

**Sermon Brief**  
Andre Riendeau  
July 17, 2022

**Text:** 1 Peter 5:12-14

**Title:** “Pockets of Shalom”

**Subject:** Believers are to stand firm in God’s grace.

**Complement:** We help each other do so by exhorting, testifying and personally relating.

**Textual Idea:** God’s family is able to stand firm in God’s grace as we faithfully connect with each other.

**Sermon Idea:** We can stand firm in a chaotic world as we create pockets of shalom with each other.

**Interrogative:** Need a pocket of shalom?

**Key Points:**

We create pockets of shalom by...

1. Speaking the truth of God’s grace to each other,
2. Testifying to the reality of God’s grace,
3. Warmly sharing God’s grace personally.

**What do I want people to know?** I want people to know that believers will face severe suffering for their faith in the world. To bear up, they need to strengthen each other by speaking God’s truth, sharing testimonies and relating deeply to each other.

**What do I want people to do?** I want people to (1) encouraging obedience in each other, (2) publicly share their experiences of God’s grace, (3) relate warmly to each other.

**What need am I addressing?** I am addressing the need for the church to remain strong in times of great persecution.

## “Pockets of Shalom”

1 Peter 5:12-14

July 17, 2022

The other day, someone sent me **(LCD) this picture** with no comment. I thought for sure it was a mistake. An aquarium in a lobby. Ok...not sure what this is all about! As I was beginning to respond, the person texted this, “*Zoom into this morning’s surprise. Beautiful rainbow.*” Then I saw it...a rainbow right in front of my eyes and yet I had missed it because I got caught up in the mundane. But it’s not mundane. It’s the lobby of a cancer ward. This person had seen a ray of hope in a place of despair. And she was sharing that moment with me because I had reached out and asked how she and her husband were doing...knowing where they were. Personal connection and spiritual vision can enable us to create little **(LCD) pockets of shalom**, peace, in even the darkest places.

We’re in a sermon series on the book of 1 Peter which I’ve entitled, **(LCD) Alien Living in a Chaotic World**. The people Peter wrote to were struggling to live faithfully for Jesus in a pagan society. Last week, we were warned about spiritual seagulls trying to pick us off – **(LCD) Don’t be a soft-shelled turtle!** We’re going to wrap up the letter today by looking at something that seems mundane...the closing. But look closer, and I think we’ll see a pocket of shalom. Turn to 1 Peter 5:12, “*With the help of Silas, whom I regard as a faithful brother, I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it. 13 She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark. 14 Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.*”

When we write a letter or an email, we usually close it by saying something like, “Sincerely, Andre Riendeau,” or, if we are close to the person, we might write, “Love you, Andre.” Short and appropriate to the audience. In the ancient world, letters were closed in a longer, but still predictable way. They could seem perfunctory...greet everyone you know by name, summarize why you wrote, offer a closing note of peace. All that is here...but as I said before, there are some important points to bring up upon closer inspection.

First, Peter says that he wrote the letter with the help of Silas or Silvanus. The vast majority of commentators believe this to be the Silas we meet in the book of Acts. The guy who **(LCD) accompanied Paul on his second missionary journey** and who proved to be faithful, as Peter says here. There is a debate as to how Silas helped Peter: did he help him write the letter, or is he giving Silas a recommendation as the one delivering the letter? Some think it’s both. Regardless, Silas is helpful because he’s faithful. That’s what matters. He’s a faithful brother. Got any faithful brothers and sisters? Treasure them!

That family language is important. Remember the context. The church is suffering great persecution. The believers in these tiny house churches in Asia Minor are being blamed for everything going wrong in their villages because they refuse to worship local gods, they’re accused of being traitors because they call Jesus Lord instead of Caesar. They’re being blackballed in the marketplace for their faith, ostracized from village life...in a

word, they're exiles. **(LCD) Aliens living in a chaotic world.** Knowing you have faithful brothers and sisters in the midst of that darkness is huge! The family of God becomes a pocket of shalom – a pocket of light, hope, in a world arrayed against God. I am so thankful for the family of God! We need each other!

And we need pockets of shalom. Shalom is the Hebrew for peace, wholeness. It's what Peter's final wish for them is at the end of verse 14, "*Peace, shalom, wholeness, to all of you who are in Christ.*" Peace is found in Christ. Knowing Him as your personal Savior and Lord. Do you know Him personally? Have you repented of your sin, turned to God through faith in Christ and surrendered your life to Him? If you have, then you've become part of God's family. God's word says, **(LCD) "Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God."** You become part of God's family and that family, the church, becomes a pocket of shalom in this dark world.

I remember when we first moved to Minnesota for seminary. At first it was exciting, a new place, a new adventure, but after three or four months, the novelty wore off and the depression set in. We were unknown there. Had no roots, no connection. We especially felt that loneliness when Thanksgiving came around. No family. No plans. Depressing. Then we went to a playground one day and ran into an older woman there with her grandkids. She was friendly and we started talking. Ended up she was a sister in Christ. She invited us over for Thanksgiving dinner at her home with her family. It was such a blessing. A little pocket of shalom. The family of God is a blessing.

