**Ekklesia Worship Conference 2015**

**Prof Mary Anne Plaatjies van Huffel**

**Theme Give Us Peace:** (John 14:23-31a / Psalm 122) –

# John 14:23-31 (New International Version)

23Jesus replied, “Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. 24Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.

25“All this I have spoken while still with you. 26But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. **27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.**

28“You heard me say, ‘I am going away and I am coming back to you.’ If you loved me, you would be glad that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I. 29I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. 30I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, 31but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me.

“Come now; let us leave.

### Psalm 122

#### A song of ascents. Of David.

1I rejoiced with those who said to me,  “Let us go to the house of the Lord.” 2Our feet are standing in your gates, Jerusalem. 3Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. 4That is where the tribes go up - the tribes of the Lord - to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel. 5There stand the thrones for judgment the thrones of the house of David. **6Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  “May those who love you be secure. 7May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. 8For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.” 9For the sake of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek your prosperity**

**Theme Give Us Peace**

In the Old Testament, the word ***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם)is often translated as “peace,” ***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם) means both *hello* and *goodbye*"Shalom" is used to both greet people and to bid them farewell. This was a common form of benediction amongst the Jews. But it means also much more than "peace, hello or goodbye".... Hebrew words go beyond their spoken pronunciation. Each Hebrew word conveys feeling, intent and emotion. The root verb *shalom* meaning to be complete, perfect and full. The word ***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם) refers to love, kindness, restorative justice, health” and “wholeness, completeness, prosperity, and welfare.” . *Shalom* is more than just simply peace; it is a complete peace. When we are saying to each other: ‘The peace of the Lord is with you.” we are indeed wishing each other contentment, completeness, wholeness, wellbeing, health, peace, welfare, safety soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the absence of agitation or discord. Our peace, our***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם) had been fully paid by our Lord Jesus Christ. **He alone is called *Sar shalom*, Prince of Peace**. The very same ***Sar shalom*, Prince of Peace**, once shortly before his death said to his disciples **27Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be trouble. Do not be afraid.**

You do not need to do anything extra to earn this complete peace … to earn prosperity, wellbeing, health … you do not need to eat grass or drink petrol like the destitute people we saw yesterday on the images Maranda Pillay showed us. Your ***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם) had been fully paid.It was customary to take leave with wishes of peace in biblical times ([1 Samuel 1:17](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=1%20Samuel+1:17&t1=en_nas); [Luke 7:50](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Luke+7:50&t1=en_nas); [Acts 16:36](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Acts+16:36&t1=en_nas); [1 Peter 5:14](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=1%20Peter+5:14&t1=en_nas); 3 John 15,[Genesis 43:23](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Genesis+43:23&t1=en_nas); [Judges 6:23](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Judges+6:23&t1=en_nas)). But our Lord distinguishes *His* peace as *true* peace, ‘*the peace which I have and give*’ ( [John 15:11](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=John+15:11&t1=en_nas)), differs from the mere empty word used in the world’s form of greeting. Peace (in general) He *leaves* with them;—*His* peace He *gives* to them.

The world can only give peace in empty words, saying ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” ([Jeremiah 6:14](http://www.studylight.org/desk/index.cgi?q1=Jeremiah+6:14&t1=en_nas)0. Without peace, can there be justice? Without justice, can there be peace? Too often, we pursue justice at the expense of peace, and peace at the expense of justice. **God of life, lead us to justice and peace”** was the theme of the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches (Busan, Republic of Korea, 30 October–8 November 2013). The WCC called us on a pilgrimage to justice and peace. At least once a year, Christians are reminded by the WCC of Jesus, **Prince of Peace**, prayer for his disciples shortly before his death that “they may be one so that the world may believe” (see John 17.21). To conceive peace apart from justice is to compromise the hope that “justice and peace shall embrace” (Ps. 85:10). The idea Jesus want to convey to the disciples and to us is that they and us as pilgrims **on our way to just peace** will receive the peace of the Lord: we will have peace with God; peace in our consciences; peace in the prospect of death and of the future world; peace amidst the storms and tempests of life; peace in death, in the grave, and forever.

Psalms 120 – 134 were Psalms that were sung by Jewish pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem, the holy place to worship. In the Old Testament, the themes of worship and pilgrimage are often linked in passages about the journey to Jerusalem for religious festivals. Adult males were required to go to Jerusalem three times every year (Deut. 16:16–17). They recite these psalms one by one, because they knew it by heart. In 1945, Rabbi Eliezer Silver was sent to Europe to help reclaim Jewish children who had been hidden during the Holocaust with non-Jewish families. How was he able to discover the Jewish children? He would go to gatherings of children and loudly proclaim Shema Yisrael – "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One." Then he would look at the faces of the children for those with tears in their eyes – those children whose distant memory of being Jewish was their mothers putting them to bed each night and saying the Shema with them. Shema Yisrael – "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" – is perhaps the most famous of all Jewish sayings. The Shema is a declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to One God. It is said upon arising in the morning and upon going to sleep at night. It is said when praising God and when beseeching Him. It is the first prayer that a Jewish child is taught to say. It is the last words a Jew says prior to death. On their journey to Jerusalem the pilgrims sang **6Pray for the peace of Jerusalem:  “May those who love you be secure. 7May there be peace within your walls and security within your citadels. 8For the sake of my family and friends, I will say, “Peace be within you.”**

