

**Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August 2020**  
**Glynde Lutheran Church**  
**Sermon on Romans 5:1 – 11**  
**Theme: “Shalom, my friends, Shalom”**  
**“Isn’t it wonderful to be at peace with God!!”**

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***Introduction:***

When someone leaves a church family, and heads off to live somewhere else, often the song *Shalom, my friends* (ATE, 195) is sung as a way of saying “farewell” to them. The word *Shalom* is a Hebrew word which means “peace” or “well-being” or “a condition of whole-ness and completeness”. The word is still used by the Israelis today, and by most Middle-Eastern peoples in a slightly different forms, to greet one another. The greeting is *Shalom Lekar* or something similar to this. And in greeting someone in this way, you are saying in effect, “Peace be with you” ....

This morning, I want to talk about how wonderful it is to live your life with *Shalom*, with “peace”. That comes when you know that you are right with God, and that nothing, not even death, will separate you from the love of God.

***Part 1: The absence of Shalom***

We all want to have this feeling of *Shalom*, this feeling of being right with God and the world.

But the tragedy is that most people don’t have it, *even though it is readily available as a gift from God*. Most people spend their life living with an absence of *Shalom*. Sure, they try to get it in any way they can: through alcohol, drugs, sex, money, holidays, family, work, and so on. But as much as most people try, an ongoing sense of *Shalom* evades them... *(n.b. dissatisfaction, guilt, shame, and fear are some of the words that characterise people in our society)*.

Few people in the media speak openly about this absence of *Shalom* in the world in general, and in their own life in particular. Woody Allen, the film-maker, is one of the few who focuses on the absence of *Shalom*. Despite his messed up private life, at least he has focussed in his films on the life situation of most people *as it really is*. He paints pictures in his films of people seeking meaning and purpose in life in their relationships, of people struggling with guilt, and of people terrified by the prospect of death.

I've got to confess my bias here and now. I'm a Woody Allen fan, and have been right from my University days when I used to skip classes to watch the movies in the Union Theatre at Adelaide University. I loved his earlier movies like *Take the Money and Run*, *Bananas*, and *Sleeper* which were pure fun. But I've really enjoyed his later movies which are not only fun to watch, but they also make you think.

I remember, *not too well*, because I haven't found it on video or DVD anywhere at all, particularly the film *Love and Death*. It was set in Russia in the early 19th Century, and in a fun way it looked at the big issues of love and death. Woody Allen's films reveal Woody Allen's own personal search for meaning and purpose in relationships, and they reflect the search of many in our society for meaning and purpose in relationships. Perhaps his best known film, in this regard, is his film *Annie Hall*. It is the story of a relationship between a man and a woman which lasts longer than most of their previous relationships. Their relationship goes from times of rocketing highs to times of plummeting despair.

Eventually the relationship breaks up and Woody Allen as "Alvie" is walking down the street thinking it through. As the story ends and the credits are about to roll, he says:

**...I thought about that old joke, you know, this guy goes to a psychiatrist and says, "Doc, my brother's crazy. He thinks he's a chicken". And the doctor says, "Well, why don't you turn him in?". And the guy says, "I would, but I need the eggs".**

And then Woody Allen makes his final statement to end the film. He says:

**Well, I guess that's pretty much how I feel about relationships. You know, they're totally irrational and crazy and absurd and...but, uh, I guess we keep goin' through it because...most of us need the eggs.**

Do you hear what he's saying!? He's saying that he needs relationships with women because they give him some sense of meaning amidst the nothingness and the meaninglessness of the world (See John Smith, *Advance Australia Where?*, pp. 102-103).

In his films, Woody Allen explores this sense of nothingness and meaninglessness that most people in this world feel. He also explores, in his films, the sense of guilt that people feel and are weighed down by when they do what they know is wrong. In his film, *Crimes and Misdemeanors*, he does just that: he looks at the terrors of a man, by the name of Judah, who has his wife killed so that he can be free to live with his lover. Judah is absolutely besieged by guilt and he teeters between confessing what he has done and lapsing into a nervous breakdown.

Actually, in the end he does neither: he rationalises what he has done, denies his guilt, and gets on with life. I don't think that it is so simple, but certainly many people in our society think that you can do this and live a happy life. This film of Woody Allen's is powerful film: I don't agree with what he is saying *that you can deny your guilt and still live a happy life....* But I do think that it *is* a powerful film so far as portraying the effect of guilt on a person.

Again and again, too, in this films, there is a focus on death, and the fear that most people in this world have in regard to death: the fear of judgement by God, or even for some the fear of nothingness. Woody Allen sums it up by having one of his characters quip in one of his films: **It's not that I'm afraid to die. I just don't want to be there when it happens** (quoted in J. Stott, *Romans*, p.133).

Woody Allen's films, then, portray *the absence of Shalom in this world*. They portray the *real* situation of most in this world, a situation marked by a struggle to find meaning and purpose, by a struggle with guilt, and by a struggle with the ever present thought that death is just around the corner. Woody Allen's films give us a glimpse of the absence of *Shalom* that most people feel (*cf. Australia Story this week on Nathan Cavaleri, and his fear of death*).

