

“Co-Creating with God a Glorious World”

Luke 24:36b-48, Genesis 12:1-3 Select Phrases, Amos 5:24 & Micah 6:8

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Prayer for Understanding God of grace, you promised to never break your covenant with us. Amid all the changing words of our generation, speak your words of eternal love. Amen.

The resurrected Jesus teaches us how to overcome fear, worry, and apathy to make loving choices that co-create with God a glorious world.

The resurrected Jesus is continual saying, “Peace be with you.” Our English word peace is a weak translation for the word Jesus used. The Hebrew word shalom makes whole and complete the Old and New Testaments, all relationships and one’s being. Jesus makes whole all that is broken. Jesus reconciles, redeems, resurrects everyone, and all things making the cosmos complete and whole. The peace Jesus proclaims is a cosmos free of conflict, every person free of inner conflict, with all being in harmony. The peace Jesus proclaims is salvation, sanctuary, and abundant life; all people uninjured, safe and sound. Jesus’ peace is multidimensional, well-being physically, psychologically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually flowing from all relationships being right, true, and life enhancing. Jesus is with us through the Holy Spirit at all times restoring all relationships. Every barrier, including death, is being overcome. Jesus is communicating all of this and more with his greeting, prayer, and blessing, “Peace be with you.” Peace is already and not yet. The resurrected Jesus has already guaranteed a future of peace and we are not yet living in the time when peace is fully manifested. In this in between time, we live in mysterious “both and” situations. Bad things happen to us beyond our control. And we get to choose how we process and how we respond. And our choices determine how much peace we experience and how soon peace will be achieved on earth. And some things are beyond our control. Each person has a different mix of these “ands” today. And each person has a different mix of these “ands” as they journey through life. There are a variety of perspectives on how faith and prayer affect our circumstances. The disciples asked Jesus: “Who sinned that this person is blind?” Jesus answered, “It was not that they sinned or their parents. Random atrocities and free will are mysteries.” For this sermon let us set aside all that we cannot control in order to reflect on what we can control with our choices as individuals and as community. I perceive that prayer is a way God transforms me to receive and share more love enabling to make ever expanding loving choices.

A reading from the gospel of Luke. **Luke 24:36b-48 NRSV** “**The resurrected Jesus stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you." They were startled, terrified, and thought that they were seeing a ghost. Jesus said to them, "Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? Look at my hands and my feet; see that it is I myself. Touch me and see; for a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." And when Jesus had said this, he showed them his hands and his feet. While in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering, Jesus said to them, "Have you anything here to eat?" They gave Jesus a piece of broiled fish and he took it and ate in their presence. Then Jesus said to them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you--that everything written about me in the law of Moses, the prophets, and the psalms must be fulfilled." Then Jesus opened their minds to understand the scriptures, and he said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Messiah is to suffer and to rise from the dead on the third day and that repentance and forgiveness of sins is to be proclaimed in God’s name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem. You are witnesses of these things.”**

The disciples are apathic, confused, and terrified. There is oppression, protests, and people being mocked, tortured, and killed for loving. They disbelieve peace, resurrection, and a glorious cosmos is coming.

Wilda Gafney explains: “The disciples do not understand resurrection. Jesus calls them back to scripture. The theme is deliverance, salvation, and resurrection available to all. The disciples are trying to make sense of these stories of love in a world of hierarchies.”

The original covenant with Sarah and Abraham, scripture declares: **Genesis 12:1-3 Select phrases “I, God, will bless you and you will be a blessing to others. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you.”** Free will; God doesn’t force blessings upon us. We are continually invited to receive blessings and share blessings. How soon all people are blessed and at peace on earth depends on how many of us, receive love, choose love, choose to co-create with God speeding the coming of a complete glorious resurrection world.

Before seminary, reading the Old Testament was confusing to me. It seemed that sometimes God was angry at certain people and against other people. Renowned Old Testament Scholars Patrick Miller and Walter Brueggemann were Jesus incarnate for me opening my mind to understanding scripture. The Old Testament is like life, messy, broken, violent, painful, heartbreaking; and if you perceive carefully, you can glimpse God loving to redeem, resurrect, and deliver. God gets blamed for all sorts of misunderstandings of God’s will. Anytime anyone one is feared, hated, or controlled that is a misunderstanding. God is always pure love, freedom, and peace. History tells how people on both sides of issues and wars were certain they were right, that God wanted them to win, and impose their views on others. God loves all people, on all sides of every issue and war. God is loving to create peace for all.

The invitation is to read the Old Testament through the lens of God blessing everyone, so all people are blessed. Hate and violence are humanities’ bad choices. All love, peace, and joy is God partnering with us in co-creating a loving world.

Walter Brueggemann wrote an article entitled “*Destiny not Fate*”. Destiny is defined as something that has to happen by the love of an agency. Destiny is we will enjoy glorious resurrection life forever by the grace of God. Destiny is our future. And destiny believes our choices partially determine our present circumstances. Fate is the development of events beyond a person’s control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power. Fate says that all your choices are predetermined. Fate says that our present circumstances are all set. Fate says there is nothing you can do to change yourself or change the world. Fate is despair and resignation. God did not create a cosmos of fate, rather an evolving life of destiny. Destiny is hope, believing that our loving choices are making a more loving world. Destiny believes that I can become a more loving person. Destiny believes God is loving to bend all to goodness and each of us is God’s partner in co-creating ever expanding goodness and love.

