



PEACE & GLOBAL WITNESS  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS  
PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

**“May the God of Peace ... grant you peace at all times in all ways.”**  
Peace & Global Witness

*2 Thessalonians 3:16–18*

*16 May the Lord of peace himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 17 I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand. This verifies that the letter is from me, as in every letter of mine. This is how I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.*

### **A Peace Garden**

When the pandemic started, there was a sense that we were closing the church and that we needed to leave ministry behind. Nevertheless, Beechmont Presbyterian Church had started working on a project that was providential, because it was a work that could continue throughout the pandemic. We were building a peace garden. This garden was important for a church that had members and friends that came to this country fleeing from civil war, crossing borders to find a place where violence and economic hardship was not a prevalent part of life, and people facing economic challenges. We wanted to make a place where people could sit down and be reminded of God’s gift of peace: a peace that also came intimately related to justice and a holistic sense of well-being.

The amazing thing, as I think about it now, is that we managed to finish this project during a pandemic, where a sense of dread, fear and anxiety were taking strong hold of our collective lives. There was no way to escape this. This is a global pandemic that has had an impact not just in our body, but in our minds as well. So, the thought of building a peace garden amid the stress of a global pandemic seemed like a crazy idea ... right?

### **Paul and his desire for peace**

The materials that you received as part of the Peace & Global Witness Special Offering state that Paul’s prayer at the end of the second letter to the Thessalonians could have also been seen as a crazy proposition. It says that this is a daring prayer that comes amid turmoil in the church of Thessalonica. Christians were being persecuted. Paul’s message was being questioned, because the hardships were so severe that people were scared and

confused. Nevertheless, Paul ends his letter with a blessing: “Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with all of you.”

It is true that a lot of Paul’s letters end with a benediction. But this one comes after a warning to the church community. Paul is worried about those who, during the crisis, have decided to go against the teaching that they have received, sowing seeds of anxiety and falsehoods in the community. This idleness that he talks about is not a lack of action or laziness. They have strayed from Paul’s lessons, and don’t want to learn anymore. His words may sound harsh: “keep away” (v. 6); and “anyone unwilling to work should not eat” (10b). He calls them “busybodies” (v. 11b)! But, at the same time, his last words do talk about finding a way to reconciliation: “Do not regard them as enemies but warn them as believers” (v. 15).

If we place verse 16 in this context, we can understand how important it is for Paul to finish his letter with words of peace. Beverly Roberts Gaventa, in her commentary to Second Thessalonians, says that this prayer of peace is “remarkable for its completeness. It wishes: “May the Lord of peace himself give you peace always in every way.” The writer knows the trials and tribulations that the congregation is facing, whether it is from the outside or from the inside. So, he desires an all-encompassing peace. Gaventa states:

Whatever the faithful endure in the present, whatever rebellion and lawlessness threaten them in the future, and whatever perils exist because of their own disorder, they confidently expect to receive the gift of peace from the only one who is able to provide it.<sup>1</sup>

### **Wisdom from peace poles**

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<sup>1</sup> Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. *First and Second Thessalonians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (pp. 132–134). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition

One of the things that we wanted to include in our peace garden were peace poles. We asked four families to design the peace poles with words of their choosing. We had a family that painted the phrase “God helps us to be the church you envision.” A Mexican family included the words attributed to Benito Juárez, a famous Mexican statesman: “El respeto al derecho ajeno es la paz” (Respect for the rights of others means peace). One of our more artistic members included symbols and words that are an invitation and a challenge whenever we are thinking about that all-encompassing peace that can speak to us, even amid anxiety, fear, conflict and trouble. I want to share Edna’s words with you, as my desire for your life of seeking peace and justice:

*Reflect:* Don’t fall into idleness! Ask questions. Learn. What are the lessons that, for example, this pandemic has given us? What does this moment of time say about peace? About justice? About love? About how these should be available for all? How can we find peace even in moments of great stress?

*Change:* If after asking questions you notice that your definition of peace is challenged, then change is needed — even if it means that you need to change the way you live, the way you go about relating to others, and the way you talk and act. Open your mind and heart to flexibility and change.

*Participate:* Don’t give up in walking toward a path of peace. Don’t stay in a bubble, confusing peace with “lack of conflict.” Paul certainly did not do that. In all his interactions with the churches, he always sought a way of reconciliation and peace. Listen to other definitions of peace. I know that we are tired, but there is no time to retreat. Don’t shut down! Participate.

*Care:* Care ... care ... care ... care ... care ... and care some more. Apathy, idleness and gossip have no business in God’s kin-dom.

*Respect:* Even when someone does not think like you, talk like you, dress like you, live like you or love like you. Respect is all about seeing each other as human beings that are

fallible, that are worthy, that are not perfect, that are deserving of humanity and not demonization. Every human being deserves to live in peace — at all times in all ways.

*Heal:* In this world of COVID-19, we think about physical healing, and that is very important. But having peace is also healing. War is devastating. Oppression hurts the human soul in such a way that it can destroy life. Peace heals! Working for a peace that means wellness for others is important. Working for a peace that gives rights to others is important. Working for peace as a way to eliminate the sin of trying to solve everything with war is healing — in a world that really needs to be healed.

*Believe:* And this is the last one. Believe that peace is always possible. Have faith in it. Find hope in it. Believe that the kin-dom of God, that the family of God is a real possibility and choice for this world. Believe, even when it seems bleak, that light and hope are possible. Believe! Believe! Believe! And live with the assurance, with the trust, with the unwavering knowledge that God's gift of peace that Paul gives as a blessing is our blessing as well.

May God's peace, peace always in every way, peace that is wellness and abundance for all be with you and with all the people of God, today and forevermore. Amen.

— *Prepared by the Rev. Marissa Galvan-Valle, pastor,  
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