## ***Part 2: The presence of Shalom***

It's into this context that Paul shouts out the good news of God, the good news that we can have *Shalom*, that we can be at peace with God and have our life transformed.

How do get *Shalom*? How do we become right with God, and feel the sense of wellbeing and wholeness that God wants us to have? By trusting in Jesus as our Saviour, by being united to Jesus who suffered and died for the sins of the world. Listen to what Paul has to say at the start of our text:

**Now that we have been put right with God through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ** (*Romans 5:1*).

And a little later on in his letter to the Romans, Paul writes:

**There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus** (*Romans 8:1*).

Paul is here shouting out wonderful news: that you and I can have *Shalom* as we cling to Jesus as our Saviour! Jesus, God's Son, has taken on himself the judgement and the punishment that we deserve from God!

And the good news doesn't stop there! We can look at the future, and stare death in the face, without fear and without worry. Paul writes:

**We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God** (*Rom. 5:2*).

As John Stott puts it in his commentary on this passage:

**Christian hope is not uncertain, like our ordinary everyday hope about the weather or our health; it is a joyful and confident**

**expectation which rests on the promises of God, as we saw in the case of Abraham. And the object of our hope is the glory of God, namely his radiant splendour which will in the end be fully displayed** (*Stott, Romans, 140*)

We know that we are God's forgiven children *as we trust in Jesus as our Saviour*, and that nothing, not even death, can separate us from God's love (*cf. Rom. 8:38-39*).

Our hope for the future rests on these twin facts: that we *are* forgiven, and that nothing can separate us from God's love. In our Bible reading, Paul goes to great pains to remind us of how great God's love for us is. He doesn't want us to forget how great God's love for us is!!

You know, if someone gives a gift to someone else, the degree of the love involved in giving the gift can be measured partly by the costliness of the gift to the giver, and partly by the worthiness or unworthiness of the person receiving the gift. As John Stott comments:

**The more the gift costs the giver, and the less the recipient deserves it, the greater the love is seen to be. Measured by these standards, God's love in Christ is absolutely unique. For in sending his Son to die for sinners, he was giving everything, his very self, to those who deserved nothing from him except judgement** (*Ibid., 144*).

That's what Paul is on about here: God's love. He wants us to realise that our hope for the future is secure and that nothing need interrupt our sense of *Shalom*, because the security of our future is based on God's overwhelming love for us. Listen again to what Paul is saying. He writes: **For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time God chose. It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It might even be that someone might dare to die for a good person. But God has shown us how much he loves us – it was while we were still sinners that Christ died for us. By his death we are now put right with God; how much more, then, will we be saved by him from God's anger** (*Rom. 5:6-9, plus Addendum re v. 7*).

Let me tell you a story, which I think gives us some sort of picture of God's love for us. It's a story that William Barclay tells in his commentary on Romans:

**In 1915, Colonel T. E. Lawrence, or *Lawrence of Arabia* as he is popularly known, was journeying across the desert with some Arabs. Things were desperate. Food was almost gone, and water was at its last drop. Their hoods were over their heads to shelter them from the wind which was like a flame, and which was full of the stinging sand of the sandstorm.**

**Suddenly someone said, "Where is Jasmin?". Another said, "Who is Jasmin?" A third said, "He's that yellow-faced man from Maan. He killed a Turkish tax-collector and fled to the desert". The first said, "Look, Jasmin's camel has no rider. His rifle is strapped to the saddle, but Jasmin is not there". A second said, "Someone shot him on the march". A third said, "He is not strong in the body, perhaps he has fainted and fallen off his camel". Then the first said, "What does it matter? Jasmin is not worth half a crown". And the Arabs hunched themselves on their camels and rode on.**

**But Lawrence turned and rode back the way he had come. Alone, in the blazing heat, at the risk of his life, he went back. After an hour and a half's ride, he saw something against the sand. It was Jasmin, blind and mad with heat and thirst, Jasmin being murdered by the desert.**

**Lawrence lifted him on his camel, gave him some of the last drops of the precious water, and slowly plodded back to his company. When he came up to them, the Arabs looked up in amazement. "Here is Jasmin", they said, "Jasmin, not worth half a crown, saved at his own risk by Lawrence, our lord" (*Barclay, p.74-75*).**

It's a parable of sorts which points us to how much God loves us: he sent his Son to suffer and to die for us "while we were still sinners".

### ***Conclusion:***

Isn't it wonderful to be at peace with God now, and to know that in the future "we will be saved": we will live with God and our Lord Jesus and all of God's people in the wonderful world that God has in store for us!! Isn't it great to be able to live with *Shalom* in our lives, thanks to God's gift of forgiveness through Jesus!!

**Shalom, my friends, Shalom, my friends,  
Shalom, Shalom... (ATA, 195).**

### ***Addendum (1):***

John Stott comments on verse 7 as follows:

**For when we were still helpless, Christ died for the wicked at the time God chose. It is a difficult thing for someone to die for a righteous person. It might even be that someone might dare to die for a good person.**

John Stott says:

Yet it is for us that God's Son died. **Why, he adds, *very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man* (probably referring to somebody whose uprightness is rather cold, clinical, and unattractive), *though for a good man* (whose goodness is warm, generous and appealing) *someone might possibly dare to die* (p. 145).**