

PAPER CHURCH

Becoming: Your Kingdom Come/Shalom

John 14:27-31

Sunday 16 August 2020

Some Tips

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

Get prepared for worship

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'sacred' space

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.

Call to Worship

Dave Wilkins

The next four weeks we will be looking at the theme of becoming. Who are we becoming? Who are we called to become? Both in our community and individually.

Every generation of kingdom believers for 2,000 years has had to press into this question. And we are no different in this time and in this place – in 2020. We can't go back and recreate the past, we have to move forward.

Each day we are faced with simple questions about how we live, how do we spend our time, where do we focus our energy. We know that we are called to be people of a new kingdom. But what does this mean? In recent months we have seen so many images of people struggling with oppression, (personal and societal, physical and political), we have seen and experienced personal pain of loved ones hurt, dying and unable to respond in ways that we desperately want to.

It's hard to imagine peace. At times we can feel overwhelmed. Our reading today talks about a different peace. Jesus draws his friends into questions around the world we live in but then later in his conversation says 'I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world'.

This is a message that we need to hold onto. Our loving and living God is not separate from our world; is not separate from the pain or anguish. The mystery is that God lives in and through our world and has overcome this world.

Martin Luther King once said, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that".

So we come as frail, often stumbling kingdom people in a world of trouble, knowing that Jesus has brought peace and light and love and that he has overcome.

And whilst we may find it hard to see at times, God's kingdom is coming on earth, and we are becoming people of the Kingdom - people of light, love and peace.

Song: Heaven to Earth (We are Blessed)

Bring heaven to earth, Lord
Bring peace where there's fear
Bring life where there's death, Lord
Bring joy in these tears
Bring love where there's lust, Lord
Bring hope where there's pain
Bring rest where there's chaos
Bring faith where there's fame

You invite us to partner with you
To see your kingdom come

We are blessed, to bless a world in pieces
We are loved, to love where love is not
We are changed, to be the change you promised
We are freed, to be your hands, O God

Bring home to the homeless
Bring keys to the chained
Bring worth to the purchased
And touch to the shamed
Bring flesh from your word, Lord
Bring truth where there's spin
Bring risk where's there safety
And grace where there's sin

In the broken, we shall see restored
The image of our King

We are blessed...

Lord we cry out to you
Change the atmosphere
Breathe new life in all who gather here

We are blessed...

Bring justice to profit
Bring patience to growth
Bring wisdom to progress
Plant trees on this road
Bring freedom from debt, Lord
An end to excess
Bring closer your kingdom
By quiet success

May we grow in the knowledge of you
Through every heart and face

We are blessed...

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Bible Reading: John 14:27-31 (NIV)

“Peace 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.

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. I have told you now before it happens, so that when it does happen you will believe. I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, but 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.”



Message

Penny Martin

“how beautiful you are
for never giving up on yourself,
for just waking up
and choosing to get out of bed.
seeing you own your life
and be so willing
to face it
over and over again
is so powerful,
you make me believe
anything is possible.

this is the growth
that is meant for you.
this is your becoming.
you are allowed to
take up all the space
you need.”

(Adapted from Thought Catalog 6 & 13.)

<https://thoughtcatalog.com/melisa-ergin/2016/09/18-incredibly-powerful-poems-about-life-love-becoming/>

Welcome to a new series that we will travel with for a few weeks. It is fascinating to consider what it means to 'become' something ...

This series is about paying some attention rather than being prescriptive. I am not going to tell you or us what we have to become – that is not the nature of it. There is simply no doubt that we are becoming things every day. Becoming older, becoming wiser, becoming more unhealthy, becoming more aware... but it can be like breathing. Something that we do without thinking about it and this is a season to pay attention to the rhythmic sense of some of the things that are emerging.

We are becoming some key things and in our paying attention – how do we recognise and embrace some of the things we are experiencing and how do we see and acknowledge the areas that we are resistant about? And over all, how can we pray with and for one another?

Today we are looking at the challenge of becoming people of the Kingdom – people of shalom. And the key questions that we will be considering are:

- Are we becoming more like the Kingdom that is proclaimed in the gospels?
- Are we embodying the characteristics of true Shalom in our everyday coming and going, in our families, workplaces, streets, cities?
- How is God calling us to become Shalom for our world?

The meaning of Shalom is powerful and it can give us some important signposts.

