

**“... and also with you”**

**February 12, 2012**

**On any given Sunday in hundreds if not thousands of churches throughout the world, someone gets up in front of the congregation and repeats the words written by the Apostle Paul so many years ago: “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace” and everyone gets up and turns to his or her neighbor and shares the peace or shares a good morning. Some of us get out of our seats and walk around; others just stand in their spot and great those immediately around them. Some seek out people they know while others look around for folks that they may not know. Some feel awkward by the whole thing and others love it and look forward to it every Sunday. However we feel it about it for the most part we believe that it is an important part of the service, because it shares a message that we hold dear to our heart. This message that declares that Jesus promises and delivers a peace that is beyond understanding and that we are the recipients of that peace and are commanded to share it with each other and the world.**

**Yet as we continue to think about becoming a missional church, I want to spend some time talking about what that message means and what it looks like**

in other missional churches. I am going to share some stories about churches living this missional vision of peace in their own communities. We still have to define what that means for our community but I hope this helps us along in the conversation. Before going on, I don't know if you remember but a few weeks ago I was helping David in the service and leading the Passing of the peace and mentioned the concept of Shalom. Now just as a reminder and feel free to look it more yourselves, the concept of peace or shalom in the Bible is much more than an absence of violence or hostility. It includes the idea of prosperity, safety, rest, righteousness, justice, mercy and wholeness. It is a very encompassing word. When you get a chance take some time to think about how shalom is in or missing from your life – I will leave that there because that is another sermon for another time. The important thing to remember is that peace is much more than peace.

For sake of transparency and so I won't be accused of plagiarism, the stories I am going to share are from the book "Treasures in Clay jars" by Lois E. Barrett and they coincide with the passages I chose this morning.

In Leviticus 26 we are given a picture that shows the arrangement (covenant) that God made with a fledging Israelite nation. Obey me, God says, and I will give you "shalom" or prosperity, safety, and rest. Shalom is

conditional and the condition is simple – obedience. Disobedience leads to a loss of shalom and all that it entails. This first story is about obedience and how far a church was willing to go in living out that obedience. I am not sure everyone here watches the super bowl every year but in the past few years Chrysler has had some interesting ads showing Detroit as place that is coming back to life and while that may be true the fact is that Detroit is a city that is a formal shell of what it used to be, populations are dropping, crime is high, unemployment is rampant. If Detroit was a city in the Old Testament it would be one of the ones left to rot by God because of some indiscretion the people committed. Yet, there is a Church in Detroit obedient to God’s word in living its mission in this decaying city. Holy Ghost Full Gospel Baptist Church is lead by Bishop Corletta Vaughn. While on a trip to Africa Bishop Vaughn was told by another church leader that God was calling Holy Ghost to move back to the inner city and the broken people living there and serve them. So after deliberating with the Church leadership it was decided that the church would move to a “decaying automobile industrial park neighborhood”. In fact members of the church were encouraged to move into the neighborhood. A cardiologist who was part of the church sold his nice home in the suburbs and moved into the improvised neighborhood with his family. Now not everyone

**moved only about 20 families of the 60 that were attending Holy Ghost actually ever ended up moving into the neighborhood. Yet their obedience to God paid off in only a few years Shalom was being introduced into the neighborhood with crime rates going down and drug dealers either being converted or shutting up shop. They were bringing prosperity, safety and rest to a neighborhood that needed it desperately. They passed the peace of Christ to their entire community.**

**In Psalms 29 the author sings about the fact that shalom comes from a mighty God that shakes the very deserts with his voice. The whole psalm extols the awesomeness of God and sings that God can do what seems impossible to humanity. This next story adds another layer to that of obedience (you will notice that obedience is in every story). This story adds the layer of seeing Shalom as a gift of God in all situations and being obedient in not only accepting the gift but putting to good use. In 1985 Rockridge United Methodist Church in Oakland CA was on the verge of death as a congregation. They were down to 13 members most of them elderly and almost all of them were convinced that the church was doomed to shutter its doors. Yet, God was not done with Rockridge, and he gave two gifts to that community. One was a new pastor named David (pure coincidence) who had an open heart to hear God's word and another was**

an octogenarian with a dream of a vibrant living church. Literally she had a dream in which God told her that she would not die until she saw the church reach a membership of 45. So they believed in the gift that God could give – a new dream and a new start – and they were obedient to it knowing that the God whose voice thunders over the waters could accomplish it. They started small covenant groups which met outside the church that were engaged in the community, they changed their services to be more of a celebration than a solemn event, and they committed themselves to be a church that was multigenerational and intercultural. It took a few years and it wasn't easy but in 1991 they reached 45 members and that faithful octogenarian passed away but not before seeing God's gift of shalom and sharing it with a church whose was on its way to being another one of the many churches closing their doors.

In Romans 14 we are told that the Kingdom of God is about righteousness, peace and joy and that we are make every effort to do what leads us to these things. God's Kingdom is the very embodiment of Shalom and our job is to help spread that message and stretch out the borders of the Kingdom into our community. Now interestingly this wonderful passage in Romans is based in the context of Paul trying to quell some infighting between members of the church – to eat meat or not eat meat dedicated to idols. It is an

interesting chapter that looks at the things that can tear churches apart. Yet, Paul's ultimate goal in this chapter is to get church members to not judge one another but to reconcile and work together in their mission. This next story is about a church that lived through some tumultuous times in which there were disagreements between church members but the church still found a way to work for shalom in their congregation and in their community. Spring Garden Baptist Church in Toronto Canada went through some difficult changes. Even though it's a long and interesting history that we won't go into today, the church was part of something called the Toronto Blessing (maybe some of you have heard about it as the Vineyard movement –that is how I knew it). The Toronto Blessing was this charismatic movement in Toronto during the mid and late 90's. It was movement that could be characterized as neo-Pentecostal with its trade mark distinction of the Holy Laughter – people would laugh uncontrollably under of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Whatever you may think about those things the fact is that Spring Garden was caught up in that movement and when people within the church started to question the movement there were rifts in the church. And to add the problem the church which founded in 1950's found itself in a new environment as the demographics of the neighborhood they were located in was changing rapidly around them.

So the lead pastor took a sabbatical and came back with a fire to be missional and bring shalom to his church. He led the church to reevaluate what they were doing and how their efforts were being effective at truly reaching the community in which they lived. They worked at bringing shalom among themselves and ushering it into the community. They came along side their community during a teacher strike and opened a day school for children during the two weeks that teacher were on strike, they started short term missions for all members of the church and they organized prayer walks to bless their neighborhoods. And while it started with one man's vision it was adopted by the church whole heartedly and now they are working together being obedient, accepting God's gifts and making every effort to spread shalom and usher in the Kingdom.

Central Presbyterian Church is not any of these churches. We have our own strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges ahead of us. However, I do believe that in order for us to be obedient to God's call on our life as a congregation and as individuals we must start thinking about being missional and incarnational in our own way. I also believe that we have been given a gift in David who has come with a rejuvenating message of possibility and hope. And I believe that we can work together to usher in the Kingdom and

**share God's Shalom with our Community, and the very pillars of Longmont will  
be shaken. The Peace of Christ be with you...**

**Amen**