



**Mennonite  
Church  
Canada**

Resource Centre

## **Sermon**

*Author* John P. Braun  
*Church* Charleswood Mennonite  
Church, Wpg. MB  
*Date* January 13, 2002

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## **Shalom: the healing work of God**

*Scripture: Isaiah 53:4-6; Romans 8:18-25*

In three of the following six Sundays we want to concentrate on Shalom as the healing work of God. This is a part of the Prayer material that has been prepared by Mennonite Church Canada Conference Minister, Henry Paetkau.

Prayer is a way of centering the focus of our lives on God. In prayer we consciously try to communicate with God, to direct our thoughts and our lives toward the Creator. Sometimes prayer happens with words logically thought out and stated. Sometimes prayer is just a sigh or a groan directed toward God. Prayer includes whatever may be on the human mind. The Psalms are a book of prayers that express a vast range of human emotions and thoughts to God. Not all of these prayers are even very pious and some of them are even filled with feelings of revenge, or desperation, or anger. Some of the psalmist's prayers are disturbing, but then some of our thoughts are quite disturbing too, and if we express the human heart and mind to God; that is prayer. Sometimes it's a starting point for a long conversation with God that takes place over a long period of time.

When we come to God in prayer it is good if we express what is on our hearts, and on our minds. If we wait until we can put it in the right words, or have the perfect theology, or have things figured out, we will not do all that much praying. Prayer

is a conversation or even a discussion. It's a long-term thing. But if we think of it as a short question-answer session then we will never have much of a conversation, we will never be able to express our feelings and thoughts as they unfold and we will never have the patience to hear what God is trying to say to us about life.

The other part of prayer has to do with listening to God. We listen for God when we gather for worship, when we read scripture, when we are open to the working of God's Holy Spirit in the world through the people and the circumstances we encounter. For a conversation to happen we have to express ourselves and we also have to listen and to hear what the other is saying.

Many of our human prayers are cries for healing. Henry Paetkau writes about one of his children, who at the age of three was diagnosed with leukemia. "Quite suddenly," he says, "we had a very unhealthy daughter on our hands. Everyone prayed for her survival and healing. Throughout the three years of chemotherapy, doctors spoke of survival rate and cure. Five years after her treatments were complete, with no recurrence of cancer, they pronounced her cured. She looked healthy enough. But we knew, and many of them recognized, that her fragile body, her fractured spirit, and her damaged emotions needed more than that cure. They needed healing, which

required a different treatment protocol and would take much longer. But she, and we as a family, are still being healed of that shattering experience with illness” writes Henry.

Through prayer we often seek healing and peace. The Old Testament has this word Shalom which we sometimes hear as a greeting. Shalom is sometimes translated peace. But the English word peace doesn’t quite do the job of translating the meaning of shalom, because shalom is something much bigger. Shalom has to do with physical health, peace and good relationships, prosperity in the sense of having food and shelter and family. Shalom has to do with groups and right relationships and not just with the well being of unconnected individuals. Shalom has to do with salvation. The German word for salvation is “Heilung,” or healing, and shalom means the healing of relationships so that right relationships are restored, and people are saved from destructive relationships and destructive ways of living.

The Old Testament describes God as the God of Shalom. There is no doubt that all healing comes ultimately from God even when it comes through other people or through the health care system. In the New Testament, Jesus’s life, death and resurrection has to do with the Divine work of salvation, God’s work of the healing of creation, and the work of peace and shalom.

Today I think of Ernie Wiebe who suffered a stroke on Friday. We pray for healing in his life and the restoration of his health. Today as a congregation we stand together with Ernie and Lynette and their family in our prayers for healing. I think also of Irwin and Margaret Friesen, Peter and Thelma Enns and Eleanor Loewen who are dealing with cancer and health issues each in their own way and according to their own special circumstances. I think of those unnamed people in our congregation who pray for healing and restoration of health. I also think of my own family and your families and our extended families and I think of the burdens that people carry quietly without anyone’s knowledge. We need to cry out to and converse with God, so to speak, in prayer. There are so many facets to the healing work of the God of Shalom. Healing takes place in different ways for people in different circumstances.

