An Ecclesiology of Shalom[1]

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José Humphreys[2]: Imagine a world of shalom—God's wholeness, God's intention—where some say nothing is missing, and nothing is broken. The story of Scripture is the story of God's shalom, from God to creation, from sin to redemption, to the new heavens and the new earth. Shalom is the thread that ties it all together. So what is shalom? How does it help us bring the Scripture together, and how does it inform mission? What does it mean to be the church in light of God's mission of restoring shalom through Christ?

Back in 2007, our church was formed when a group of diverse people began to discern how the church could be a public witness and a sign of the kingdom in our community. We were a quirky kind of group, racially diverse and ecumenical. Among us were evangelicals and a couple of Presbyterians. There were three Pentecostals who were recovering from burn out. There was also a Bapticostal—that's what you get when you cross a Baptist and a Pentecostal. There was a young woman who was

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between Islam and Christianity. There were a couple of agnostics who weren't quite sure whether God existed; they just knew that something was out there. There was an Irish Catholic and two Christian anarchists. We sounded like the beginning of a good joke that takes place in a bar, except it was about the church.

One of our anchor verses was Jeremiah 29:7, "Also, seek 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, you too will prosper" (Jeremiah 29:7, NIV). Discerning this text in context was the challenge of our day. Our context in East Harlem is a gentrifying neighborhood. We can look around and witness our fair share of cupcake shop invasions. One of our challenges has been to respond to the economic shifts that seem to be on turbo drive. Manhattan can seem more like a port of call than a destination for rootedness. People come, and people go. They're hurried; they're scattered. It can be tough to cultivate a sense of community and tetheredness.

I remember a pastor lamenting over café con leche (the original latte), what kind of transformation or public witness can we truly expect if the typical Manhattan church attender comes to church thirty Sundays per year for one and a half hours each week (or three if you're Pentecostal)? How does one live an integrated vision of shalom under these circumstances, in this ecology? Like this pastor, I've lamented the diminished role of the church in our society, in North America for that matter. Yet I also find there are many churches reimagining their togetherness in God's shalom with God's Spirit, while living out God's purposes at the intersection of the world's breaches and God's gospel of peace.

Adam Gustine: I come at this topic a little bit differently than José, because shalom is not my native language. In fact, in some ways I'm a liability in the work of pursuing God's shalom. As a white male American, I carry a way of seeing and engaging the world that has serious blind spots for the work of seeking God's shalom. I've come to see that injustice—the shattering of God's shalom—is not easily understandable to someone who has not experienced the backside of privilege. Growing up, I had no awareness of systemic injustice or structural inequality, which meant I had no sense of how central justice is to the heart of God. This meant that I could embrace a theological frame that focused almost entirely on questions of personal security and salvation. The idea that God's kingdom intentions might include a renewal of the deep brokenness of

the world was not part of my theological imagination. Shalom and the intersection of church and justice felt ancillary to the real work of the gospel. My last decade or so of ministry has been both the hardest and most sacred of my life, as God has allowed sisters and brothers from a wide array of stories different than my own to very graciously help me see what I was so sure I saw fully long ago.

My doctoral cohort leader was Manny Ortiz. The first day of class Dr. Ortiz introduced what he called the "hermeneutics of repentance." He said that many of us see the work of hermeneutics as coming to the text for answers. But in an increasingly globalizing and urbanizing world where issues of injustice are coming to the fore in ever-increasing ways, he was concerned that our quest for answers would make us arrogant. He drew a descending spiral on the white board and said, "I come to the text, and I invite you to come to the text, not in search of a better answer but in search of a deeper question. The search for a deeper question is posture of repentance. It's a way of saying, I'm so blind that I don't even know the right question to ask."

Ortiz's point was that hermeneutics ought to be an exercise of discipleship, of becoming a different kind of person, and this requires repentance. This lesson was huge for me and has stuck with me all of these years. I believe that without a hermeneutic of repentance, I and those who look like me will always be a hopeless liability in the work of seeking God's shalom. Through embracing a hermeneutic of repentance, I believe it is possible to mitigate this liability, just a bit, so that the shalom of God might be expressed more fully in and through me in the world. I want to invite us all, but particularly my white and majority culture sisters and brothers, to lean into this idea of a hermeneutic of repentance, because there's too much at stake to pretend that we already have the answers, that we already see everything that needs to be seen.

