

Text: Acts 2: 1-21
Title: Signs of Shalom
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Most mornings I wake to chaos. Most mornings I get up early, watch the news, and wake to the chaos of tweets, leaks, talking heads, and images of terror. Most mornings when I'm longing for a sign of *shalom* I wake to chaos.

Do you know what I mean?
Do you know the same?

Yesterday Pastor Joe did a funeral for a young man with a good heart from a good family who grew up right around the corner from the Center. But he suffered from the internal chaos of mental illness, didn't get the care that he needed, and there was a hand gun in the house...

Almost every day in Chicago kids are killed by gunfire. Some are simply caught in the crossfire, some are caught in a sickness that is not of their making, all are caught in the chaos of guns, violence, drug trade, mass incarceration, unemployment, poverty, etc. Every morning we wake to the tally of how many were shot and how many were killed. You can barely absorb it or grieve it or claim that their lives matter ~ unrelenting chaos.

Almost every day we are flooded with the images of terrorist attacks: people running, shrapnel, blood spilled, rubble. Whether Coptic Christians on a bus, children at a concert, Muslim brothers and sisters in prayer, or pedestrians on a bridge... Suddenly, without warning or reason, there's chaos. And, the attacks are so common, and the technology so immediate, that we carry the images in phones in our pockets next to videos of squirrels on water skis.

A friend's wife is faced with a rare aggressive form of breast cancer. Her body produces a protein that mutates into a cancer; her body creates that which would kill her. Chaos on a cellular level. Together they face the uncertain and uneven journey of chemo and radiation doing battle to kill her body without killing her. Chaos...

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Dear friends, one way to read the Bible, one way to read the long story of scripture, is as a pitched battle between chaos and *shalom*. *Shalom* ~ where Creator, creature, and creation are webbed together in right relationship and mutual delight. From Genesis to Revelation there is a cosmic struggle between chaos and God's desire for creation's *shalom*.

Our text this morning finds the disciples in the midst of that struggle.

Jesus had been crucified, they'd seen him in some resurrected form, but now he was gone again. He told them to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit, but they weren't even sure what that meant. They were bewildered and frightened, so they huddled together. Wondering, worried, and waiting, they didn't know what else to do.

The disciples were Jews living under Roman occupation. It was a bustling-brutal-multi-cultural empire, in which the Jews were a scattered fragmented family. They were strangers in their own country; homeless in their homeland. They were trying to ride out the chaos waiting for something to change....

And, then one day there blew a violent wind,
then one day there came a fire,
then one day God breathed,
then one day the very power of the resurrection rippled out,
then one day everything changed.

Fifty days after the resurrection, ten days after the ascension, on a Jewish holiday, the disciples went from wondering and waiting to proclaiming the wonders of God in every tongue under heaven. They went from huddling in fear and uncertainty to embodying a glimpse of God's *shalom*. Everything changed because one day the Holy Spirit blew in a new and powerful way.

The list in our text of Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Capadocians, Pontusians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphylans, Egyptians, Libyans, Cryenes, and visitors from Rome is not a random list. With Jerusalem as the center, Luke lists the people and places of the farthest reaches of the known world. Like counting the numbers around a clock, Luke names every corner of creation. The power of God's Spirit, the *shalom* of God, ripples and reaches out to all people.

A few years ago, Sandi and I got off a train in Italy and we were completely lost. There were no signs that made any sense. While other countries often offered help in English, in Italy there was only Italian. We made our way to a busy courtyard, there were people everywhere, it was loud and confusing, but when we asked for directions people shrugged with indifference. The babble of an unfamiliar language was overwhelming. We were weary, lost, befuddled, had no idea which way to turn, and proceeded to have one of the biggest fights of our marriage. To be lost without language was chaos.

In the Genesis story of the Tower of Babel people are scattered and their languages are confused. The curse of Babel is a kind of fragmented chaos. But, the Pentecost story is Babel in reverse. For, rather than the confusion of language all hear and understand.

Rather than the scattering of nations, people are united.

Rather than a curse, this is a promise.

Rather than brokenness, there is a symbol of reconciliation.

