Harmony with one's being means allowing Christ to live in us.

...but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

- a. *Christ living in us* means living by faith in this physical body. This physical body is the immediate context of our life-in-Christ. This body must live apart from unhealthy life-style, like substance abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, work abuse. Instead, we are commanded: *"I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."* (Rom. 12:1)
- b. *Christ living in us* means living and being secured in Christ's love. If we want to love ourselves, then give the best love—the love of Christ. The love that originates from the *self* is fallen and marred; it's self-centered and often insecure. Allow ourselves to be loved by the love of Christ—patient, kind and never fails (cf. 1 Cor. 13: 4-8).
- c. *Christ living in us* means modeling the life-giving self of Christ. We received Christ as the Living Water. We pass on the Living Water through our beings. The picture is not like the water in a pitcher being poured into a cup. Instead, the picture is like a huge water reservoir flowing through giant tubes to supply life-giving water to villages, towns, and cities. In this picture, Christ is the reservoir and we are the giant tubes. It's a dynamic, sustainable imagery! We, as channels of Christ's love, must always be empty of our selfishness so we can be clean channels of life-giving love of Christ.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2011

PEACE IS HARMONY WITH OTHERS

Main Idea: Harmony with others is socio-political transformation.

Text: Mark 12: 28-34; Deuteronomy 6:4-5; Leviticus 19:18

*28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"
29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (NIV)*

Context: Imagine yourself to be a Jewish person during the time of Jesus. Your *rabbis* or teachers counted 613 individual statutes in the whole body of Jewish religious-legal system. Some of them were tagged as "great" or "heavy"; some of them were "little" or "light". So, the question here was about the heaviest among the whole system of law. Like any respectable Jewish rabbis, Jesus considered Deut. 6:4-5, called the *Shema*, as "the most important one." But unique from the rabbis before him, Jesus connected a verse from social justice laws from Lev. 19: "...love your neighbor as yourself" (v. 18). The motivation for justice, according to this Hebrew Bible passage, is love.

What is socio-political transformation? The term *social* refers to a person's behavior, relationships, and activities that involve being with other people. The term *political* refers to the relationships of power that exist between people in a community or city (*polis*), or in any human organization. *Socio-political transformation*, in this series of biblical meditation, is the process of profound and radical change that orients our social and political organizations in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness in advancing the values of the kingdom of God—like love, justice, peace, and stewardship.

1. Harmony with others must start by loving God—the *Ultimate Other* (vv. 28-30)

- a. We are invited to a loving relationship between us and the *Holy Other*. The *Shema* recitation is the beginning of the Jewish confession of faith: "*Shema Israel! Adonai Elohainu. Adonai Echad.*" ("Hear O Israel. The LORD is our God. The LORD is One.") This is a profound declaration that there is only One Creator who is distinct from all the rest of the creation. This is a great statement of the *Other-ness* of God. The other word for a God who is *Separate* or *Distinct* from all the rest of the Creation is *Holy*. YHWH is the Holy Other.
- b. We are invited to a personal, intimate, loving relationship with the *Transcendent Other*. "Love YHWH your God..." In the Jewish tradition, the proper name of God must not be uttered; instead, they substitute the term The LORD (*Adonai*) to refer to YHWH. This is important because it emphasizes the reality that the Creator-God is eternally present but cannot be grasped totally by any human being. God is with us, immanent; but God is also transcendent and cannot be manipulated based on human wants and needs. To worship

YHWH means acknowledging God to be at the highest position in our value system—thus, *worth-ship*. A community who worships YHWH recognizes that no persons or objects can be acknowledged to be at the highest position in the community's value system and the community's understanding of reality. For YHWH-worshippers, God is the Transcendent Other.

2. Harmony with others means loving the *outsiders* and the *enemies* as our neighbors (v. 31).

- a. We are invited to a loving relationship with the *outsiders* as neighbors. The *outsiders* are those who are considered not part of our community. In the story of the Great Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), Jesus teaches us that the neighbor is actually the person who is the object of our prejudice—not trustworthy, not pure, not clean, not lawful, not our people. Loving the outsiders includes accepting help and protection from them—being vulnerable, humble, and transparent.