JH: What is at stake here, then? If we have been raised evangelical in America, chances are we have been formed in either an over-personalized gospel or a fragmented one that sees justices as the latter part of a sequence. In such a fragmented view, justice can be reduced to one of many checkboxes on the ministry menu, an implication of the gospel, or even an addendum to it. A more integrated view of the gospel challenges us, the church, into a larger story that takes personal, interpersonal, and even political dimensions as integral parts of the larger gospel story. Because the gospel message, the story we tell every Sunday shapes us.

And it's about shaping us to become more and more like Christ.

As evangelicals it behooves us, then, to revisit our language of faith and ask what it means to be Christ-like. If you put five Christians in a room and ask them, "What's the gospel of Jesus Christ?" you may get five different responses. Our words can signify different things. For example, a 2016 Barna study concluded that church people's view of being Christ-like in North America can entail "using the way of Jesus as a means of pursuing the way of the self."[3] If we are really trying to shape disciples to become more Christ-like, we need to revisit our language.

In contrast to the Barna study, Christ's life demonstrates how the way of shalom is at the heart of Christian maturity and that we're all connected to a greater ecology of both beauty and brokenness. When I think about beauty and brokenness, I think about the question Howard Thurman posed in his seminal book *Jesus and the Disinherited*: What does your gospel say to those whose backs are against the wall?[4] When Jesus said, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he's anointed me to preach the good news" (cf. Luke 4:18), he demonstrates that concern for others is central to the culture of the kingdom, not just an implication. The gospel is for the poor, for the incarcerated, for the oppressed within the context of empire, and those seeking a reset through Jubilee.

In all this talk about the gospel and its social dimensions, it's important to make salient that I am evangelical. Or, I'm *still* evangelical. I still believe in personal salvation. I still believe in repentance—the need to change our allegiances so that we can be aligned with the kingdom of God. But I also recognize that there's a fuller gospel that many of us are yearning for. We look around the world, and we see that the world is seeking a more expansive story than we've been giving them—one that brings together the personal dimension but is not overly personalized, one that harmonizes this with public works. That's what the gospel of peace is about. Jesus's redeeming love does this. It draws us back to God, and it turns us outward to the world with the face of the church. Shalom will continuously be outward facing, beginning in the family of faith and flowing out into the world. Heralding and embodying this good news will then be the church's performance, because we desperately need a theology that is as big as our gospel.

[3] *The State of the Church and Family Report* (Barna Group, 2016).
[4] Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

AG: The first time José said to me, "We don't have a theology big enough for the whole gospel," I just about fell out of my chair. "We don't have a theology big enough for the whole gospel." That is a big claim, and it's one we don't make lightly. In all the ways we've experienced church—being trained to be pastors within congregations—for all the ways we searched to put our Bibles together, to make decisions about our theological convictions and our missional priorities, we always find ourselves holding on to a shadow of the big story of what God is doing in the world through Jesus.

On the one hand, we recognize that we're always going to fall short of capturing the fullness of God's good news, that we'll always fail to grasp the entirety of God's missional intent. Even so, we need a way of framing the gospel story that doesn't just bring together the variety of theological commitments represented in this room. We need a way of framing the gospel story that pulls all of us—conservative or progressive, old school or new school, missional or attractional, urban, suburban, town and country—into the deeper story of God's great work of redemption.

If you'll permit us to offer a suggestion, we believe a commitment to a serious and embodied theology of God's shalom provides the framework needed to stitch the story of Scripture together in a stunning and sacred way as well as a pathway for living out the gospel in real ways in the communities God has placed us. Shalom is not abstract. It is not ethereal or otherworldly. Shalom is concrete, or maybe we should say that shalom is embodied because the natural habitat of God's shalom is and has always been a community of persons. That's why we can't ignore the implications of God's shalom for our churches. It's why our theological convictions surrounding God's shalom have to find their way into lived reality of congregational life, because shalom bears its fruit in community. It has always been that way.

