

PEACE ON EARTH

Josh Siders | TG@TW | December 5, 2021

So What? Jesus has brought restoration of worship and shalom to mankind.

Feel What? Peaceful

Now What? How can I welcome God's shalom & express it to those around me during Advent?

VISION CASTING

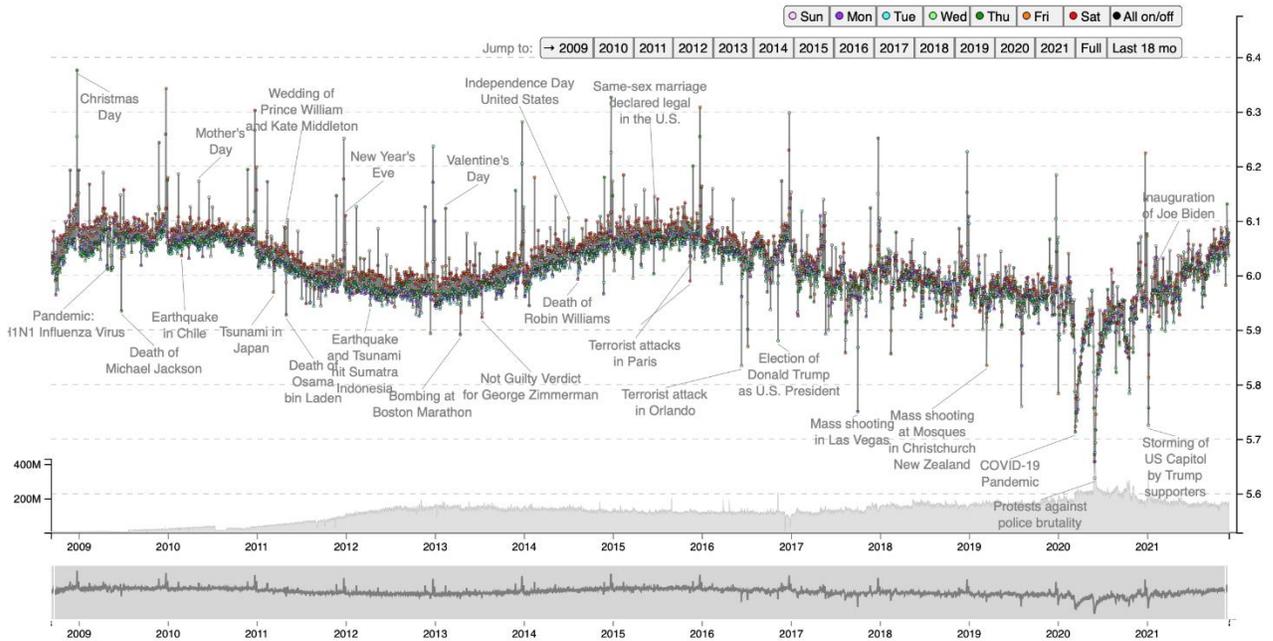
The purpose of Tallgrass at The Well is to create community together by inviting everyone into the Way of Jesus.

INTRODUCTION

The [Hedonometer](#) (heed-en-om-eter) is a project that began in the late 2000s, which was also the early days of Twitter. The project started as a way to gauge the happiness of the American population, or at least those who tweet. By analyzing a portion of the over 500 million tweets that go out on a daily basis, researchers can pair the ups and downs with corresponding events. For example, the highest peak each year is Christmas Day-- which isn't surprising and almost comforting that so many people still find a modicum of happiness during this time of year. But the low points scattered throughout are the various crises, national tragedies, and natural disasters our country experiences.

Average Happiness for Twitter

All Tweets in English.



All of this is to say: While current trends put us as bouncing back and regaining our collective happiness, how long can we maintain it? I don't mean to sound grim, but when we look to our circumstances to relieve our anxiety, there's always something next that will confront us. When we look at recent history, placing our hope for peace in world event will let us down, leaving us devastated. And I believe Advent is an invitation to us all to consider how we move from valley to peak.

Fleming Rutledge, Advent: “In the church, this is the season of Advent. It’s superficially understood as a time to get ready for Christmas, but in truth it’s the season for contemplating the judgment of God. Advent is the season that, when properly understood, does not flinch from the darkness that stalks us all in

this world. Advent begins in the dark and moves toward the light—but the season should not move too quickly or too glibly, lest we fail to acknowledge the depth of the darkness.”

