



Series: "God's Justice in a Hurting World"

The Shalom of Justice

Ephesians 1:1-14; Proverbs 14:22-35; Matthew 5:3-10 (8am)

Peace, Beauty, and Justice

Colossians 1:19-20: "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (Jesus), and through him (Jesus) to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his (Jesus) blood, shed on the cross."

This is Biblical justice. Isn't it both wonderful and humbling? This is God's work in the world since the beginning of time. God is reconciling humanity to Himself and in doing this, He is reconciling all things to Himself. He is bringing all things in Heaven and Earth together in Christ.

Every culture has a story to explain the creation of the world. Most ancient accounts depict creation as the result of a battle or of a struggle between warring cosmic forces.

The Biblical creation account is quite different. Creation is the work of God without a rival. Creation is not borne from conflict but as an artist paints a picture or shapes a sculpture. God creates beauty and peace and justice in His world.

God created all things to be in a beautiful, harmonious, interdependent, connected relationship to one another. Just as related physical elements form the cosmos, so rightly related human beings form a community.

Peace

This is what the Bible calls 'shalom', or harmonious peace.

Shalom is complete reconciliation. It is the state of the fullest flourishing in every dimension; physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual.

I'm sure we can relate to times when our physical body lets us down, or our mental wellbeing is unravelling.

When society disintegrates, when there is crime, poverty and family breakdown, there is no shalom.

It only takes watching the news to know our day-to-day experience is not characterised by shalom.

How did we get into this place? The Bible tells us that when God created the world, in the Garden of Eden, humanity walked with God and served Him. Under His rule and authority, it was paradise.

All this ended when humanity turned away from God, rejecting His rule and Kingdom. We became estranged from God; we are alienated from our true selves and from each other. Our self-absorption has led to oppression, injustice, and breakdown.

When we turned away from God, the whole world stopped “working right”. For those who turn to God, we do get glimpses of shalom. God is transforming us and changing us to be more like Jesus. With Jesus at the centre, we strive for shalom.

Justice

We get glimpses of shalom when we “do justice”. Living this way generates a strong community where human beings can flourish. So, to “do justice” is to go to places that are unravelling, and meet the needs of those who are vulnerable.

Michael (Birrell) connected us to Amos 5:24 “But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!”

Justice is “restoring to beauty what has been deformed.” It rolls on like a river. Justice must be constant, who we are and how we see the world.

The only way to do justice is to connect. To become interdependent. To be interwoven socially. We need to brave enough to examine our own prejudices. We all have them. How do they shape our perceptions, which in turn impact our actions? God calls us to act justly. To examine our own prejudices is a critical step in learning to wear justice like a robe, and daily choose justice as our response. By ‘doing justice’, we reconnect and bring healing to a community.

An example close to home is integrating engaging with our indigenous peoples. It's time to listen to First Nations people who have extensive knowledge of Country.

For tens of thousands of years, First Nations people have addressed changing weather on this continent and successfully applied their knowledges to land management. Their knowledge and contribution deserve recognition. It's time to connect and bring healing to a community.

Here are some ways to bring justice through shalom.

We've got a lot of healing, loving, restoring work to do.

1) Be light bearers

Bring the light of Jesus into the darkness. John 8:12: “When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, **“I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.”** The only way to remove darkness is to introduce light. Grab someone's hand. Stay with them while they crawl toward the light. Remind people of their worth and value, as people and before God. Be a light bearer to stir souls toward joy.

2) Be an advocate

Shift power, notice the oppressed, raise up the voice of the vulnerable. Walk alongside others, not over them or under them. Be **with** people. Help people use their voice. Do not be fearful of the cost. Stand up against injustice. Do not avoid the matter before you as it can only start with one. Be a cheerleader of others. Be moved by, in and with the Spirit into action. Do not be afraid to be an advocate!

3) Restore dignity

Jesus has restored our dignity through the indignity He took on for us. To restore dignity is to live as God intended. For many, God's image, written on their heart, is buried underneath a lot of rubble. Be a part of recovering it. Encourage gifts and passions. Fan beauty and hope into a flame. Be an agent to unbind and set another free, because in Christ, we are free indeed.

4) Be a peace maker

Practise shalom. Bring people together in unity and hope. Create the space for different voices without being threatened to hear opinions different to our own. Lay down our swords and reach out in love. Wash each other's feet. Jesus was not born into peace, but he taught it to us with the ultimate cost for eternal victory. Let us never forget these words (John 14:27) **"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."**

5) Love others

Jesus used love as a verb. **"Love each other as I have loved you"** (John 15:12). The Apostle Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13:13 **"Now these three remain— faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love."**

This is my hope, my prayer, the cry of my heart – that fuelled by God's Spirit moving through us, we would reflect these things in whatever ways we can. Not because we're "supposed to", not because we "have to" but because we are compelled to.

The Spirit of God should be alive in our hearts, transforming us to respond to the character of God, His good and perfect will.

Beauty

The concept of beauty is explored by Dr Bill Lawton in his book. He says *"Beauty lies in the intersecting layers of stillness, curiosity, and shalom, glimpsed through respectful relationships. Beauty encourages us to embrace differences and consider alternative perspective"*.

Beauty evokes love as the essence of our humanity, and love shapes as justice that crosses social boundaries. Biblical justice is central in every search for beauty, for how we see the world and understand the society we live in. When we are drawn out of ourselves into unselfish acts of service toward others, we see God as supremely beautiful. This is the point where Christian love looks different to human love.

Our human nature resists justice simply based on education or persuasion. It takes an experience of beauty to shake us from our self-centredness and entice us to seek justice.

Proverbs 14:31 says, **"Whoever oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honours God."**

God identifies closely with the vulnerable and needy. This can be seen throughout the Old Testament. It is the New Testament that allows us to fully grasp the degree to which God has done this.

Jesus was born in a feed trough. When his parents had him circumcised, their offering was just two pigeons. Jesus lived among the poor and marginalised. At the end of His life, Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, spent His last evening in a borrowed room, was given an unfair trial and when he died, He was laid in a borrowed tomb.

Jesus had little the world valued. He was discarded and treated unjustly. But it is only because of Him we have any hope. We see how far God was willing to go to identify with the oppressed of the world on the Cross. And He was doing it for us.

Jesus, who deserved acquittal and freedom got condemnation. Not only did Jesus identify with the poor, He stood in the place of all those of us in spiritual poverty and bankruptcy and paid our debt. He was the once, perfect sacrifice needed to bring people back into a relationship with their Creator. He opened the doors of Heaven and all who turn to Christ are welcomed in.

Now that is a thing of beauty. To accept this grace offering and dwell on it in your heart will make you one of the just.

So, peace, justice and beauty are integral to our journey of faith. Find God's peace, that is beyond our understanding, and be a peacemaker, living with humility and grace. Know God's restorative justice through Christ. Live this restorative justice by acting justly and loving mercy. Find beauty in the moment, in each person you encounter, see Christ.

Let justice be the foundation, peace be the journey, and beauty be the tapestry of a life lived in accordance with God's perfect will.

Let's keep growing together as we work out God's justice in our lives.

Let me pray using 1 John 4: 7-12

God's Love and Ours

⁷ Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

⁸ Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

⁹ This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him.

¹⁰ This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

¹¹ Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

¹² No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

Amen!