The entire story of Scripture is the story of shalom being expressed in a community and then extended to the world through that community. And that begins with God. The Trinity is the original community of shalom. "In the beginning God." Before the creation of the world, before the destruction caused by sin, before the need ever arose for salvation and the work of justice, God. And God is, in God's very essence, a people. Now that may seem a little strange to say that God has always existed throughout eternity in a peopled form, but central to what makes God God is the fact that God exists in community. The Scripture reveals this Triune God to us as a community of three that make up the one true God

of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The reality that God has always existed in community is important because it is the baseline for our understanding of shalom. Because God exists in perfect harmony between Father, Son, and Spirit. God is an expression of shalom, because in God "nothing is missing, and nothing is broken."[5] In God there is no oppression or evil or injustice or marginalization. Each person of the Trinity exists in loving, dynamic mutuality with the other persons of the Trinity, and each, in their specific way, contributes to and also submits to the community of the others.

This community that God enjoys is the highest and greatest expression of God's shalom. And it is also this God who exists as shalom community who acts in the world in creation in the opening chapters of Genesis. If God exists as the perfect expression of shalom, then it is possible to see creation as the original extension of shalom. The reality of creation itself suggests that it would not do for God to stop at being simply an expression of shalom. Shalom had to extend out. So when God creates Adam and Eve, and by extension all of humanity, we witness a widening of the circle of persons who live within the relational borders of shalom. What was originally experienced in God by God alone is now an ever-widening circle of those persons who participate in that community of God's shalom. God's mandate to Adam and Eve aligns with this idea of expression and extension, because Adam and Eve become participants in the extension of shalom to the rest of creation, to care for the earth, to be fruitful and multiply. These are tangible ways in which Adam and Eve demonstrate shalom community where nothing is missing, and nothing is broken.

JH: This picture of God's partnership with Adam and Eve began with creation and God's good intention. For five days God created, and at the end of each, God looked at creation and said, "It is good." But something deeper happens at the end of the sixth day. God sees the woman and the man God created. God sees the totality of everything that God has done and doesn't just say "good" but "very good." In essence, emphatically good and forcefully good; in the Hebrew it's *tov m'od*, very good in its totality and wholeness. Things were in right relationship with one another. In her book, *The Very Good Gospel*, Lisa Sharon Harper writes this:

[5] I first heard this phrase from John Perkins, one of the pioneers of the Christian Community Development Association.

> In the Hebrew conception of the world, all of creation is connected. The well-being of the whole depends on the well-being of each individual part. The Hebrew conception of goodness was different than the Greeks. The Greeks located perfection within the object itself. A thing or a person strove toward perfection. But the Hebrews understood goodness to be located between things. As a result the original hearers would have understood *tov* to refer to the ties of relationship between things in creation.[6]

Harper is emphasizing how shalom is the connective tissue of right relationship between persons, places, or even things in Hebrew thought. It can help us look at creation as an ecology, an ecosystem that is woven together through God's goodness with everything interconnected. In light of this we can witness just how egregious sin's impact is. Not many verses after God calls creation very good, Adam and Eve eat the fruit, leading to an unraveling of shalom, a disconnection not only from interpersonal relationship but also a disconnection from the land, from the Garden of Eden. With shalom unraveled, God's great ecology was impacted and, as a result, the intended wholeness of creation undone.

When I ponder the image of something becoming undone, I envision my mother-in-law, who loves to knit. There were times when my son, her grandson, would look at the intricate knitting of her sweaters or scarves, and, doing what kids sometimes do, he would pull on the loose thread, causing part of her work to unravel. If creation is God's intricate knitting together, sin causes the integrity of relationships to break down.

Sin is far more multi-dimensional than then we perhaps suspect. If we have a thin view of sin, we will have an equally thin view of the gospel. Just as the word became flesh (John 1:14), sin will incarnate itself becoming an embodied reality in our world as well. This is what we call powers and principalities. We see this in the sin of racism. Racism is partly the categorizing of darker bodies as a lesser value. It's a curse imputed on bodies, wherein darker bodies are seen as imaging less of God or, in US history, as three-fifths human.

We also witness the unraveling of sin in generational trauma. Studies show that trauma gets trapped in people's bodies, in the body's tissue.