From the modern Christians' context, these are the groups we refer to with negative prefixes: *non-Christians*, *unchurched*, *unreached*, *unsaved*. Let's re-think the social-ethical implication of our labeling.

- b. We are invited to a loving relationship with the *enemies* as neighbors (Mt. 5:43-48). The enemy is the person who does not love us. The enemy may be a party or another community who persecute and oppress our community. As soon as we identify these enemies, we feel the need to label them: "terrorists," "bandits," "thieves," "murderers," "rebels," "insurgents." They become statistical data. They become mere pieces of information. The tendency is to *thingify* them. It becomes easy to harm and kill the enemies when they are seen as *things*.

In the context of the Church today, we tend to listen and follow the state or the political party as to whom we will regard as friends or enemies. On one hand, many Christians, instead of following the command of Jesus to love our enemies, have regarded the New People's Army (NPA), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and other non-state armed groups as enemies. On the other hand, some Christians have regarded the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) as enemies because of their ideological views.

We need to see our land and our people from the eyes of Jesus! We need to love our land and our people through the heart of Jesus!

- c. We are commanded to love both the *outsiders* and the *enemies* as we love ourselves. Let's review what we have already learned about loving ourselves. We received Christ's love as the Living Water. We pass on the Living Water through our beings. The picture is not like the water in a pitcher being poured into a cup. Instead, the picture is like a huge water reservoir flowing through giant tubes to supply life-giving water to villages, towns, and cities. In this picture, Christ is the reservoir and we are the giant tubes. It's a dynamic, sustainable imagery! We, as channels of Christ's love, must always be empty of our selfishness so we can be clean channels of life-giving love of Christ.

Group Discussion:

1. Who do you consider as *neighbors*? Who do you consider as *outsiders* and *enemies*?

2. The Great Commandment is, "Love the LORD your God... and love your neighbor as yourself." The Great Commission is, "...make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. 28:18-20) What do you think is the relationship between the *Great Commandment* and the *Great Commission*?

3. How do you feel about the NPA and the MILF?

In your understanding –

- a. What are those that the NPA is fighting for?

- b. What are those that the MILF is fighting for?

4. How do you feel about the AFP and the PNP?

In your understanding –

- a. What are those that the AFP is fighting for?

- b. What are those that the PNP is fighting for?

5. *Socio-political transformation*, in this series of biblical meditation, is the process of profound and radical change that orients our social and political organizations in a new direction and takes it to an entirely different level of effectiveness in advancing the values of the kingdom of God—like love, justice, and peace.

How should the Church of Jesus Christ in the Philippines move as an agent of socio-political transformation in our land?

SEPTEMBER 25, 2011

PEACE IS HARMONY WITH THE CREATION

Main Idea: Harmony with the creation is economic-ecological transformation.

Text: Romans 8:18-28

¹⁸ I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the freedom and glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. ²³ Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. ²⁶ In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. ²⁷ And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. (NIV)

Context: The Apostle Paul taught the believers in Rome that the Holy God is in the business of creating a new humanity from among human beings who sinned—that is, human beings who failed to live in accordance with God's standards. Humanity chose to be alienated—from the Creator, from the self, from others, and from the creation. So, Paul taught the early believers that those who have been reconciled in Christ were *justified*—that is, they were saved from the penalty of sin; they were also being *sanctified*—that is, they were being saved from the power of sin; and, they will be *glorified*—that is, they will be saved from the presence of sin. This salvation, in three tenses, is not only applicable to the individual person; this applies to the whole creation. The whole creation will be redeemed and God's present "down-payment" for this future hope is the Holy Spirit.