The text that I have used for today is taken from the Farewell Discourse in John's gospel. This is a key part of the gospel of John – where Jesus takes specific and intentional time with those closest to him to press in words of encouragement, final teachings and pieces of wisdom, he draws together many threads of experience and thinking and in the very broadest sense Jesus is asking the question, 'What have we become together and what are we becoming?' The ultimate goal of this time is to help his followers to believe in a life not shaped by Jesus' absence – but by the unending presence and power of God.

Peace 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.

John 14:27

One of the words Jesus uses here and then later again in this same discourse in 16:33 and then repeatedly as he appears to his disciples after his resurrection (John 20:19; 20:21; 20:26) is the word 'peace'. *Shalom*.

What does shalom mean?

We often translate the word shalom as "peace," but like many other occasions in the English language – this is a very limited definition – shalom means more than that. *Shalom* is more of a world-view a world where there is abundance and plenty, where there is equality and opportunity

and inclusivity, personal and systematic harmony and righteousness, where there is freedom, and just economic practices and political relations. This vision of the world – is about the reign of God that will produce a harvest of righteousness and peace.

For Jesus, the 'shalom' of God was the kingdom of God, that he came to proclaim – this now and still coming reign of God in human hearts and in all arenas of human life. Jesus proclaimed that the Kingdom 'has come near' (Mark 1:15) and that there was a sense of urgency about how we as followers took part in such a vision of Shalom: 'But strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness,' (Matthew 6:33).

Paul in his letters to the Corinthians says, 'So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!' (2 Corinthians 5:17). In other words – when one embraces the vision of the Kingdom of Shalom – we realise that the old way of doing and being is fading away. Hostility and conflict, power and greed, injustice and oppression – these ways of being in the world are obsolete and dying. The new way was coming in. For those who see with the eyes of faith, it is clear that our common human future in this world is the promised reign of God. Shalom.

We can see signs of this now and not-yet Kingdom of Shalom all about us if we pay attention. From thoughtful acts of kindness by individuals, to open and heart-felt moments of practical hospitality, to a clearer recognition of our basic, common responsibilities to one another. In particular, the healthy church can be, and often is, a sign of Shalom. Imperfect as it is, a community of believers can, when working with accountable love, provide the best clue we have to God's vision.

So, what is our role? It is certainly not to sit back and passively wait for God's kingdom to roll on in. It is to pray fervently, to hope unswervingly, to invest lovingly and in doing so point to the presence of God: 'let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:16)

A story: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

"This will be a completely full flight." It was the announcement I had been dreading. While I consider myself an extrovert, once I've hit my interpersonal limit, I'm really done engaging with people. I had been on the road for a week and a half, and I was hoping to have at least one seat between the next passenger and me. Alas, that would not be the case. I pressed earbuds into my ears, pulled my sweatshirt hood up over my head and leaned against the window of the airplane, pretending to sleep and fully intending to ignore whoever sat in the seat next to me.

That person's name was Joe. I knew his name because immediately after sitting down he started talking to me. It wasn't a gentle, neighbourly interruption. The tenuous peace I had created with my headphones and hood was broken by an onslaught of requests and apologies: "Excuse me. I'm sorry but, hi there, hello, excuse me, sir, if you don't mind, please, sir, excuse me, pardon me, I'm sorry, but..."

I pulled my hood off, removing one of my earbuds. "Hi. Can I help you?"

"Hi," he said. "My name is Joe."

"Hi Joe. I'm Justin." I waited for a few moments to see if he'd pick the conversation up. He didn't.

"Joe do you need something?"

"Yes!" he responded. "Can you help me with my seatbelt?"

As I walked him through the process of buckling his seatbelt, I noticed Joe was exhibiting many of the behaviours I see in friends living with autism. Later that day, after stepping off the plane in Oakland, I talked with Joe's parents (from whom he'd been separated during the boarding process) and learned that Joe was in fact autistic. He'd also never been on a plane before. If you know someone living with autism, you understand that unfamiliar environments, protocols and mechanisms can be confusing or intimidating for those sisters and brothers.

Joe thanked me as I reached for the earbud dangling out of my shirt and started lifting it toward my ear. His eyes widened as he watched my hand rise. "Uh... um... uh... um..." And then, with volume more appropriate for the discovery of lost keys, he shouted "Wait!" WHO'S YOUR FAVOURITE BASEBALL TEAM?" Joe, it seemed, was not done talking with me. I dropped the earbud and told Joe that since I was born in Oakland, California, I was a fan of the Oakland Athletics.

He booed. Loudly.