[6] Lisa Sharon Harper, *The Very Good Gospel: How Everything Wrong Can Be Made Right* (New York: Waterbrook, 2016), 31.

Trauma rewires the brain, causing genetic changes. There's a whole field dedicated to this called epigenetics. The impact of sin is not just a spiritual reality but a deeply embodied one. The church needs to consider the breakdown of shalom in these many dimensions of life. What does our gospel have to say to those whose backs are against the wall, especially in a world where fragmented people create fragmented worlds and divided realities? Hurt people *hurt* people, but healed people, with the good news of the gospel, begin to *heal* people as wounded healers.[7]

AG: The entrance of sin into the world fractures the shalom community. Within the people of God, a fissure appears. This fissure is caused by the rejection of dynamic, loving community in favor of individualistic, self-centered existence. Tragically, sin not only destroys our capacity to express God's shalom, but it undercuts our capacity to extend shalom as well. Within one generation of creation, we witness the gravest of all injustices—murder. Seeing sin through this lens of shalom helps me see the ways in which my view of sin is rather thin. Sin is not mere error; sin is not mere missing the mark. Sin is more than that. Sin is a breakdown of the community of shalom. Sin is a kind of infidelity, not only before God, although certainly before God, but also among the people of God's shalom community. Sin pulls away the fabric holding together the human family who bear the image of the God who purposed to see us all in loving community. And that lens of shalom also gives us a way to think of sin that holds together the personal and systemic. The effects of sin are cosmic in that they have structural, social, and political expressions, but they are also cardiological: they infect the heart. If shalom means wholeness, then sin creates a deep breech, a brokenness, an incapacitation of our personal and communal will and ability to live in fidelity to God and to one another. We're not able to do what God made us to do, and it's here that something must be done.

JH: Shalom can provide us with a language for spiritual formation, a language that connects our gospel to both the personal and the public dimensions of life at its breakdowns. If sin is about division and relational breakdown, then the gospel we proclaim is about re-tethering and the unity of the Spirit. As shalom-makers, we work toward the mending of

[7] Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer: Ministry in Contemporary Society* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1972).

the world across differences. Our individual and collective vocation is to bring healing justice. Justice has many dimensions, and if we look at it through a gospel prism we'll see that justice is about healing. The church is called to work toward the healing of the world with Jesus.

Paul claims that Jesus is our shalom, our peace, and that Jesus, in his bodily sacrifice, brought together two races of Gentile and Jew and has torn down the wall of hostility (cf. Ephesians 2:11–16). Healing the divide between Jew and Gentile is a holy tethering. This healing justice was seen continually throughout the life and ministry of Jesus even before the cross. Each of Christ's miracles pointed to a whole gospel for the whole world, even as each made the gospel particular in a local context at a specific unraveling point. No miracle was the same; each was distinct, addressing the multiple ways tears in the fabric of shalom can label, dehumanize, and separate people. We see in Jesus's miracles an integrative character. In Luke 8, Jesus frees a demon-possessed man and sends him home to testify. The man returned home and shared personal shalom, but he also brought neighborhood shalom, or a political shalom depending on one's reading of that text.

In Luke 17:11–19, Jesus demonstrates this restorative and integrating approach on the road to Jerusalem. When he encounters ten lepers on the way, Jesus says, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." This was not only for the purpose of testimony. This testimony would also ensure the men were reintegrated into society as a form of social shalom. They say, "I now have a story to share with the rest of the world. Look at what the Lord has done." Like we used to say in the old church, "He touched my body, / He touched my mind, / He saved me just in time, / And I'm gonna praise his name."

In Luke 19:1–10, Jesus encounters Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, a predatory lender. After salvation comes to his house, Zacchaeus says he will return four times what he stole, an act of restorative justice within his own 'hood in Jericho. Zacchaeus wouldn't need to go with Jesus on the itinerant path, but he went back to his own ecosystem and made a just impact. Notice Jesus says this, "Today salvation has come into this home" (Luke 19:9). The "sinner's prayer" is not in the text; repentance came through Zacchaeus's act of economic shalom, his righting of wrongs. This was part of the mission and the message of Jesus. Every miracle Jesus performed pointed to the kingdom and a greater wholeness to come.