The journey was filled with longing and anticipation to reach this special city; as they went, travelers usually sang **“songs of ascent**” (see Psalms 120–134). These 14 **songs of ascent** focus on confessing wrong-doings, giving and receiving forgiveness and reconciling with each other. These Psalms were designed to glorify the Lord and help prepare the hearts of the saints of God for worship in the tabernacle and later on in the temple. If one looks at Ps 120-122 the following emerges. Psalm 120 depicts the pilgrim living in a hostile world of unbelievers — facing trouble and problems. I cried unto the Lord, and he heard me - I had no other resource the weary traveler to Jerusalem cried out I am for peace - I am A man of peace. Literally, “I (am) peace.” It is my nature. I desire to live in peace. I strive to do so. I do nothing to provoke a quarrel. But when I speak - When I say anything on a subject, when I suggest or propose any changes, when I give utterance to my painful feelings, or express a desire to live differently - they will listen to nothing; they will be satisfied with nothing. They are for war, the poet said- They are for discord, variance, strife. All my efforts to live in peace are vain. They are determined to quarrel, and I cannot prevent it. Psalm 121 explains that divine help gives the pilgrim’s peace of mind in such a world. **I will lift up mine eyes to the hills,** he said , to the hills on which Jerusalem was built,, the hills where aid from God himself was expected. Jerusalem and at the Temple were seen as visible reminders of God’s presence and covenant. Psalm 122 speaks of the triumph of arriving at Jerusalem and standing within its walls — a city under God’s protective blessing. The city was strongly associated with God’s protection, and that those who loved God would find security there (v. 7; cf. Ps. 125:2).

The poet instructed these worshipers, he does not negotiate with them, he gave them an instruction they should adhere to. He said: **Pray for the peace of Jerusalem..** Beloved, pray for peace, prosperity, blessing of God not only of Israel … not only for Jerusalem, not only in your church, neighborhood, country …….. but pray for peace of Israel Palestine, for the peace in Central African Republic (civil war), Democratic Republic of Congo (war against rebel groups), Egypt (popular uprising against Government), Libya (war against islamist militants), Mali (war against tuareg and islamist militants), Nigeria (war against islamist militants), Somalia (war against islamist militants), Sudan (war against rebel groups), South Sudan (civil war), Afghanistan (war against islamist militants), Burma-Myanmar (war against rebel groups), Pakistan (war against islamist militants), Philippines (war against islamist militants), Thailand (coup d’etat by army May 2014) , Ukraine. Iraq (war against Islamic State islamist militants), Syria (civil war), Yemen , Colombia (war against rebel groups), Mexico (war against narcotraffic groups) More than 10 000 people get killed annually in ongoing armed conflicts across the globe. **Pray for the peace of world .**  There is a widening gap between the rich and the poor. The cries of the poor and vulnerable echo in the groans of the creation. **Pray for the peace of world**. Peace is a matter of life and death for those people who are yearning for it. **Pray for the peace of of the world**.

“Go in peace” is a biblical mandate for us to bear witness to the vision of abundant life in the new heaven and earth. We should respond to the gospel imperatives of loving our neighbours, rejecting violence and seeking justice for the poor, the disinherited and the oppressed. **Pray, the poet said, for the peace Yes …** As Christian we should pray that the church may prosper - that the divine blessing may rest upon it – that a blessing may attend the preaching of the gospel. More so we should also pray that there may be harmony, peace, love, and zeal in church and society - There is only ***one way*** to find Just Peace , TRUE ***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם) - and that is in the Word of our Lord. Many search for fulfilment, happiness and contentment in material possessions, money, sex, pornography, entertainment. But those things is not the peace of the Lord. Only GOD can give us peace! Those things only serve to distract and prevent us from finding true peace...the ***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם) that can only come from Him who created and put all things into place.

Just Peace, ***Shalom*** (שָׁלוֹם) , invites all of us to testify with our lives. Let us rise and work together for peace and justice. The church that embodies peace is what Jesus called a city set on a hill for all to see (Matt. 5:14). We, our Lord says, are like Jerusalem which had been built on the hills for everyone to see from afar3**Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together.**  Dear brothers and sisters a church divided about peace, unity and reconciliation and churches torn by conflict, have little credibility as witnesses or workers for peace. We should become peacemakers… **a city closely compacted** together … a city on a hill for everyone to see. We should become the peace of the Lord… become cities on hills for everyone to see. To build peace includes amongst other to criticize, denounce, advocate, and resist as well as to proclaim, empower, console, reconcile, and heal. A peacemakers speak against and speak for, tear down and build up, lament and celebrate, grieve and rejoice.

