

# ***“The Story of Shalom: God’s Dream”***

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By Susie Ford  
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## **Scriptures (Isaiah 42: 1-9)**

*Here is my servant, whom I uphold/my chosen, in whom my soul delights;  
I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations.  
He will not cry or lift up his voice/or make it heard in the street;  
A bruised reed he will not break/ and a dimly burning wick he will not quench;  
he will faithfully bring for justice.  
He will not grow faint or be crushed/until he has established justice in the earth;  
and the coastlands wait for his teaching.*

*Thus says God, the Lord/ who created the heavens and stretched them out,  
Who spread out the earth and comes from it,  
who gives breath to the people upon it/ and the spirit to those who walk in it:  
I am the Lord, I have called you in righteousness/ I have taken you by the hand and  
kept you;*

*I have given you as a covenant to the people/ a light to the nations,  
to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoner from the dungeon/ from the  
prison those who sit in darkness.*

*I am the Lord, that is my name; my glory I give to no other/ nor my praise to idols.  
See, the former things have come to pass/ and new things I now declare;  
before they spring forth/ I tell you of them.*

## **Sermon**

I’m old-school. And I have been discovering this more and more recently. I have been taking a class called “Soul2Soul Sisters: Facing Racism.” Now, I have been facing racism for a while now. I have worked hard at facing myself and my whiteness, and getting to know people of color so I can see the injustices they face.

But in this class I have discovered how little I know. I am learning the new terms being used today: white supremacy, white fragility, white silence, anti-black racism, microaggression, DEI (the one Elaine used a few weeks ago), BIPOC, and the list gets larger every week; and I’m learning as well what action steps to take to encourage others to do the internal work it takes to deconstruct and then dismantle our white supremacy culture.

Luckily, here at FCMF, people have been interested in what I have to say. You take it to heart and attempt to apply it to your life. And you encourage me to continue to do this work and to inform you of what I am learning. Now, contrast this to the rural community I was immersed in the past two years in Iowa.

When I asked our church council if I could start a Zoom group on racism, maybe using the book *White Fragility*, the feedback was, “You can try, but don’t be surprised if no one comes,” and then two weeks later I was asked to stay for a meeting after church and I was told if I was to lead this group, I should not use the word “racism,” or any other incendiary words, and then I was told that *they* wouldn’t be talking about loving *those people* who wanted their land back and looted the cities. And from that point on, my relationship with church leadership went downhill and four months later I resigned.

Now, not all of them by a long shot, but a good majority were Trump people (I bet you hadn’t guessed it). I was told early on that the church was no place to talk about politics; it was a sensitive subject, and politics had no place in church. That gave me little to talk about that would apply to today.

But if I had time, I would tell you the good parts about this church and its early life, because this church has a long, distinguished history.

I’m telling you all of this because I have had two very different lives, as have a lot of you. But I’ve been thinking about the people I know in both places and what God’s shalom has to do with them – and with me. What brings groups of people together – people whose worldviews are so different I have begun to think it would be best if they didn’t get close to one another?

SHALOM, MY FRIENDS!

In recent years I have rediscovered my love for Old Testament History. I have always loved the stories in the Old Testament. I grew up with these stories. I knew them to be just that – stories. But they are such *good* stories – stories about a particular group of people learning to be God’s people – and failing miserably. My dad loved the history of the Israelites, and he told that history well. What prophets were speaking to what kings and when they were speaking. What was going on in the culture at that time.

When I went to seminary my exposure to the prophets rekindled my love. I love telling stories, and these are best stories I know. But there is one amazing, overarching story in the Bible – that is the story of Shalom – God’s dream.

But first, let’s talk about the *word* shalom as it was used in the Bible. I find it to be both earthy and sacred. It’s a word that is personal enough to be used as a greeting but includes everything – all of life. God created the world with Shalom in mind, and yet we can’t experience the concept fully until the last days. It is a concept so deep, so profound, that though it was used 500 times in the Bible, it was mostly described by other words.