The kind of booing generally heard from the third deck of a stadium during a particularly rough stretch of baseball. Ignoring the glances of those around us, Joe and I talked about baseball for a while, including what was wrong with the American League and why he liked the Chicago Cubs so much. Somehow our conversation morphed into talk of comics and superheroes and why the movies about them were always just a bit disappointing. All this while our plane was still parked at the gate.

After take-off things quieted a tad between Joe and me. That is until the steward came down the aisle with peanuts. I opened my two bags and quickly consumed the contents of both. Joe, on the other hand, sat struggling with his peanut bags. He pulled and tugged. He shook and flapped and pulled and tugged again. And then he dropped both bags of peanuts into my lap. In Joe's mind it was my responsibility to open those bags of peanuts now. Why? Because I was the person sitting next to him, and that's the way the world should work. Proximity should come with responsibility, and we should take responsibility for those near us with a sense of discovery and adventure.

As I said goodbye to Joe and his family at the airport, I hoped he would remain relentlessly committed to the way he saw the world and that his hopeful optimism wouldn't be worn thin by disappointment. I hoped he'd keep expecting the people around him to live up to the best parts of themselves.

I thought about the ways I expected so little of the people around me and even of myself, to the point that generosity and kindness and charity felt like exceptions to the "rule" of selfishness and greed and isolationism. I recognised how I'd embraced a much sadder view of human behaviour and relationship than I realised, one in which I expected people to hurt one another and cause damage.

But what if that wasn't the case? What if I believed that neighbourliness was a fundamental human reality and that variations from it were tragic departures? What if a vision of the world made right was at the centre of my psychology? How would I live differently? How would I love differently? Maybe I'd quit far less often than I do. Maybe I'd give weary travellers their opportunity to live into their better selves.

I grabbed my bags and walked across the street to the shuttle that would take me to the airport parking lot. After I boarded the shuttle, I reached once again for my earbuds and then paused ... and dropped them against my chest. Someone might sit next to me. Something good might happen. I didn't want to miss it. In fact I think I'd rather expect it.

From: Justin McRoberts and Scott Erickson "May It Be So. Forty Days With the Lord's Prayer" 2019.

The Lords Prayer...

"Our Father in heaven
hallowed be your name,
your Kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we also have forgiven our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from the evil one.

For your is the Kingdom, the power and the glory
Forever and ever
Amen

Communion

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

If you're able, join us at 11am Sunday through Zoom to share in communion together at rngwd.com/communion or after you have shared in communion below, consider who you can call to have a chat as you would on a Sunday morning after a church service.

One of the things that we can be actively doing to embrace the idea of spiritual formation is to press into spiritual practices. Communion is a dedicated practice that we do week to week – to set aside time to pause and remember Jesus' death on a cross and the loving sacrifice that he made for each of us. As we pause for a few minutes and take simple food and drink – we remember Jesus meeting with his followers:

*Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it saying,
"Take, eat, this is my body".*

*Then he took the cup gave thanks and offered it to them,
and they all drank from it.*

Please share in your version of communion.

Communion is usually a time of being *in* community, breaking bread together as a symbolic remembering of Jesus' last supper with his disciples and followers. If we are not in our normal community it might feel strange to do this alone, as a couple or with only a small group of people.

Intentionally consider who you are communing with:

- Think of the people in close proximity to you e.g. neighbours. Give thanks for them.
- Consider and visually bring to mind friends in our church community who would normally be sitting close by at this time. Give thanks for them.
- Consider the community of the Trinity – God the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit – a divine community into which you are embraced today as a beloved child of God.

Prayer

Penny Martin

Lord God, thank you for an opportunity to share together, to dig into your Word, to seek your wisdom, and to pay attention to some of the things that are happening to us, around us in our world, to people that we love and care about, in our communities, in our families, in our neighbourhoods.

Lord, to simply look and pay attention is a spiritual discipline and so we ask for courage and wisdom as we press in. God, we also ask for your guidance as we consider some of the things that we are going to look at over the next few weeks. Who are we becoming? And what does it mean for us as a community of faith?

But also God, for us individually and for our world. Would you guide our hearts and our minds and our thoughts as we make a journey in this time together? We pray in the name of Jesus.

Amen

Connect cards online

Click this link or enter it into your web browser rngwd.com/connect.

We love to know that you have been able to connect through worship today. Please click on the link (or enter it into your web browser) to our online connect cards letting us know which ways you have been able to worship, and if you want to let us know how we can praying with you.

If you love to engage in worship through music, we've got a YouTube playlist for you for this week at rngwd.com/168playlist.