

Sunday 13th October

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

2 Timothy 2:8-15

Luke 17:11-19

Peace – Shalom – Wholeness in our lives

Somewhere in the shed at the bottom of the garden there is a set of golf clubs. I got them second hand some 25 years ago, and they have probably seen the light of day no more than a dozen times since. Golf has never been one of my strong points. My only claim to fame is that when I hear of the best players getting birdies and eagles, I can remember with pride the time I got a duck. A real duck. A shot of mine sliced off somewhere where it had no right to be heading and collided with a duck as the duck was taking off. It (the ball not the duck) then plummeted into the water. The duck flew away stunned but otherwise unharmed.

Why am I telling you this? Well, just occasionally things went somewhat better.

Just occasionally – maybe once on each round if I was lucky – everything gelled. The golf club swing was such that the head of the club met the ball at just the right angle and with just the right amount of force and the ball was propelled forward in a beautiful arc, landing safely in the middle of the fairway just where it was intended.

Just for that one stroke everything seemed in harmony. Everything seemed right. If only it were always like that. It highlighted just how bad my play usually was; how discordant it normally was. And how skilled the professionals are when every stroke is like that.

And the same story could be told using other illustrations. Kate was talking (at CTK) about skiing last week. Just occasionally while skiing, everything gelled for me and it seemed like I was gliding down the slope, effortlessly and smoothly. Everything under control. In perfect harmony. (but only occasionally)

Or with music. The combination of instruments, notes and voices all coming together in a beautiful sound when orchestra and choir are in harmony.

Today in our sermon series we are thinking about peace or wholeness in our lives. Not simply peace as in the absence of conflict or disagreement or fighting, but deep peace. The Hebrew word Shalom (at St Johns the greeting we sing to each other at the end of the service) means this kind of deep peace. It carries with it thoughts of harmony, wholeness, completeness, welfare and tranquillity. Of everything in our lives being at one; all as it should be.

Both the OT and the gospel reading today talk about healing. Naaman and the ten lepers. Physical healing. Naaman who is asked to wash in the river and then he would be healed. The ten who are asked to show themselves to the priests.

Often in the gospel stories when Jesus heals physically, he also addresses other areas of people lives. We read about him forgiving sins as well as healing a disease – restoring someone not only to physical health, but also to a right relationship with God. Spiritual and emotional health. He is concerned with our whole beings. With harmony in our lives.

Jesus wants us to be in harmony with everything; with God, with the world, with other people and with ourselves. Living in harmony, where all things work together to produce the best; producing a beautiful sound with no discordant notes. Living in such a way that we will flourish and thrive. Living the way God intended us to live. And we can see something of this complete healing, this wholeness, this deep peace takes place for Naaman – the reading finishes with these words *Now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel* – his relationship with God is restored.

So what would this kind of harmonious living be like for us?

It would surely involve being at peace in all our areas of relationship. Being in harmony in all areas.

With God

With other people

With the world around us

And (maybe the hardest) with ourselves

The way it should be.

The story of creation in the bible presents a picture of humans created to be in harmony with God, with each other, with the world and with themselves. We picture God walking alongside his people and talking to his people; we see the man and the woman at peace with each other; we glimpse the relationship they have with the world – the land – and we see that they are not ashamed of themselves – they are at peace with themselves.

But that harmony is broken. Discord enters. The relationship between the people and their God breaks down. They disobey him; they turn and go their own way.

And we see this discord spread to their other relationships. They argue about who is to blame; they have to toil to scratch a living from the earth; they are ashamed at their exposure or nakedness. Their relationships with each other, with the world and with themselves break down. Peace is shattered; harmony is gone.

So it would seem that the key to harmony in life, the key to wholeness is how we relate to God. Other things flow from that relationship being restored to how it should be. But restoring that relationship with God is not something we can do through our own efforts. It can only be restored through the forgiveness and reconciliation that come as a result of Jesus' death on the cross. Because of that we are welcomed back into the presence of God; because of that our relationship with him is restored. And this is sealed by God sending his Spirit – the Holy Spirit – to live within us. Encouraging us and guiding us, helping us in all we do, in all our relationships, to be more like Jesus.

We remember how the spirit came to those first disciples at Pentecost. The very breath and life of God within them. We see how the Spirit transformed them from being discordant and out of contact with God, to being God's hands and feet and mouths – people living and proclaiming the gospel truths and living in peace and harmony with him.

And that same spirit is available for us too. God's spirit within us. Helping us to have a restored and close relationship with our creator. Helping us as we pray,

as we seek to read and understand scripture, as we try to follow the example and teaching of Jesus. Helping us to be in harmony with God.

In his letter to the Galatians Paul talks about the effect that being filled with the Spirit of God, having the life and breath of God in our very beings, has on our lives. He talks of the fruit of the spirit. Attitudes and actions that will inevitably follow from Gods spirit being within us. He says the fruit of Gods spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. We know that no matter how hard we try, we don't seem to be able to make ourselves more loving, more patient, more generous etc. But it is possible through the Spirit of God working within us.

If these things flow from being in a restored and harmonious relationship with God we can see how that relationship will spread to our relationships with others. The way we behave, the things we say, the love we show, the attitudes we demonstrate. The closer we are to God, the better our relationships with each other.

And the presence of God's spirit within us also brings us a peace within. A new understanding of ourselves, our value to God and our potential. It helps us to see that, though we are far from perfect, we are loved by God. The presence of the spirit helps us see our limitations, but also our strengths and gifts. The presence of the spirit gives us confidence in who God created us to be and how he wants us to live.

Easy words to say, but words that are borne out by experience. Many Christians talk of this peace that comes from God being within us. Not that it means all our problems and challenges have disappeared, but that with God's spirit we have the resources to cope with them and live with them. Our relationship with our very selves is restored to one of harmony.

And so this morning This morning we come to God with a whole host of things on our hearts and minds. Perhaps we feel distant from God; maybe we feel at odds with those around us – perhaps even those who we love and care for the most; maybe we feel out of sorts with the world itself; and many of us might feel an unease with ourselves, a discomfort, a discordance deep within.

This isn't how God wants us to live. He wants to bring us to a position of wholeness and harmony; he wants to live within us by his spirit, to restore

relationships and confidence. To lead us on to be the people he created us to be.

This morning it might be that we can take one small step. An easy step of asking God to fill us with his spirit. A simple step like Naaman washing himself in the river. But a step that will lead us to a new peace, a new Shalom.

I invite you to take that step now. In faith that God will respond.