

A World Fully Alive

Rich Nathan
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Fully Alive
Isaiah 65:17-25

Today is the end of our Fully Alive discipleship campaign, but I'm praying that it won't be the end of hundreds of new host groups that were formed during the campaign. We have produced great material for groups to continue on. I'm going to ask hosts, will you talk with your group and ask them if they'd like to continue. If so, get in touch with Host support person or contact us at

smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org

This Palm Sunday weekend I want to move from a discussion about us as individuals becoming Fully Alive, that is becoming spiritually alive, physically alive, relationally alive, emotionally alive and financially alive. I want to talk about what it would look like if the community around us and, indeed, if the world around us became fully alive. How many of you would say that the world is working the way it should work? As you look at, for example, your family or your marriage or your workplace or politics in Washington, DC it's all working like a Swiss watch. If you look out at the world, how many of you would say that the world is working the way that it should work?

Every day in the paper we read several reports of young adults who have died from drug overdoses, specifically overdoses by opioids and heroin and fentanyl have sky-rocketed in the last decade. There is a large group of people in America who have given up hope.

There was this startling caption to a photograph recently in the paper:

"On the streets of Chillicothe, Ohio shooting heroin is like drinking beer."

Earlier this week, a police officer was flagged down by a frantic woman in Portsmouth, Ohio. It was a little after midnight and the woman screamed that an 18-month old child was lying on the sidewalk and she wasn't responsive. The child was lying there in great distress. She wasn't breathing. It was discovered that this toddler had overdosed on what they believe was heroin and that she had somehow taken it from her mother who is a suspected heroin addict.

The world is not working the way it should. Our country is not working the way it should. Our state is not working the way it should. Our city is not working the way it should. Our neighborhoods and families and schools, our workplaces, our relationships

– nothing is working the way it should. Why is that? The Bible would describe the current situation as the loss of shalom.

Shalom lost

What is shalom? What's been lost? Let me read to you today's text from the book of Isaiah.

Isaiah 65:17-25

¹⁷ "See, I will create

new heavens and a new earth.

The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever

in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.

¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem

and take delight in my people;

the sound of weeping and of crying
will be heard in it no more.

²⁰ "Never again will there be in it

an infant who lives but a few days,

or an old man who does not live out his years;

the one who dies at a hundred

will be thought a mere child;

the one who fails to reach a hundred

will be considered accursed.

²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them;

they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them,

or plant and others eat.

For as the days of a tree,

so will be the days of my people;

my chosen ones will long enjoy

the work of their hands.

²³ They will not labor in vain,

nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;

for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,

they and their descendants with them.

²⁴ Before they call I will answer;

while they are still speaking I will hear.

²⁵The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.
They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.

The Jews had a word for the picture that the prophet Isaiah is painting, the word is shalom. What is shalom?

Shalom defined

The root meaning of the word shalom is whole or sound. Shalom speaks of completeness, prosperity, well-being, tranquility, peace. The word shalom is used as a greeting in Israel today. There is a Hebrew greeting:

Shalom Aleichem

Which means "peace be to you". And the response to that greeting is:

Aleichem Shalom

That means "to you peace".

A great Christian writer and theologian named Cornelius Plantinga defines shalom this way, he said:

"The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call shalom. We call it peace, but it means far more than mere peace of mind or a cease-fire between enemies. In the Bible, shalom means universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight – a rich state of affairs in which natural needs are satisfied and natural gifts fruitfully employed, a state of affairs that inspires joyful wonder as its Creator and Savior opens doors and welcomes the creatures in whom He delights. Shalom, in other words, is the way things ought to be."

What is the prophetic vision of shalom promised to us in the Bible? If we were to update Isaiah's picture, we might say that shalom is Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs joyfully celebrating the marriage of their children together with toasts to each family in Hebrew and in Arabic. What does shalom look like to you? I imagine all disease being healed and Children's Hospital here in town turned into a gigantic Disney store where everything is free.

What will the world look like when shalom comes? I imagine a white supremacist marrying the student leader of Black Lives Matter and they are both kneeling together as they gratefully receive communion, both confessing Jesus as their Lord and Savior, at their wedding ceremony.

Shalom is not just middle-class tax cut or even a candy apple red new sports car, although that would be nice. Shalom is a radical change in the entire culture so that no one would take drugs to dull any pain. Radical change in culture so that everyone supported healthy lifelong marriages and sexual purity going into marriage.

Shalom is grandparents who live long, healthy, productive lives and are respected are sources of counsel and wisdom. Children – who regardless of who their parents are – all have incredible futures and grow up healthy, successful, and free of any childhood trauma. Shalom, in short, is a world fully alive. Shalom is the way things ought to be.

Where does shalom come from? Does the government have the power to produce shalom? Does shalom come from schools or family or counselors? Can really bright scientists grant shalom in the lab? Who does the prophet say is the source of shalom? To whom must we look for shalom?

Here's what we read in verse 17:

Isaiah 65:17

¹⁷ "See, I will create
new heavens and a new earth.
The former things will not be remembered,
nor will they come to mind.

¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever
in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight
and its people a joy.

The Hebrew word that the prophet uses three times which is translated in English as create is the word *bara*.

Bara = create

It's used in the first verse of Genesis:

Genesis 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

And this word *bara* which means create is a special word in Hebrew. In the Hebrew Bible it's only used of God. We talk about an artist creating a great work of art, musicians creating a musical masterpiece, a chef creating a wonderful dish, but in the Bible the word *bara* – to create – is used only of God. Only God can make something out of nothing. Only God can give life to something that's dead. Only God can bring hope where there's total despair. We human beings can shape the raw material that God gives us, but only God doesn't need raw material. Only God creates.

When we're looking for shalom – life in a dead marriage, hope for a hopeless addict, healing when the doctors have given up – the prophet tells us that shalom requires the intervention of God. Shalom is not man made. Shalom requires God to stretch out his hand, God to break in, God to intervene. And that's precisely what this week is about. The in breaking of God, the intervention of God. This week is about

Shalom inaugurated

You know what inauguration is don't you? It's the beginning of something, the start of something – you have the inauguration of the president. That means that this is the beginning of the presidency. When we inaugurate a new trade policy with China, that means we're commencing a new policy with China. This week, beginning on this day that we call Palm Sunday, shalom was inaugurated in this world by God really 2,000 years ago.

Here's what we read about that first Palm Sunday in Jerusalem:

Matthew 21:1-5

As they approached Jerusalem and came to Bethphage on the Mount of Olives, Jesus sent two disciples, ² saying to them, "Go to the village ahead of you, and at once you will find a donkey tied there, with her colt by her. Untie them and bring them to me. ³ If anyone says anything to you, say that the Lord needs them, and he will send them right away."

⁴ This took place to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet:

⁵ "Say to Daughter Zion,
'See, your king comes to you,
gentle and riding on a donkey,
and on a colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

Who is the prophet whose prophecy is being fulfilled by Jesus riding into Jerusalem on the back of a donkey? The prophet, of course, is Zechariah. It was the prophecy written of Palm Sunday written more than 400 years before Jesus rode into Jerusalem.

Zechariah 9:9-12

⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!

Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!

See, your king comes to you,

righteous and victorious,

lowly and riding on a donkey,

on a colt, the foal of a donkey.

¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim

and the warhorses from Jerusalem,

and the battle bow will be broken.

He will proclaim peace to the nations.

His rule will extend from sea to sea

and from the River to the ends of the earth.

¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,

I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.

¹² Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;

even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.

What is the purpose of Palm Sunday? It was to announce the inauguration of shalom, a peace that would begin on Good Friday when the Prince of Peace, Jesus of Nazareth, would be hung on a cross opening the door for you and I to have peace with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Palm Sunday is an announcement of coming peace through the death of the Prince of Peace on the cross and his glorious resurrection on Easter Sunday in which he conquered the enemy of shalom, namely death and sin and Satan.

What does shalom feel like? When life works the way it should, when things are the way they ought to be, what does it feel like? Let's look at verses 18-19:

Isaiah 65:18-19

But be glad and rejoice forever

in what I will create,

for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight

and its people a joy.

¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem

and take delight in my people;

the sound of weeping and of crying

will be heard in it no more.

Here we find

Shalom experienced

The Bible has a word for shalom feels like and the word is joy. You are experiencing the shalom of God when you feel pure joy. Joy, delight is the mark of shalom.

My step-brother is an ultra-Orthodox Jew. He weighs over 200 pounds. At his wedding reception, four men carried him in on a huge chair that was hoisted way up into the air. And four other men did the same thing with the bride. They carried them in together, into the reception hall. It was like they were being carried on thrones. Then the women did the circle dance as the men spun around the room. This huge Jewish butcher picked up my step-brother and put him on his shoulders and they danced together. And then the rabbi who was wearing one of those big black hats with the wide brim, he poured brandy on his hat and set it on fire. And he danced around with his hat on fire. Now, that, my friends, is what joy looks like.

I told you about my experience at my first Christian wedding. I didn't eat before we went to the wedding because I was used to Jewish weddings and I figured they would really feed me at the wedding. I was 19-years old and I couldn't wait for the wedding ceremony to be over so we could go and eat this big wedding meal. I was a hungry teenage boy. We went down into the church basement, it was dimly lit, and I discovered what some Christians do at their weddings. There were a few older women who served punch in plastic cups from a large bowl and we had little Dixie cups with peanuts and mints in them. That was the meal – you stood there eating mints and peanuts like little gerbils. We ate a small piece of wedding cake and then we all left. I learned that evening that Christians are great at a lot of things, but you generally don't go to Christians for a great party. This is really bizarre because the person that we are committed to follow, namely Jesus, loved to party.

The most striking thing of Jesus in the Bible is the amazing number of parties that he went to. When Jesus called Matthew the tax collector into relationship with himself, Matthew threw a big party so that all his tax collector friends could come and meet Jesus. They feasted together and there was joy.