AG: When I was a kid, I was into puzzles. I was constantly putting them together, then I would glue them together to hang in my room. I was addicted to the idea of a bigger picture emerging from so many little pieces. I found that incredibly satisfying. I've often thought how different the process would be without the picture on the puzzle box. Can you imagine trying to make sense of the picture from the little fragments alone? You would be fumbling along, trying to figure out how the pieces go together. I'm an Enneagram One, so I'm always looking for ways to demonstrate that I'm achieving more. There were times I tried to put a puzzle together without looking at the picture on the box, as though this would be a greater accomplishment. But if we do that, we're unnecessarily limiting ourselves, rejecting a resource that's available to us, a picture of the end product. In a puzzle, they give you the picture for a reason; puzzling is all about seeing the end product and working toward it.

Theology should be similar. Theology should be the work of seeing the end and working toward this vision. Yet in many of the churches I've experienced, it seems like we do theology the way I tried to do the puzzle, without attending to the picture at the end. Maybe we think it's a better accomplishment to assemble our theological convictions without a deep understanding of the end of the story, or maybe we forget that God never intended us to train our theological imaginations without a clear and compelling picture of that ultimate end. We contend that the end of the story ought to help us make sense of all the pieces that we put together along the way. The telos of the story of God should so thoroughly saturate our imagination that it gives renewed meaning and life to the rest of the text and the work of living it out in the world.

If the theological frame of shalom has merit for how we stitch together the entire story of Scripture, we should expect the end of the story—the "picture on the puzzle box"—not only to reflect that but to justify and inform those conclusions. It should tell us about that greater wholeness to come that Jesus inaugurated and pointed us toward. We ought to be able to see the imagery of shalom community being expressed, taking root, and extending out to the entire created order. We should expect to find evidence of a people gathered in dynamic relationship with one another and with God, the community marked by total shalom and flourishing. In the pages of Revelation, that's exactly what we find:

> After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe,

> people, and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were 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." (Revelation 7:9–10, NIV)

Nation, tribe, people, and language—the fault lines of division in our world—become the evidence of renewed shalom in community where, instead of division, people say, "our God." God has made it right. And in Revelation 21:

> Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth has passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 'He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death' or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." (Revelation 21:1–5, NIV)

I love that. "I'm making everything new. Write it down." We have a new heaven and a new earth. Renewed restoration of God's intentions. Wholeness fully expressed and indeed extended to the ends of the earth. The evidence of all of the brokenness of shalom. The fruits of sin and death have been done away with. Finally, on the last page of the Bible we have words from Revelation 22:

> Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. They will see his

face, and his name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:1–5, NIV)

The leaves of the trees and the tree of life is for the healing of the nations, and there will no longer be any curse. God's dwelling place is among the people. God will dwell. They will be God's people. God will be their God. God's tomorrow is an eternal shalom community where everything wrong has been made right. And what started with God in a trinitarian community of shalom has now become fully restored—a global, even cosmic community of shalom, fully expressed and fully extended.

So what do we do with all this? Our hope is that spending time teasing out a biblical theology of shalom might give us a deeper capacity to actually embody it in our congregational life. That's our prayer—for all of us in our churches to have a lived ecclesiology of shalom, because shalom bears its fruit in community. In the remaining pages we want to point to a couple of practices to help us lean into shalom as an orienting way of life in our congregations.

JH: When we consider our work in the world as a church, we begin to consider our stories or our testimony at the breaches. Our gospel says nothing to those at the breaches if we are not there ourselves. What will our gospel say to those whose backs are against the wall? I believe we can begin to reclaim some of the tools of the church's trade, such as the practice of testimony at the breaches and fissures of life. We testify while we are going through trials and challenges, not just at the end of them. The Bible affirms that we shall overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the power of our testimonies. That reality is the convergence between God's good news and our places of unraveling. That's where we find the basis of our testimony in lived practice. Lived testimonies that proclaim God's good news in personal, public, and political dimensions are practices for seeing more of Jesus in more places. We get to witness snapshots of the kingdom through people's lives, in real-time. All we really have are snapshots, a facsimile; we only see in part. But we see more clearly when God graces us with signs and wonders.