Walter explains: “The covenantal-prophetic tradition of the Old Testament to which Jesus is an heir is an invitation to agency, choice making, as a part of the human role in covenant. YHWH’s covenant partner has an active role to play in the life of the world. On the one hand, YHWH has agreed “to be our God”. On the other hand, we are agreeing to be YHWH’s “treasured people”. The role of treasured people, in the horizon of Deuteronomy, is not a one-dimensional, blind, unthinking obedience. Rather it is being responsive to YHWH’s commandments, blessings and love, requiring active interpretive engagement and decision-making regarding how to love God, love neighbor, love self and love all of creation. Thus, the covenantal tradition is a community at work to generate an alternative future. We are being blessed by God. We bless others by making loving choices. As covenant people the imperative is to “choose”. Destiny continually chooses life so that all may live abundantly. An alternative is fate, to muddle through the status quo, to endure today’s problem solely on the promise of heaven.”

The prophets repeatedly convicted Israel of living by fate, refusing agency, refusing to confess their misunderstandings, refusing to make loving choices, that bring about a world where all people are blessed. The prophets regularly conclude that the failure to make loving choices brings disaster. The prophets urge us to return to destiny, to covenant, to hope, to making loving choices and taking loving action to partner with God in making earth like heaven soon. Amos urges us to live in such a way that **Amos 5:24 “justice rolls down like waters and righteousness flows like an ever-flowing stream.”** This is a call for agency, for making loving choices. Jesus who is situated in the covenantal-prophetic stream of Israel urges us to love establishing peace.

The quality of life tomorrow is partially a result of our choices today. Choosing justice, generosity, and kindness will yield a future much different than choosing power, greed, and indifference. Each choice each person makes partially determines our short-term future. To God, short-term future could be thousands of years. Ultimately, love will prevail and everyone will make loving choices and all will be at peace.

A careful reading of the Old Testament reveals that both covenant partners, us and God, are indispensable for loving life and peace to unfold on earth. No loving earthly world without the agency of YHWH. And no loving earthly world without the agency of humanity. It is “both”/”and”. In the Old Testament, people are summoned by prophets, law, and love to co-create with God a loving future creating peace for all.

Pastor Valerie Bridgeman perceives in scripture a kinship of messy struggle to co-create with God a loving world. Valerie explains: “As a black woman from the deep south, I know what it is like to be vulnerable, to grieve and to want for something that doesn’t seem like you can have it. In the midst of grief, struggle and trauma knowing God is with me means, I am ok.”

For just a few sentences, let us pick back up all the random, uncontrollable, suffering that we experience that we cannot change. Pastor Valerie’s words comfort me. No matter how awful the situation knowing that God is with me means, I am ok. Now back to what we can change with our choices.

Pastor Troy Jackson urges us to live the words of the prophet Micah. **Micah 6:8 “Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, walk humbly, love mercy and do justice.”** God is eager to serve with you in co-creating a loving world. It means choosing courage over fear, choosing love over indifference, allowing God’s resurrection love to inspire you to loving action.

There is plenty of anxiety, worry, and fear today over violence, wars, court decisions, politics, the economy and the church. Pastors Erin Weber-Johnson and Thia Reggio write: “We are keepers of God’s covenant. That is our charge, established millennia ago and carried on from generation to generation into the present age. In the moment in which we are living, with the forces of greed, fearmongering, and power-hungriness that have always been at work in the world now amplified by media and transmitted around the world with lightning speed, it’s easy to lose sight of the longer view that connects us across the ages to our ancestors and to generations yet to come. We are trained to focus on much shorter timelines: 24-hour news cycles, crises that hold our attention for a few weeks at a time before they are subsumed by the next crisis, political rhetoric punctuated by election year trends. As bearers of God’s ancient covenant, we cannot allow our vision to be so exclusively near-sighted. We must recalibrate our focus to include a much longer horizon. We must understand that the work of God’s justice and love does not begin and end with an election cycle. Vote, yes. Work for the near-term outcome you desire. But remember that your commitment to keep God’s covenant will continue when the election results are in. Regardless of whether you see the outcome you desire or not, the work of love will need to go on. Remember, you are not alone. God is with you. God’s promises have been active

since before our history began. Powers and principalities have risen and fallen many times in God's presence and the covenant still stands. So, we stand in God's promise to work toward the world of love and peace with justice that God is calling into being—whether we live in an age that reflects those values or obscures them, God's promise will prevail.”

God is for all people. God is for every loving choice. God is against choices of fear, hate, control, shame, blame, violence, and all that diminishes life. And God is for the people who make those poor choices. We are called by God to be at peace, to believe resurrection glory is coming for all, to wonder, to be curious, to make loving choices, to proclaim repentance, that is change, transformation, for each person and the cosmos, co-creating with God a loving, joyful, glorious, resurrection world where all is forgiven.

John Shea writes: “In Jesus God's plan for the salvation of the world is revealed. Salvation must go out to all people. We are witnesses who know the story and must live into the reality.”

The risen Jesus is with us, so we will be ok. Our guide, the Holy Spirit, is revealing the most excellent way of love. With a Holy Spirit inspired mind one perceives love through scripture, love through Jesus, love in others and love permeating the cosmos and realizes that love will be fulfilled. Perceiving love inspires us to love extravagantly. We are called to make loving choices and be at peace. We are called to fulfill the ancient covenant, to receive God's blessings, and share God's blessings. We are called to co-create with God bringing heaven to earth. We are called to proclaim the world is changing, each life is changing, to perfect glory by God's grace. Amen.