This is a marvelous but sobering quote. It grabs our attention and simply says this: Advent is for the cynics and skeptics. Advent is for those whose hope is failing, for those who are venturing through the valley of the shadow of death. Advent is for those with unanswered prayers and unfulfilled dreams. Advent is for you and Advent is for me.

Ancient Israel lived in an in-between state, with their golden age led by David and Solomon squarely behind them, they looked forward to a future deliverance when the Babylonians and Assyrians and Persians would no longer overrun their land. They had mini-peaks when good kings brought them into the blessing of God, but it was always quickly followed by devastation and disappointment. The prophet Isaiah was the voice that God raised up to give the nation a verbal chastening for their disobedience, but also the promise of future flourishing when they returned to covenant faithfulness.

Isaiah 9:6-7 (NIV): For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice

and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the LORD Almighty will accomplish this.

This promised future pointed to a deliverer, a Messiah, who would save the Jewish people. He would rule with heart like David and with wisdom like Solomon. He would be a Prince who brings peace back to the nation so they could live fully as God's people once again.

This promised peace is what we all want. We want God to move in a specific way to bring about a situation in our life that benefits us. And we want him to do it sooner rather than later.

Now, when we speak of peace, it's important to describe what we mean. Peace, as we often use it, can mean an absence of conflict. To achieve peace, it's the cease-fire between warring nations or arguing siblings, is a good thing.

But this isn't an exhaustive definition when Scripture uses the word peace. The Hebrew word is shalom, and it's used over 300 times in the Bible, the most often in the book of Isaiah. Shalom means "whole, complete, or fulfilled." It's been used as a greeting for thousands of years, and you'll most likely remember this is how the Apostle Paul starts many of his letters: with grace and peace to his listeners.

Transition: As we gain clarity on the Scripture's concept of shalom, this puts us in a better position to understand how magnificent the coming of this Prince of Peace truly is.

SOLUTION

In the Gospels, we read the familiar stories about the birth of Jesus. Joseph is engaged to Mary and they travel back to his ancestral home in Bethlehem because Caesar Augustus had ordered a census, most likely for the purposes of tax collection. It was a very difficult journey, most obviously because Mary was pregnant with Jesus.

Luke 2:8-18 (NIV): And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

An angel appears to these shepherds who are going about their everyday business. This is good news of great joy-- the birth of Jesus the Messiah, the One who will reign on David's throne and the sign for them to believe this is true is that the baby has been born in Bethlehem, David's hometown.

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

The writer, Luke, is basically trolling the Caesars here. When Caesar Augustus' birth was announced, it was said

to be "good news" to the Roman Empire and nothing was spared to make a to-do out of the occurrence. Luke is saying, "Oh, you had messengers on horseback? How cute. This King caused the sky to burst open with the heavenly host freaking out lowly shepherds because they were so excited."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

God's purposes in Jesus is summed up here in this line: **"Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (NKJV)** First, Jesus will bring a restoration of worship to the Father in heaven. Our understanding of who God his and his purposes for us are revealed in Jesus, restored from the Fall when thing went awry.

Secondly, he will release his favor on his people, those who turn to him and trust in him.

Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*: "The picture of being a person of God's favor was a Jewish way of saying that someone was numbered among God's chosen people.... This remark makes it clear that salvation and its fullness are not automatic for everyone."

Transition: So God's shalom is available for all, but only those who respond will partake of its benefits. Let's talk about how God's peace affects us.

APPLICATION

Three Dimensions Of God's Peace:

1. Upward

We have peace with God through the sacrifice of Jesus. Because we're unable to achieve forgiveness from God and reconciliation with him on our own, we needed Someone to come and procure it on our behalf. This is what is eluded to in the Gospel of Matthew when the angel visits Joseph:

Matthew 1:20-21 (NIV): ...An angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, "Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins."

Peace with God means we can cease our striving to find elusive rest and we can stop try to earn God's acceptance or affection. It's available to us as a gift we simply need to receive.