Jesus' first miracle was performed at a wedding feast. The young couple ran out of wine and Jesus helped them out by performing his first miracle – he turned water into punch and they served it with mints and peanuts in the church basement. No! They turned water into wine and they partied all night. Unlike some Christians, Jesus knew what it took to have a great wedding.

Over and over again in the New Testament, Jesus is portrayed as being the life of the party. It's almost like folks are saying, "Hey, Jesus is coming over! Jesus is coming over! Fire up the grill! Break out the keg! We're going to have a party." So many of Jesus' stories have to do with invitations to parties. The Jewish festivals – Passover, Tabernacle – there was all kinds of feasting. In fact, the Hebrew word for party is

Simcha = joy or party

What shalom feels like is joy. This shalom that was inaugurated, that began in the week following Palm Sunday through the death and resurrection of Jesus, how is God's shalom displayed by us in the world?

Shalom displayed

I think there are three things that those of us who are followers of Jesus can do to be people of shalom. The first thing is:

Be the peace

How is the shalom of God displayed? It's displayed as we followers of Jesus bring shalom with us into our families, into our small groups, into our classrooms and dorms and neighborhoods and workplaces. You're a carrier of shalom. Let me put it this way: the difference between being a Christian and being a non-Christian is not that the Christian has no trouble and the non-Christian has trouble. Jesus said and he made us this solemn promise,

In this world, you will have trouble

The Christian may lose her job just like the non-Christian. The Christian may have family troubles just like the non-Christian. The Christian can have a very challenging marriage or problems with their parents or their roommate, just like a non-Christian. A Christian can get into a dispute with a car dealer or a plumber or their accountant, just like a non-Christian. A Christian can get sick or be diagnosed with a tumor or have problems with their roof or problems with their pets. Being a Christian doesn't guarantee that your plane won't be delayed or that someone won't be mad at you or break your heart or break a relationship or gossip about you.

Our hope is not that everything in the world will go well with us. The difference between a Christian and a non-Christian is that when a Christian goes through difficulty, we go through it with God. Before we're Christians we are without hope, without shalom, because we are without God. A non-Christian goes through difficulty alone. We have God with us. He is our peace. He is our shalom. It's not just what the doctors say or the experts or the visible changes that we can measure. Our peace is that God is with us. What does the psalmist say?

Psalm 23:1, 4 (KJV)

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, thou art with me

Be the peace! Pray for peace! That's the second thing:

Pray for peace

Here's what we read in

Jeremiah 29:7

Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the LORD for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper."

This is the verse we have on the sign on our way out of the Cooper Road property. That word peace is the Hebrew word shalom. Seek the shalom, the blessing, the prosperity, the good of the community that you live in. Pray that our city and our state and our country we live in will prosper. God says if our community prospers we and our children will prosper. If the world we live in is fully alive, we will be fully alive!

Be the peace. Pray for peace. And, finally,

Slide

Spread the peace

The mission statement here at Vineyard Columbus reads: "Our mission is to develop a community of disciples who experience God, love one another, and partner with Christ to heal the world."

We partner with Christ to bring shalom – wholeness, healing, completeness, blessing – wherever there is an absence of shalom. How might we do this? On April 22, we're going to have a service day – that's a Saturday – to bring shalom to the Columbus community. How will we bring shalom?

What am I asking you to do? Everyone who is listening to me right now, talk with your small groups about a project that you're going to be working on. We want to get out 2,500 to 3,000 Vineyard people. Your children can join you. This is great for kids. It doesn't matter what age you are, what stage of life. Hosts and small group leaders, talk with your groups and decide on a project.

Small Groups decide on a project

We have projects at:

- 8 Columbus public schools
- Nursing homes
- Value Life ministry
- Transitions ministry
- Community Gardens

- Helping Hands home repair ministry
- Red Cross Disaster Relief Training

Sign up as a group

You can go online after the service in the lobby – you can sign up as a group and just tell us how many people are going to be coming.

Listen, even if you're not in a group or even if you plan to end your group at the end of the six weeks, sign up for one of these projects. We want to bring shalom locally and we want to bring shalom globally.

But we don't want to just bring shalom locally. Followers of Jesus are called to spread shalom, the blessing of God, the peace of God, the presence of God, the healing of God, globally. At Vineyard Columbus we are committed to do this. We are opening up space for several hundred people from our church to take short term mission trips in the next 12-18 months. What that looks like is a team of 6-12 people going with an experienced leader for 10 days to two weeks to places where Vineyard Columbus is working – to North Africa, to the West Bank in Israel, to Greece, to Central Asia, to India, to Brazil, to Cambodia – go to the lobby after the service and find out more about one of these short term trips. Get an application and pray. You and I can partner together with God to bring shalom so that the world will be what God intends it to be – fully alive, really alive!

Let's pray.

We really have something to celebrate! Will you join me in the lobby for food and music right after the service? Let's finish this campaign with giving thanks to God by celebrating together!

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