

Restore Series (1): Shalom // Steve Sutton

On August 28, 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington DC, Baptist Minister Martin Luther King Jr gave his famous 'I Have a Dream Speech'.

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal."

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.

I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today!

Then quoting from Isaiah 40, King concludes his speech...

I have a dream that one day every valley shall be exalted, and every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plain, and the crooked places will be

made straight; "and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed and all flesh shall see it together." (Isaiah 40)

Martin Luther King Jrs' vision was for an America free of racial inequality.

God too has a dream/vision for this world?

Walter Brueggemann, the pre-eminent Old Testament scholar writes,

The central theme of world history in the Bible is that all of creation is one, every creature in community with every other, living in harmony and security toward the joy and well-being of every other creature...

The most staggering expression of that vision is that all persons are children of a single family, members of a single tribe, heirs of a single hope, bearers of a single destiny, namely the care and management of the earth...

A cluster of words is required to express its many dimensions and subtle nuances: love, loyalty, truth, grace, salvation, justice, blessing and righteousness. But the term that has been used to summarise that controlling vision is shalom.

Brueggemann suggests that God's dream for the world can be summarised in a single word, the Hebrew word 'shalom'. We usually translate shalom to mean peace but it has a far richer and deeper than just peace – shalom contains the ideas of wholeness, harmony, wellbeing, healing, and prosperity. I love the little phrase that describes shalom as 'nothing broken, nothing missing'.

Chloe, if I get a tattoo what would I get? Shalom

The Garden of Eden is a picture/representation of shalom – a world in which nothing is broken and nothing is missing. A place of peace, harmony, wholeness and wellbeing, which was seen in:

- The relationship between God and humanity;
- The inter-relationships between people – the social order was characterised by love and mutual service;
- Individuals were emotionally, mentally and physically whole and healthy; and
- The environment flourished

Those early chapters of Genesis describe a time when and place where everything was as it should be.

As the biblical story unfolds the shalom of Eden, however, is lost:

- The connection between God and humanity is broken;
- The social order of love and mutual service between people is replaced by selfishness, violence, greed and oppression;
- Individuals begin to experience the toxic emotions of fear, guilt and shame – physical sickness and disease begin to take hold and stake a claim on the body; and
- The beautiful harmony of the earth now produces thorns and thistles.

Into this broken world God establishes a community of people, the nation of Israel. God's call upon Israel was to re-establish shalom – to be a living portrait of peace, wholeness, harmony, wellbeing, healing, and prosperity.

To help them live in shalom with God, one another, themselves and creation, God gives Israel Torah, the first five books of the First Testament. Torah lays out the spiritual, moral, economic, social, health and environmental principles and practices that facilitate shalom. Torah explains how to live well with God, one

another, with oneself and the land. Follow these principles and shalom will flow.

Torah was unique in that shalom could be best measured by the way that Israel treated those who sat on the margins. Israel's treatment of the poor and oppressed, the widow and the orphan, the alien and the stranger was the most accurate barometer of shalom.

Israel's role was to be a light to the surrounding nations, a sign and symbol of what it was to live out and experience shalom. God's intent was that those who observed Israel would look at them and say, "Oh, that's how the world is meant to be."

Whenever Israel turned away from following Torah and particularly when it mistreated the poor and marginalised, God would send prophets who would remind the people to live out righteousness and justice.

Righteousness and justice are two of the most significant themes in the First Testament. They appear some 900 times.

The Hebrew word 'righteousness' means, "that which is as it ought to be, particularly with respect to relationships."

We Christians tend to frame righteousness around living a moral life and our relationship with God. For Christians righteousness is primarily viewed as inward and upward. But the Jewish understanding of righteousness focuses on the outward – it's about social and environmental responsibility – how we care for others and the land. This is a very Indigenous Australian worldview.

The Hebrew word 'justice' means "to put things right, to intervene in a situation that is wrong and fix it."

The result of righteousness – caring for others and creation and justice – putting things, which are wrong to right is shalom.

Isaiah 32:16-17

The Lord's justice will dwell in the desert,
his righteousness live in the fertile field.
The fruit of that righteousness will be peace (shalom)...

The prophets constantly urged Israel to live righteously and justly and thereby live out God's dream of shalom.

The prophets also painted word pictures to stir the imagination of Israel to envision what the world would be like when shalom was established in their midst:

Isaiah 65:20-25

“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.
They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.
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.
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.
Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.
The 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.

Even in their darkest days Israel was to focus on shalom not only for themselves but for those around them.

[S]eek the peace (shalom) and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers (experiences shalom), you too will prosper (experience shalom).” **Jeremiah 29:7**

Historically, what developed over time in Israel was a concept called ‘Tikkun Olam’ = ‘repairing/restoring/healing the world’. Tikkun Olam is what Jesus called the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God is what happens when God’s shalom reigns.

It is into this very Jewish way of viewing things that Jesus comes. In his inaugural message in the synagogue of his hometown in Nazareth, Jesus quotes from the prophetic imagination of Isaiah and outlines his mission and dream:

Isaiah 61:1-2

The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me,
because the Lord has anointed me
to proclaim good news to the poor.
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captives
and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor

Jesus message and subsequent ministry was characterised by healing and restoration. As we read through the gospels we see the focus of Jesus was repairing brokenness in all its various forms: social (making space for and lifting the status of the poor, women, children, Samaritans, tax collectors and sinners) physical (healing miracles), mental and emotional (those who were tormented) and spiritual (reconnecting people with God).

Today we commence a new series called 'Restore'. We want to take time to reflect on God's dream of a world founded upon shalom. Over the coming months we will be taking a look at things such as: addiction, mental health, physical wellbeing, spiritual wholeness and society structured, as it should be.