2. Inward

When the relationship to God is changed, we receive a new identity. Instead of him being a harsh taskmaster, we see him as a loving Father. And instead of us being worthless and filthy, we are welcomed sons and daughters. We cannot underestimate how much healing this brings to our souls. We must realize that, as Mike Bickle says, we're not sinners who struggle to love God, but lovers of God who sometimes struggle with sin.

But, we also cannot underestimate the damage the Fall and a life lived disconnected from God's Spirit has done to us. Following Jesus is a life-long pursuit of shalom, or wholeness, that takes daily redirection and realignment.

Robert Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*: “...The process of spiritual shaping is a primal reality of human existence. Everyone is in a process of spiritual formation! Every thought we hold, every decision we make, every action we take, every emotion we allow to shape our behavior, every response we make to the world around us, every relationship we enter into, every reaction we have toward the things that surround us and impinge upon our lives—all of these things, little by little, are shaping us into some kind of being. We are being shaped into either the wholeness of the image of Christ or a horribly destructive caricature of that image--destructive not only to ourselves but also to others, for we inflict our brokenness upon them.”

And this brings us to the last dimension because when we stop at seeking inward peace, we fail to go far enough. If

gaining peace is all about feeling better about ourselves, we've only settled for a therapeutic gospel, not a thoroughly transformative one. And it's a gospel that is only good news for us, not for those around us. It looks like being ok with the world going to hell as long as my sleep isn't disrupted at night. And this falls far short of the radical good news Jesus preached.

3. **Outward**

The wholeness of shalom will always overflow to those around us--the relationships we have with friends and neighbors, our coworkers, and especially our family members.

Can we say that shalom has taken root in us if the community at large stays the same? Doesn't the good news of Jesus have something to say to troubled marriages, food and housing insecurity, crime and incarceration, abuse and neglect? Do we expect people to ever want to know about this Jesus we preach if the peace we carry never makes it out into streets of our city to affect the lives of those we encounter?

One big problem is that in our brain's development, we've tend to categorize people into like and unlike. We are constantly sorting people to determine who are supposedly dangerous--those unlike us--and those who are safe--those like us. We, by our biology, are looking to make enemies out of people for the sake of self-preservation. And it's difficult to extend shalom to those we

have already, often subconsciously, predetermined are different and against us. So, we're reminded by the Apostle Paul:

Ephesians 2:2-15 (NIV): Remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations....

Transition: Dr. Brian Lorritts who [tells the story](#) of the local tribunals in post-Apartheid South Africa that were set up so victims could seek justice and the country could begin to heal. [One story](#) of the process stands above the rest:

INSPIRATION

After Apartheid ended in South Africa, a white police officer named Mr. Van der Boek was put on trial. The court found that he had come to a woman's home, shot her son at point-blank range, and then burned the young man's body on a fire while he and his officers partied nearby. The woman's husband was killed by the same men, and his body also was burned.

A member of the South African Truth & Reconciliation Commission turned to her and asked, “So, what do you want? How should justice be done for this man?”

“I want three things,” the woman said confidently: “I want first to be taken to the place where my husband’s body was burned so that I can gather up the dust and give his remains a decent burial. My husband and son were my only family.”

“I want, secondly, for Mr. Van der Boek to become my son. I would like for him to come twice a month to the ghetto and spend a day with me so that I can pour out on him whatever love I still have.”

“And finally, I would like Mr. Van der Boek to know that I offer him my forgiveness because Jesus Christ died to forgive. This was also the wish of my husband. And so, I would kindly ask someone to come to my side and lead me across the courtroom so that I can take Mr. Van der Boek in my arms, embrace him, and let him know that he is truly forgiven.”

The message of Advent reminds us that finding peace doesn't mean there won't be pain in your life. And it doesn't mean that everything will turn out the way you expect it to. What it does mean is that God will meet you in those moments with his presence. And you could be the very instrument that he uses to bring healing to those around you who need it most.

When God moved into the neighborhood, once and for all we were told there is no injustice too big to be toppled.

There is no evil that is too dark to be enlightened by the glory of God.

Transition: So how do seek shalom for us and in our lives?

CONCLUSION

Next Step:

- How can I welcome God's shalom & express it to those around me during Advent?

**Prayer
Invitation**