Eleanor Loewen gave me permission to share something with you that she told me this past week. She was being treated for ovarian cancer, but now the doctors say that she doesn’t have ovarian cancer and they don’t know where the cancer started. She feels that her body can’t

take the treatments anymore. Eleanor has decided to stop receiving her chemotherapy because she has come to the realization that she wants to spend this last part of her life without the effects of chemotherapy. She wants a better quality of life in the time that is left. She says that she has come to what the Anabaptists called “Gelassenheit”. We talked a bit about it and she said its not a fatalistic kind of resignation, but rather an acceptance of the reality of her situation. She finds deep meaning in her faith in Christ. She experiences that people care and she can concentrate on certain projects now that are meaningful to her. When I told her our service today was about Shalom and healing, she told me that maybe the healing for her right now was “Gelassenheit” or acceptance and reliance on God and others.

I think that healing takes on many forms in the lives of people and that the God of Shalom works at healing in many and various ways. I think that our present understandings of medicine and health are one part of God’s healing work. But I think that it goes far beyond that. Healing is physical, relational, social, spiritual and mental. It has to do with faith and trust and peace and well being. We need healing because we live in a broken, sinful world.

Suffering is a fact of life. It’s part of the human condition. If we think of ourselves as part of the creation, or even just as creatures of the planet earth, we know that there are many things that need the healing of the God of Shalom. There are many people who lack food and shelter. Shalom is partly defined in terms of prosperity in the Old Testament. And if we think of prosperity in terms of having shelter and enough food to eat, then there are many people in the world who have need of healing. There are many people who suffer because of war. War always makes way for violence, hunger, famine, disease, death and homelessness. Many people need salvation from these things for healing to happen.

Many people experience broken relationships in family, in marriage, and between ethnic groups. Part of healing consists of the shalom that comes when relationships that have gone wrong are set right.

Isaiah 53:4-5 says of the Suffering Servant, “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrow; yet we considered him stricken, struck down by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions and healed for our iniquity. Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole and by his wounds we are healed.” The early Christian Church understood this in terms

of the life of Jesus. In some mysterious way the suffering of Jesus brings healing to us. Somehow Jesus takes the suffering of the world upon himself and through Jesus's suffering we can find healing. Jesus suffers for us so that we can move towards wholeness.

In Romans 8 it is stated in a different way. The apostle Paul talks about us suffering with Jesus. He says that we are "heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ provided that we suffer with him so that we might also be glorified with him."

Somehow the suffering of Christ has something to do with people who suffer because they don't have enough food or shelter. Jesus's suffering has something to do with people who suffer because of famine, or starvation or disease or death. Jesus' suffering is somehow related to the human suffering of broken relationships, the agony of destructive living, the loss of meaning. It has something to do with our health and the wholeness of our bodies, our communities and our very lives.

Suffering is a fact of life. Paul says, "We know the creation has been groaning in labour pains until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is no hope. For who hopes for what is seen. But if we hope for what we do not see we wait for it with patience."

We need to connect our lives to the suffering of Christ, so that we can be on the path of healing on so many levels. And so we believe in the God of Shalom, the God whose work is the healing of creation.

I ask you today to ponder the healing that we need in our life together as human beings. We groan inwardly for wholeness. Perhaps you are now dealing with issues of physical health, or maybe you are dealing with frayed or shattered relationships, or perhaps you are groaning inwardly for the healing of the wounds of mental depression or struggling with the inhumanity of international warfare. Perhaps you are downhearted because there is nothing more to life for you than self gratification. Ironically that is ultimately a path of great suffering too. If we connect ourselves to Jesus Christ, to his life, death and resurrection, if we identify so closely with him and his suffering as a way of understanding our own lives, then we will be living in the hope of the resurrection when all things will ultimately be healed.

Hope and patience are needed in the healing process. Sometimes we are filled with despair and impatience and we can't see what God is doing. When we cry out to God and then listen for God we can be reconnected to the healing work of God in Christ who suffered for us. He asks us who suffer to suffer with him because his suffering and resurrection is the path to healing and wholeness.

Our calling is to explore what the healing power of God means for us as families, as a church and as human beings. In order to explore this healing power of God, we are called to pray; to express ourselves to God and to enter a life-long conversation with God. And we are called to listen to the life of Jesus and to experience its healing power. May the God of Shalom lead you down this path of healing and salvation as you open yourself to God and as you listen. **Amen.**