When we think about the practice of testimonies, we're simply reclaiming the tools of our trade as a church. Unfortunately, our Sunday services are not always set up for this kind of intimacy. At times even our small

groups are shaped more like spaces for heady intellectual exercises. In contrast, with testimony I've seen the breakdown of educational barriers and class barriers in the church, as even someone with a third-grade education can stand with the authority of God and say, "Thus sayeth the Lord, I've seen God's good hand at the breaches." I've witnessed testimonies in the old church, and it was the most beautiful thing. We would testify to God's intervention in our educational endeavors, in our work, even in picking a ripe mango and attributing that gratitude to God. God was even there when I was picking that ripe fruit.

People at our churches can begin to testify at the intersection of faith and work, sharing how God is using their vocation to bring love and light into a specific industry. As pastors, instead of only asking, "What can you do for our church?" we can also ask our people, "How can I get on God's agenda for what God is doing in your life? What is God doing on Wall Street or Main Street? What might God be doing in that classroom in the South Bronx? How is God beginning to do exceedingly above what you could have ever asked or imagined because you have begun to see a bigger gospel?"

What about testimonies of the body? Do we still believe God heals in our day? I recently had a parishioner whose seventy-year-old father had a brain hemorrhage, and the prognosis wasn't promising. In pure millennial fashion, we got everybody praying via text through Whatsapp. Many of us prayed, and after two days we received news he had a miraculous recovery, confounding the nurses and doctors. This moment was a snapshot, a facsimile, an image of what God's wholeness and shalom look like in our world, right here, right now. We see God's hand bringing shalom into the world's ecology.

I believe we all desire a bigger gospel. A gospel that begins with personal salvation, springs forth into new allegiances, shapes and creates new cultures, creates harmony, and reaches out to the poor, the disenfranchised, and those who have been forgotten by the world. We see God's hand bringing shalom into the world's ecology. In 2 Corinthians 3:2, Paul reminds us that the greatest testimonies are not made of brick and mortar but of people's lives for the world to see. As leaders we get to curate these snapshots of a greater wholeness to come.

AG: I love José's image of the church locating itself in the breaches, of situating ourselves in the fissures where sin has corrupted our capacity to participate in the shalom community of God, finding ourselves in

places where the broken remains of God's shalom lie on the ground of our own lives, our neighborhoods, our cities, and our world. And I love that because when we intentionally put ourselves in the places of deepest brokenness, we have an opportunity to enact a parable of something different, a parable of God's tomorrow. The historian Justo González very helpfully calls the church "a *mañana* people," a people who live out of God's tomorrow today.[8] Just as the future kingdom of God breaks into the present in Jesus Christ, so we as the body of Christ are a people who give expression to God's future in the present. We are the people who enact the vision that John had in Revelation. We give people that first taste, that snapshot of the intentions God has for the whole world.

I grew up in a family that had a fair share of farmers, so I spent a lot of my younger years around fields, listening to people talk about crops and yields and harvests. Maybe that makes me particularly drawn to the image of the demonstration plot. A demonstration plot is the small sectioned-off part of a field where a farmer can experiment with a new seed or a new cultivation method. These are clearly marked areas so that others can observe the new fruit that is being produced. The demonstration plot gives expression to something new. It gives expression to something that is now possible.

The church is a demonstration plot of God's tomorrow. The church is an embodied picture of the new fruit made possible by the person and work of Jesus. In this sense the church is deeply eschatological. If God going to restore shalom in every nook and cranny of creation, how does this impact the mission and vision of our community? How does our strategic planning process begin with the picture on the box, the ultimate telos of the story of God in Christ, and attempt to work back from there to the concrete ways we live out our faith in our neighborhoods?

If God in Christ is tearing down the dividing wall of hostility and creating one new humanity, what does that mean for our churches and our local communities to act, as Paul wrote, as ambassadors of that reconciliation (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:20)? Is it possible to be a church that intentionally stands in the breaches of broken human relationships and the broken systems and cultures they produce and demonstrates a compelling alternative to the world's status quo? If God in Christ is healing the wounds of suffering and brokenness, do our churches reflect that same

[8] Justo L. González, *Mañana: Christian Theology from a Hispanic Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1997).

commitment to binding up the brokenhearted and locating ourselves in and alongside the places of deepest suffering in our world—not just going to the point where it makes us uncomfortable, but going to the extreme place?