So if we're going to create these pockets of shalom, refuges of hope, we need faithful brothers and sisters like Silas and this sister in Minnesota. That is what Peter is trying to do in writing this letter. Specifically, there are three things that he references in this closing that create a pocket of shalom for these weary believers: encouraging, testifying and greeting. Let's look at all three. First, exhorting.

Peter says, "*I have written to you briefly, encouraging you and testifying that this is the true grace of God. Stand fast in it.*" In the ancient world, letters were very brief...1 Peter is actually considered long by ancient standards; but it's brief in that it's focused. His purpose was to encourage them and testify to them of the true grace of God. Everything Peter had written in this letter was written that they might stand firm in the grace of God in the midst of present trials. He had described the grace of God right off the bat, **(LCD) "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade...Therefore, with minds that are alert and fully sober, set your hope on the grace to be brought to you when Jesus Christ is revealed at his coming."** Our salvation in Christ is assured in Jesus. In light of that, Peter exhorted them to set their hope on this future grace. To stand firm in it.

The word here for "encouraging" or "exhorting" is **(LCD) "parakaleo,"** literally, to call alongside, usually for help. Rich used to illustrate it with jumper cables. When you run

out of power, you need someone to come alongside and give you a boost. That's what Peter's doing: he's giving them a boost of truth. The truth of the gospel and the suffering that accompanies it. It's not an easy or convenient truth, but it's true, nonetheless. The life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are true and worth a lifetime of suffering if called to it. Stand firm! This truth is a strong pocket of shalom.

We need truth-tellers in our lives. People who care enough for us to share what's true whether it's easy or not. In a book on leading like Jesus, Ken Blanchard suggests this, **(LCD) "Name the special people in your life who love you enough to tell you what you need to hear. What are you doing to nurture and strengthen those special relationships?"** Can you name those people? These people create pockets of shalom for us – places where the truth can set us free. Who's that in your life?

We also need people who can encourage us with God's truth at hard times like Peter's doing here. In his book, "Lead Like Jesus," Ken Blanchard tells a great story about the power of encouragement. *"When Phyllis' second husband passed away, their family and friends came from around the country. After his memorial service, people from their church prepared dinner for all the out-of-town visitors. The sun had already set as Phyllis and her loved ones drove up the street to her home. As they rounded the corner, they saw lights. (LCD) Hundreds of luminarias – sand-filled white bags with lighted candles flickering from inside – had been placed around her cul-de-sac, down her long driveway, and up her walkway, lighting her pathway home. The sight was breathtaking. Phyllis and her family and friends couldn't believe their eyes. They day's pain faded for just a moment as they looked at the beauty and felt the encouragement being shown to them. She found a card on her door from her neighbor, explaining that she had not known what to do to encourage Phyllis through this day. She decided that lighting a path to her home would remind her that God was still lighting her path for the future."* That is a creative way to communicate God's truth: He's with us, and has us, even in the dark.

The other purpose Peter mentions is "testifying" that this is the true grace of God. The word here is a legal word that meant to bear witness in a court case. Peter, the man who knew Jesus personally, heard him teach, experienced the Transfiguration, walking on water, the Resurrection, the Ascension to heaven, miracles upon miracles, this Peter is testifying that it's all true! He's a witness. You can stand fast in it brothers and sisters! Peter is not just teaching God's truth as knowledge but as his life experience! It's lived truth! Reminds me of Job's experience with God, **(LCD) "My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes."** It's one thing to hear God's truth, it's another thing to experience God Himself. When Job met God, the response was humility. And as we learned last week, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Grace is what we need, and it comes through personal experience with God. This is what Peter is testifying to and he's encouraging these beaten-down brethren to stand firm in it.

We need to be sharing publicly with each other of the reality of the grace of God in our lives. We're going to hear three baptismal testimonies later today. Real life stories of how God's truth has brought transformation to real people. The whole purpose of our

quarterly Encouragement Sundays is exactly this – to allow the family of God to testify to the reality of God in our midst. We’ve already got a full slate of testimonies lined up for the next one in two weeks. I hope you’ll be strengthened in your faith as you hear how God is working in the lives of fellow brothers and sisters here at Wintonbury.

What testimonies do is help us relate to each other, empathize with each other...which is what Peter does next. Verse 13, *“She who is in Babylon, chosen together with you, sends you her greetings, and so does my son Mark.”* Who is this woman in Babylon Peter speaks of? We don’t know but the vast majority of scholars are convinced that this refers to the church in Rome. At this time, Babylon had become a code word for Jews and Christians for Rome. Just as Babylon in the Old Testament represented a place of worldliness and evil, a place where God’s people were in exile, so Rome in Peter’s day was similar. In other words, by referencing Babylon, Peter was empathizing with these far-flung brothers and sisters. Empathy creates a pocket of shalom.