Jesus of Nazareth, the Prince of Peace, before his death, resurrection, and ascension. invites us to commit ourselves to Peace, his peace. He calls his disciples and us to on our way to the city of God to become Just Peace. Just Peace embodies a fundamental shift in our ethical practices … in our actions against our fellow human beings, in our relationship with people from other cultures, and races and languages and adherents from other religions.Peace I leave with you he said. These words are much more than a mere form or an empty wish. It came from Him who has power to make peace and to confer it on others. He assured the disciples that the Holy Spirit would come to comfort, teach, and guide them. He promised them My peace, **I give you,** My peace, …not the peace of the world - Peace, just peace as only the triune God can impart he promised. My peace, he said … Not pleasure, not fame, not wealth. My peace … Not the false security of the world, but **My peace.**  He promised us that His peace will abide with us even in the hour of death and until the end of times. The world can neither give nor take away his **peace**! Be not afraid – even amidst pain, persecutions, or trials. Be not afraid You have a Friend who will never leave you; the Prince of Peace is with you. “Arise, he said let us go hence.” Let us go from here. As Christians we should foster conditions for progress towards justice, peace and reconciliation.

The Prince of Peace once said to someone from another cultural background "Give me to drink" (John 4:7) To drink water from someone else’s well was in those days the first step towards experiencing another’s way of being. Although Jesus knew the cultural differences between Samaritans and Jews …. The taboos …. it however had not prevented him from requesting water at a well, belonging to the Samaritans. Women, Samaritans, Gentiles, outcasts, sinners, tax collectors, and the poor are all welcomed into the Jesus’ community. How do our worship services look like on Sunday mornings? All are welcome in Jesus’ *shalom* community. Women, Samaritans, Gentiles, outcasts, sinners, the poor all in Christ form one body of Christ. At the heart of the liturgy is the Prince of Peace who prepares a banquet where strangers and sinners— which is to say, all of us—are welcome. The water was his to take, but he said to her: "Give me to drink" (John 4:7). We .. each one of us should become the peace of God into the world… We .. each one of us should restore right relationships in our communities. He will not force you to become his peace. “Give me to drink” compels us to change our attitude, to commit ourselves to seek unity in the midst of diversity. He request us to drink from the living water without taking hold of the well. The well does not belong to us. Rather, we draw life from the well. The well of living water which is given by the Prince of Peace is not temporary.

“John’s gospel highlights Jesus’ redeeming work to re-create *shalom*. On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples that his impending suffering was for their *shalom.* **“**Peace (*eirene/ shalom*) I leave with you. My peace (*eirene/ shalom*) I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn. 14:27). His final word to his disciples reasserts this promise. “I have told you these things so that in me you may have peace” (*eirene/ shalom*, Jn. 16:33). In John’s narrative, these promises are fulfilled. On resurrection evening Jesus’ repeats his assertion of *shalom*. He enters the room where his disbelieving and terrified friends are hiding. He speaks to the ones who abandoned him just a few nights earlier, including Peter who betrayed him. “Peace (*eirene/ shalom*) be with you… “Peace (*eirene/ shalom*) be with you” (Jn. 20:19-21). Eight days later Jesus repeats these same words to Thomas, who demanded evidence of the resurrection for himself (Jn. 20:26). According to Jesus, *shalom* is the goal and culmination of his crucifixion and resurrection. He has done everything necessary to restore God’s *shalom*.”

**Therefore … Go out from here and become the peace of the world… be the liturgy of life... what is then this liturgical life he call us to?** The liturgy of worship on Sunday morning is a hollow formality. It should be combined with the liturgy of life. At the heart of liturgy is the Prince of Peace who sends us forth to testify to what we have seen and heard at this worship conference, to become what we heard and experience, to be a blessing in and for God’s beloved and broken world. We are all called to be saints, to be holy men and women … to be peace makers. Christian ought to reach out in loving compassion to the other… Christians should embody compassionate justice. Christians should stand where God is standing namely with the poor and the downtrodden and the marginalized.  **To go in peace therefore means to go out and feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to associate with people who don’t look like you, speak your language, don’t think like you, … it is to go out and fight for justice … to end oppression and injustice and inequality .. to proclaim anew the old, old story: that Jesus the prince of peace save. It is to go out and reach out to those who are running from God and God’s church. And do all of this in the name of the Prince of Peace who call and sent us all to this world.**

**AMEN**

**Prayer** Dear triune God send us now into the world in peace and grant us strength and courage to love you and serve you… Send us out to do the work you have given us to do, to love you and serve you as faithful witnesses of Christ, **the Prince of Peace.** Give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking before you in holiness and righteousness all our days….

#### Agnus Dei "Lamb of God" litany:

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, **have mercy upon us.**

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, **have mercy upon us**

Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, **grant us peace. Dona nobis pacem.**