What is economic-ecological transformation? *Oikos* is the Greek word for house or household. *Oiko-nomia*, where we got the word *economy*, means management or administration of the resources needed to sustain the life and livelihood of the household or the family living in their house. *Oiko-logia*, where we got the word *ecology*, is the study of the relationships of all living organisms in our earth-house, or natural environment, or the creation, for the purpose of building a sustainable life in this earth-house that God entrusted to us. *Economic-ecological transformation* is the process of profound and radical change that orients our means of livelihood and our management of creation in a new direction, and takes it to an entirely different level of sustainability, in accordance with the values of the kingdom of God—like love, justice, peace, and stewardship.

1. Harmony with the creation is inherent in our hope and liberation (vv. 18-21).

- a. "For the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed." Creation is not just nature or mere environment. Creation is God's creative and faithful intention; an aspect of God's revelation. Such is our glorious hope in "our present sufferings."
- b. The creation "was subjected to frustration" through human abuse. In our context today, one expression of abuse against the creation is by treating it in a *mechanical-utilitarian* way. It means treating our earth-house like a machine to be used without caring for it. In a mechanical-utilitarian view of the world, the emphasis is exploitation. If one of the parts of the machine-world is not functioning, the tendency is to replace it. In this abusive system, the natural resources are exploited for the present, and then later, they are substituted with synthetic products and artificial solutions.
- c. But the Creator is not giving up: "...the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into glorious freedom of the children of God." We are all called by the Creator-God to be good stewards of our earth-house! Earth-destruction is listed by the Prophet John as a sin: "The nations were angry, and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead... and for destroying those who destroy the earth" (Rev. 11:18). We are to repent or to turn-away from our abusive practices against the creation. The liberation of the creation is also our liberation!

2. Our final harmony with the creation is about to be born; meanwhile, the Spirit of God assures us as we wait and hope (vv. 22-27).

- a. "We know that the whole creation has been groaning... we ourselves... groan inwardly..." Here, the creation is seen as an *organic-relational* reality. It's alive! It has the capacity to relate! In an organic-relational world, the emphasis is stewardship and loving care of creation. This is consistent with the original story of creation. The Book of Genesis tells us that "the Lord God formed the mortal (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*) and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the mortal became a living being" (2:7). These are the dynamic imageries used to give us a grasp of the beginning of the human race. We all came from the ground. We were named after the ground. We are one with Creation. We are one humanity! We are all carbon-based material. We are all breathed with the same breath of God. That is the story of our *Being Alive*! When the Creator-God commanded us to subdue the Earth (Gen. 1:28), it has the idea of *l'shamrah*—to care for, to keep, to watch, and to preserve it (Gen. 2:15).
- b. "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness... because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will." While going through "our present sufferings" as we wait for the final redemption of the creation, the Spirit of God—the same Breath of God that made us alive during the creation—will intercede or pray for us beyond what human words can express. This is our sustained source of energy as we live, and even as we suffer, in seeking to be good stewards of the creation in the midst of the powerful economic and political forces who are destroying the creation.

3. The creation is part of all things God is working for the good of those who love the Lord (v. 28).

- a. "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him..." Those who love God love God's creation. The creation is the world that "God so loved..." (Jn. 3:16). This world (*kosmos*) can mean the sum total of everything here and now, all of humanity, or world-systems.
- b. This is also the creation that will ultimately be reconciled with Christ (Col. 1:15-20). Those who love God are called according to this Divine purpose of cosmic reconciliation in Christ. Our shalom—our experience of wholeness—necessarily includes the whole of creation.

Group Discussion:

1. "Redemption and salvation applies to both the individual person and the whole creation."
 - a. What is your understanding of the above statement?
 - b. Do you agree with it? Why? Why not?
2. Read Genesis 3:17-19. In your own words, re-tell the story how the creation was originally "subjected to frustration."
3. In what sense are we one with the creation?
4. Economic-ecological transformation is the process of profound and radical change that orients our means of livelihood and our management of creation in a new direction, and takes it to an entirely different level of sustainability, in accordance with the values of the kingdom of God—like love, justice, peace, and stewardship.

How should the Church of Jesus Christ in the Philippines move as an agent of economic-ecological transformation in our land?