Rather than chaos, there is a sign of *shalom*.

Dear friends, scripture reads that God's will is for *shalom*.

From patriarchs, to priests, to kings, to prophets, to Christ, to the cross, to the resurrection, to the pouring out of the Spirit, God keeps pursuing creation's *shalom*. And, the blowing of the Holy Spirit points toward and empowers that end.

Like a sign the Holy Spirit points toward what God is doing in Christ.

Like a tsunami the Holy Spirit pushes out and empowers the purpose of God in Christ.

Like a picture the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is a foreshadowing of creation's *shalom*, when, to quote Revelation:

...and there before was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne and to the Lamb."

Or, to quote Bono,

I believe in kingdom come when all the colors bleed into one...

Thanks be to God....

And yet, most mornings I wake to chaos.

Most mornings I still haven't found what I'm looking for.

Most mornings when I am longing for a sign of *shalom* I wake to chaos.

Do you know what I mean?

Do you know the same?

It's easy to get overwhelmed by the chaos of our world, or the chaos in our hearts, or the chaos in our heads, or the chaos in our families and our neighborhoods. And, quite frankly, if you're not at least sometimes overwhelmed by the chaos you probably aren't paying attention...

But, what if there are signs?

What if there are signs of *shalom* in the midst of the chaos?

What if the Holy Spirit is still blowing and pointing toward God's purpose in Christ?

Two congregations ~ one mostly black, one mostly white ~ have been friends and partners for forty years. Being gathered together today to worship and share a meal is a sign of *shalom*.

Women and children who are in transition or trouble are being given safe haven at the Center. And when they arrive there are quilts ~ hand quilted with love by women from Hope. A sign of *shalom*.

One old alcoholic helping another old alcoholic find suitable housing and make his way to meetings is a sign of *shalom*.

People standing beside and behind one another in the midst of cancer, or divorce, or grief, or depression is a sign of *shalom*.

The movement of the Spirit, that awakens in us the good news that we are loved, accepted, and forgiven by God in Christ, is a sign of *shalom*.

Men and women, young and old, gay and straight, black and white, the faithful and the fumbling coming to the table is a sign of *shalom*.

I think it is easy to miss these little signs of God's purpose in Christ. They might be the gentlest of breezes, they might barely make a ripple, but they are signs of *shalom*. Signs that light drives back darkness, love overcomes fear, life ultimately conquers death, and one day *shalom* will reign and chaos will be crushed.

Well, dear friends, maybe what we need is a reminder of these signs. Maybe what we need is a reminder that for all people the purpose of God in Christ is to restore creation to *shalom*. So, to that end we want to send you home with signs....

Yup. Literal signs.

They read, "Shalom, Salaam, Peace, Paz." (Hebrew, Arabic, English, Spanish.) The Elders and I hatched the idea. Chris Pierik did the design. We hope you will take a sign and put it in your yard, put it in your window, put it where ever you will be reminded and others will see it.

The truth is, in part, we thought about this because every day I see two Muslim women in hijabs walk past my office window, I wave, but maybe they could be reminded every day
that God's desire is *shalom*,
that our desire is *shalom*,
that at this little God-shop, on this corner of creation, we are committed to *shalom*.

So, take a sign. You don't have to. We hope you will. Who knows, maybe a neighbor will ask about your sign of *shalom* and you will have opportunity to bear witness to God's heart in Christ, or talk about your church, or wish a neighbor peace.

Hope's website is in one corner of the sign. Who knows, someone might go to the website and read there a brief statement about God's will for *shalom*, and Hope's commitment to that reality in all sorts of ways, and they'd be encouraged to join us. Who knows?

Take a few signs. Give them to your kids. Share them with others. We're going to send a box home with Joe to give to Roseland folks. What if there were little signs of *shalom* all over Chicagoland?

Dear friends, most mornings I wake to chaos. But!

But, one morning the wind blew, and God's Spirit was alive and among us, and there were signs of *shalom* in every corner of creation. So, come to the table, for here is a sign that one day God in Christ will welcome all of his people to his table and creation will be *shalom*.

Even so, come Lord Jesus.

Amen.