Various aspects of Shalom were described as: completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety, soundness, repayment, justice, righteousness and the absence of agitation or discord. First Israel, then all humans, have been called to be co-workers with God to bring about Shalom. The story goes something like this:

In the beginning existed God, the heavenly Father, the Incarnate Word, and the sustaining Spirit, living together in Shalom. Out of this union came the Earth and all things in it – living things, rocks, soil, substance, all were created by this union, and in the garden where all things came to be, Shalom, all things working together, could have happened. But things went terribly wrong.

Animals and plants misused God's creation, they had great discord with one another. They fought one another, and even began to kill one another. From that point on, God's sole intention – God's *telos*, God's *end goal*, was to bring her creation together to be reconciled with her, with one another, and with all of creation.

God tried to destroy the earth and start over again with a sample of every part of creation, but that didn't work. And so, God created a nation – one small nation – and gave them commandments so that there would be no doubt that this nation would know how to live in Shalom with each other and with its neighbors, and with God as their king. This nation was to be a city on a hill, a light for all the nations to learn from. They built a city called *iru shalem*, City of Peace, with a large fancy Temple in the middle, the place of God's Footstool.

But this nation wanted to be like other nations, to have Kings and armies and idols they could touch and see. So God let them have Kings and armies and idols. And when they got Kings and armies and idols, they didn't need God. And they forgot about Shalom. So God sent prophets to chastise them – to warn them that if they did not even practice Shalom among themselves, if there was no justice for widows and orphans and strangers, the nation would be exiled from their precious Jerusalem and the city would fall.

But the nation didn't listen, and they were taken into exile by Big Bad Babylon. And the nation disappeared completely for 80 years. And the people had no temple to come to and were sure God turned his face away from them. But God wanted Shalom to come out of this nation. God promised the Nation they would return to Jerusalem and rebuild their big fancy Temple, that they would have a leader who would save them from their predicament, who would teach the people how to live in Shalom. And they returned and rebuilt the city walls, the big, fancy Temple, and never had a King again.

Now this nation existed under a variety of Empires for the next 500 years, and we don't know a lot about this period of time. We know that they were first conquered by Assyria, then Big Bad Babylon, then Persia, then the Cellucids, Greece, and Rome.

And during the Roman Rule, God sent his Word to become Shalom Incarnate named Jesus. He taught and *showed* the people how to live Shalom and to save the world

from destroying itself. He taught the disciples that to have hospitality and humility, to be humble servants in contrast to the Emperors and Governors, to become *unknown* and *unloved*, was the only way to bring Shalom into the world.

But Shalom Incarnate named Jesus was hung on a cross and somehow in this act redeemed the World from the wrath of God. Then Shalom Incarnate named Jesus reappeared to his disciples, helping them to read the scriptures and understand the story of Shalom itself. The disciples began little churches in households where Slaves ate at the table with Masters and Shalom was practiced.

And God told these households that *they* would become a light to the nations, that people who live Shalom had become coworkers with God to bring the reign of Shalom to all the world so that a *new humanity* would come about. And in the last days all nations will come and every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Shalom Incarnate named Jesus is Lord. And all people will be reconciled with the Creator, with each other and with all of creation.

And that's the end of the Story. But wait! There's more. There's more because God does not have enough coworkers to bring about Shalom, and the world today is on the brink of destruction.

The coworkers she has live mostly in Africa and Asia. The churches in the West have twisted God's Word so much that they no longer know Shalom. There are a few small groups, mostly among the least known peoples, indigenous groups, Spanish-speaking groups, Black-skinned group who are calling us in the West to redemption, but not many are listening.

So, the story of Shalom keeps going. There are those who call and those who resist (as in the two groups I have come to know). So as we work and wait, we can hear what Shalom Incarnate named Jesus once said, "Don't worry, daughter. If God takes care of the Birds of the Air and the Lilies of the Field, God provides everything you need to be whole and to be fully loved."

Shalom brother and sisters!

**Susie Ford, Guest Speaker at Fort Collins Mennonite Fellowship**