Look at **(LCD) this map**. Rome, where most think Peter wrote this letter from, is here, and the churches he’s writing to are way over here. They’re far apart geographically but not theologically. They are aliens in a chaotic world. They are fellow members of the kingdom of Christ in the Roman empire. They are sister churches, “chosen together” by God. The church is bigger than just one local congregation. That’s why we do things like The Hartford Project and missions and events with the Citadel of Love. We’re all in this together and we need each other. And when we bless each other, it’s a pocket of shalom.

And that helps extends to the personal level too. Peter sends greetings not only from a church that understands difficulty, but from a person who does too – “my son Mark.” This is most likely the same Mark who failed miserably in the book of Acts. He had gone on Paul’s first missionary trip and deserted. When the second trip came around, Paul’s partner, Barnabas, wanted to take Mark but Paul said ‘no.’ They disagreed so strongly about it that they broke up – Paul took Silas, the one mentioned in verse 12, and Barnabas took Mark. Here they are together...with Peter. And Peter calls Mark, “my son.” Meaning his spiritual son. Again, family language. Who better than Peter, who had failed Christ, to take Mark, who had failed Paul, under his wing. Never let your past define your future! God is in the business of restoration. Peter helps Mark and, most people think that Mark’s gospel is essentially Peter’s testimony of Jesus. How cool! Peter discipling Mark – a little pocket of shalom!

One last verse, 14, *“Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace to all of you who are in Christ.”* In the ancient world, people would greet their family members with a kiss of love on the cheeks. They wouldn’t do that with just anyone – just family. Again, another family note. Love each other like you love your family. I found **(LCD) this picture of me and my sister** giving each other a kiss of love! Okay...we don’t need to be kissing each other on the lips, but we do need to be personally greeted. During our race conversation, several of our friends of color mentioned multiple instances of people hugging and shaking hands with each other but not doing so with them. This made them feel like outsiders. No. In the family of God, everyone matters. Greet everyone whether by shaking hands, hugging, whatever...let’s make Wintonbury a warm pocket of shalom!

To summarize, **(LCD) We create pockets of shalom by...**

- 1. Speaking the truth of God's grace to each other,**
- 2. Testifying to the reality of God's grace,**
- 3. Warmly sharing God's grace personally.**

I'd like to end by reading something our sister Kim Haskell posted on Facebook a few weeks ago. It's about the church. It's a little long but worth the read. It's written by a guy named Jacob Waldron. Listen and see if you can relate to this at all:

*"Church is hard....*

*Church is hard for the person walking through the doors, afraid of judgement.*

*Church is hard for the pastor's family, under the microscope of an entire body.*

*Church is hard for the prodigal soul returning home, broken and battered by the world.*

*Church is hard for the girl who looks like she has it all together, but doesn't.*

*Church is hard for the couple who fought the entire ride to service.*

*Church is hard for the single mom, surrounded by couples holding hands, and seemingly perfect families.*

*Church is hard for the widow and widower with no invitation to lunch after service.*

*Church is hard for the deacon with an estranged child.*

*Church is hard for the person singing worship songs, overwhelmed by the weight of the lyrics.*

*Church is hard for the man insecure in his role as a leader.*

*Church is hard for the wife who longs to be led by a righteous man.*

*Church is hard for the nursery volunteer who desperately longs for a baby to love.*

*Church is hard for the single woman and single man, praying God brings them a mate.*

*Church is hard for the teenage girl, wearing a scarlet letter, ashamed of her mistakes.*

*Church is hard for the sinners.*

*Church is hard for me.*

*It's hard because on the outside it all looks shiny and perfect. Sunday best in behavior and dress.*

*However, underneath those layers, you find a body of imperfect people, carnal souls, selfish motives.*

*But, here is the beauty of church—*

*Church isn't a building, mentality, or expectation.*

*Church is a body.*

*Church is a group of sinners, saved by grace, living in fellowship as saints.*

*Church is a body of believers bound as brothers and sisters by an eternal love.*

*Church is a holy ground where sinners stand as equals before the Throne of Grace.*

*Church is a refuge for broken hearts and a training ground for mighty warriors.*

*Church is a converging of confrontation and invitation. Where sin is confronted and hearts are invited to seek restoration.*

*Church is a lesson in faith and trust.*

*Church is a bearer of burdens and a giver of hope.*

*Church is a family. A family coming together, setting aside differences, forgetting past mistakes, rejoicing in the smallest of victories.*

*Church, the body, and the circle of sinners-turned-saints, is where He resides, and if we*

*ask, He is faithful to come.*

*So even on the hard days at church—*

*The days when I am at odds with a friend, When I've fought with my spouse because we're late once again. When I've walked in bearing burdens heavier than my heart can handle, yet masking the pain with a smile on my face. When I've worn a scarlet letter, under the microscope. When I've longed for a baby to hold, or fought tears as the lyrics were sung. When I've walked back in, afraid and broken, after walking away. I'll remember, He has never failed to meet me there."*

Let's be a pocket of shalom for each other that we might offer shalom to the world.

Amen.