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Lev 25, Jer 29, Zech 8  
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### Visions of Peace

Good morning church. Today's sermon is based on peace in the Old Testament but is spread across hundreds of years of history. From Leviticus in ancient Israel, Jeremiah before the exile and Zechariah afterward. Each time period called for a different vision of peace, but there is the repeated theme of peace being the thriving of humans.

Please pray with me. May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be pleasing to you. Our rock and our peace. Amen.

What is your vision of peace?

Maybe it's sitting on the couch watching a movie, little Ruby snoozing on my lap, a cup of ice tea in my hand. Or perhaps it's sitting on a bench, listening to a river below me and trees giving shade above me. I'm a bit of an introvert, so when I imagine peace, it is usually alone or with others in silence. What about you? At least for me, in our fast-paced world, slowing down and just doing nothing is my vision of peace. And indeed we see a little of this in Jeremiah and Zechariah. Peace is getting married or watching children play. However, I want us to take a moment this morning to expand our vision of peace beyond just the serenity of a moment.

So, let's start with a boring law document in Leviticus. A little bit of Sabbath law that returns the land to their ancestral owner every fifty years. The other part of this 50-year jubilee was the release of slaves and the forgiveness of debts. You know small stuff. But let's wrap our heads around this mind-bending law that flies in the face of our current economic system. Imagine. The farmland owned by people in this church, whether you mortgaged or sold it, would return to your grandchildren.

Leviticus is establishing what Perry Yoder calls, the economics of shalom, where God owns the land, and we humans only take what we need. Then the fruit of the land goes to feeding the community, both human and nonhuman. The land is firstly sustenance, not capital. The best I can figure, here in Leviticus, peace is that people have the dignity of a plow and enough land to work to survive. Peace is material wellbeing.

This is not a convenient passage for us. Many of our families benefited from historical laws of forcing out the native Yokot people and having legal ownership. Yes, these families had to work really hard and farming can be rough. On the other hand, it is good news because it speaks of the return of family farms that have been swallowed up by large corporate farms.

So what happens when there is no “Godly state” to enforce peace legislation?

Jeremiah was written on the eve of the exile, as a final sermon to a defeated people about to be sent off to Babylon for the rest of their lives.

Still, Jeremiah calls on them to seek the peace of the city. This peace is still rooted in Leviticus, peace means that people have houses to live in, have fields to cultivate so they can eat. Peace is about marriage and raising families. Even when the exiled people cannot control an economic system of peace, they are still committed to the spirit of the law. Peace means that everyone prospers, everyone has enough, and even their enemies deserve to prosper with them.

Then we come full circle with Zechariah, which is a sermon from a reconstructed Jerusalem to the exiles in Babylon, declaring that the exiles should return home. With Zechariah’s sermon is the promise of peace. The simple peace of growing to old age and watching our grandchildren play in the streets. With a justice system that does peace, because it is based on truth. I come to you as a young person who does not know the difficulty of old age, but I do believe that getting old is helped along with material well-being, food in your stomach, a house over your head, and a family to support you. But I also know that finding peace without these things is a hardship some of us have or will deal with in our lives.

Can you see how wide these visions of peace are? They include legislated peace and the peace of powerless exiles. The peace that is having enough to eat and peace that is watching children playing.

Brothers and sisters, I don’t need to preach to you about the way of peace that is nonviolence. You’ve received that word many times. But let us take seriously these other visions of peace. A peace that is rooted in economics, community, and fun. I know that we lack this peace in our nation of overconsumption and greed. We lack peace when we look at the drought in our land. We lack peace when people do not build houses and live in them and have no gardens to eat from. We lack peace when our children live in fear of where their next meal is coming from.

And so I ask the question of Jeremiah. How will we seek the peace of this community? Because the peace of the community is our peace. For each of you, the answer will be different because peace is too wide for us to do it all. And so my challenge to you is to look at these visions of peace. Pick one aspect, and live into that peace. As the great Martin Luther King said, Be the peace you wish to see in the world.