

This should come as no surprise to you: I'm a **"peacenik" from way back**. I **avoid conflict** as much as I can – I try to fill the **role of negotiator and advocate** whenever there are disagreements – I believe in **compromise and consensus** – I (naively) want the world to be positive and full of peace.

There, I've said it...there's no hiding the truth.

I love peace and I want peace in my life as much as I can manage it.

Maybe it comes from my family position – I'm the **middle child who struggled for understanding and acceptance** between members of my family during the variety of crises we've come through over the years. Like all families, we've had our share of challenges, and **I've taken on the role of peacemaker** – sometimes not successfully so - but it seems to be where I fit in our family schematic.

I want us to get along – I want us to **accept each other's differences** – I want us to **pass through what hurts** and come together better because of what happens to us – I want us to know peace within our family unit.

Maybe this feeling of craving peace comes from **experiences of my youth** – I was a **high school student from 1968 through 1972**, and we all know what happened during that time. **Equal rights for Blacks and women** were part of classroom and dining table discussions - the **Vietnam War** was a central focus of all our lives during those years and **my boyfriend was up for the draft**.

I had **lots of questions** about the war that I tried to understand and analyze – **my father was a veteran of WWII**, a **serious supporter of the government** and its reasons for the war, but the **evening news was full of peace demonstrations** that also seemed to make sense to me – there were **so many opinions**, it was difficult to nail down a commitment in my own mind. My father and I argued about the war and equal rights almost every night.

I couldn't wrap my head around the conflict - **I wanted to invite everyone involved to a giant table for chicken dinner to talk about it all**. I wanted to make peace happen.

And then there was my **exposure to the "hippie movement."** My high school and local college was full of kids who practiced **alternative lifestyles and behaviors**, who protested the war and dabbled in drugs and "free love" – a part of me truly bought into these ideals of being the **master of your own body and mind and standing for a cause**, but I couldn't practice them because another part of me was afraid – **my parents and their approval were always on my mind**.

Fear of, and respect for them caused me to watch much of this era from the sidelines, yet **I wasn't convinced** these were the methods to finding peace either, though **remnants of its influence stuck fast**...I have to admit that **I wish leaders could employ other options to solve world conflicts than with warlike actions that hurt so many people in so many ways**.

I'm definitely a product of my generation!

But what fascinates me is that through all the early years of my personal evolution, **a message of the coming of the Peace of God through Jesus' birth didn't bubble to the surface at all** when I attended church with my family and listened to the sermons of the day.

We were **regular church-goers** – we belonged to the Lutheran church the whole time, but I **can't recall hearing much about how God's love and Jesus' birth was a Gift of Peace for humankind** during those days of intense violence and disagreement.

We even **attended a church called "Prince of Peace"** but **the connection was never made clear to me** as to why this was a good and worthy name for the church I attended for more than 10 years.

Going to church was something good families did, but for some reason, that's about as far as it went with seriously talking about and understanding how God could impact lives. **People "did" church – they sang and prayed and took turns doing the coffee visit after worship** – but it seems to me that **folks didn't "do" that next level of looking at their faith and putting it purposeful work.**

And I remember **asking myself at the age of 13 if this was what being a believer was all about...I wondered why there was so much strife and anger in my world, if God was involved.**

Where was the Peace?

I don't think I truly got the idea that **living God's way- living as Jesus lived - was the way to finding peace** until long after I was married and became more deeply involved in a church that invited me to **ask the big questions** I'd been carrying around my whole life.

A young and brash pastor in Pennsylvania challenged the members of his church to **look hard at how Jesus lived and what Jesus did during his ministry** – and then he **made us look at how we and others in the world fell short** of doing what Jesus modeled. **Jesus lived differently than we did – why?**

It was an incredibly **humbling and eye-opening experience**, because I got the feeling that while it was good to be a regular church-goer, there was also another **whole layer of expectation – of demonstration or proof of my faith - for God** that I hadn't even thought about before, and for me, this was a huge concept: **not only was I to receive God's love, but I was also expected to return it somehow, and it doing that, I'd find the peace I'd spent my whole life looking for.**

I realized then that there are, in fact, two kinds of peace – and Jesus himself told us how it is. Listen to this passage from John, Chapter 14, Verse 27:

"I leave you peace; my peace I give you. I do not give it to you as the world does. So don't let your hearts be troubled or afraid."

At the end of his life and ministry, **Jesus gave us peace** – God's Peace - a **different kind of peace** – a sense of **"shalom" or wholeness and fullness**, of being content in our own hearts, no matter what the world throws at us.

Suddenly, the concept of **God's Peace** took on some serious focus and **all the questions I'd had were answered.** It changed my life...

Suddenly, I had to reconcile that **being one who believed** in God, who believed in God's Love and the Peace that comes from following God's Way – Jesus' Way – **required action that proved I meant what I said.**

Suddenly, I had to truly work to **live what I believe** – I had to be an example to others in the world that God's Way works, if we let it.

If there was to be Peace, and if I wanted others to know it as God intended it, it had to start with me.

And it wouldn't be like the peace (or non-peace) of the world. It would carry with it a **whole different attitude and understanding** about what happens between people in all instances – in some ways, this **“Shalom Peace” would separate those who believe from those who do not**, and it would be noticeable enough that **those who don't know of it would want to know of it.**

And that's where the whole notion of **evangelism** comes in, because **if we feel that true Shalom Peace in our hearts, it shows, and others around us want to have it too.**

Then we have to give it to them.

Shalom Peace opens the door to bring God to them in a way that **isn't frightening or pushy or demeaning** – it's almost like it **rubs off** on them, and before you know it, they have Shalom Peace too.

Having Shalom Peace in our hearts means that **we can witness or experience horrible events**, but we find a **quiet place inside to bring strength and hope** which helps us reach out to others who our help when those things happen.

Having Shalom Peace means we can **comfort family members who lost a loved-one** – we know the pain is there, but we also know that God will help us **find the right words or actions to bring that Peace** to grieving family members.

Having Shalom Peace means we should **understand world troubles and they should concern us**, but we accept that **God is always in all things**, and **in God's time some form of resolution** will come – and as God's ambassadors we'll **be ready to help with that resolution.**

Having Shalom Peace means when **we ourselves are faced with loss, pain or struggle**, we **recognize it and accept it** – but we **don't allow it to cripple our belief and strip us of our hope** for better days. There will **always** be a tiny light showing us the way to Peace...we know God is there.

Having Shalom Peace means we are never alone to handle life without God, because Jesus said, “...don't let your hearts be troubled or afraid.”

The world's peace can't even come close to offering the benefits of Shalom Peace, and too many people spend their lives looking for the wrong one.

When Jesus was born, the Jews were **really** looking for a King who would save them from the world's ugliness – who would stand for them and lead them to their Promised Land – **they were looking for the world's kind of peace.**

Imagine, then, their shock and surprise when they found that Jesus, the Messiah, **brought with him something even more meaningful – God's Peace - Shalom Peace** – and it could overshadow any war or famine or anything they would have to deal with.

It was inspiring enough to some of those Jews that they were compelled to **throw away their lives and take up with Jesus** to get this Shalom Peace out there. Because of their dedication to the cause during his ministry and after the Resurrection, we experience it today.

When you think about it, **how all this came to be is amazing and miraculous!**

Shalom Peace came to us in the form of a baby who would grow to change the world with examples of how to treat each other as he lived among us, and how to forgive each other and bring peace to one another after his death and resurrection.

So, as we prepare to welcome that baby in these days of Advent, may Shalom Peace continue to grow in us, and change us all.

Amen.