To say that the church is eschatological is simply to say that the church embodies in ever-increasing ways the reality of God's future new creation in our day-to-day life together. People ought to be able to get a sense of what God is up to cosmically by looking at our concrete life and community. The world is desperate for an eschatological church. They might not know it, but they are desperate for a church that dares to live out God's tomorrow today. As Paul says, all of creation is groaning. All of creation is waiting for the children of God to show up (cf. Romans 8:19, 22).

JH: I love Adam's illustration of becoming God's demonstration plot. I also think about the church as God's experiment in staying together. Multi-ethnic ministry can be messy. So I want to explore another practice: showing up at the breaches as an embodied form of liturgy. One of the tools of the church's trade is liturgy. Liturgy literally means the work of the people. When liturgy is connected to our current social reality, it positions the church to become a more accurate interpreter of the times, especially during moments of suffering and pain.

I remember July 4 and 5, 2016, when Philando Castile, an African American man, was shot and killed by the police. He was pulled over by a police officer, and, while trying to show the officer his carrier's permit, the officer shot him four times, in plain sight of his wife and four-year-old child who were in the vehicle. Not one day later, another African American man, Alton Sterling, was killed by police in Louisiana. Social media was flooded with video images, and many of us were retraumatized, headline after headline. Not one day later, five cops were shot in Dallas at a protest rally. The trauma we experienced as black and brown people, as cops, and as partners was compounded. That week, a diverse group of East Coast Conference churches showed up at New York Covenant Church. Showing up together is a way of infusing our liturgy with a sense of incarnation and God's presence. In other words, it was important for our white sisters and brothers to show up, lament, and grieve with us.

This gathering included poignant prayers, words of hope, and singing. A powerful healing moment took place when Peter Ahn, a Korean American Covenant pastor, began to read from Ephesians, where it says we are one body with many parts. In a mostly black and brown space,

Peter began to make confessions that took us all by surprise. He confessed how, in his experience, Korean Americans could take a more active in role in being allies for black and brown sisters and brothers. Many of us were in tears hearing this confession, as it proved healing not only for many black brothers but also black sisters represented in that room. Peter recognized how the church, as sacred ground for healing, can also be infused with moments of racial justice, honoring real-time pain and disinheritance. But he was also addressing larger divides in our community between African Americans and Asian Americans. And that could be extended to tensions between black and brown as well.

Or it could even be extended to many of us men confessing our machismo and beginning to bridge the gender divide. We can become allies. Recently someone pushed me further on this concept, saying, "I don't want you to just be an ally; I want you to be an accomplice as well." At first I expressed trepidation, because being an accomplice meant something else where I grew up. What she was encouraging was that I not only show up but that I get in the trenches as well. Because it's in that proximity that our eyes begin to see things from another vantage point—the vantage point of those whose backs are against the wall. It is in that proximity God begins to do a work. It's in that proximity we are transformed, and we begin to see others beyond a single narrative into a generous place of dimensionality in Christ and in Christ's image. This embodied fellowship and solidarity will mean becoming a student of other people's struggles so that we can serve others with nuance and distinction. What if the church could take more leaps into faith this way? Justice and healing wouldn't be mutually exclusive but would go hand in hand.

AG: Liz Mosbo VerHage gave us a great reminder of the way that justice is discipleship. Formation that fails to integrate the shalom of God is going to fail at discipleship, because we're going to leave people to deal with the cracks and the fissures on their own. When we frame justice or pursuing God's shalom as outreach, we fail biblical interpretation 101. Scripture's call to pursue justice is not framed as an issue of outreach or as mission in a narrowly defined sense. The call to justice and the pursuit of God's shalom is always an issue of fidelity to God and God's people. If sin is infidelity, then justice is about fidelity—discipleship. God's mission is the restoration of a shalom community, and discipleship is the way we learn to live in that community. God's shalom then becomes a matter of

the character of our lives and the character of our life together.

The demonstration plot doesn't actually change the fields that surround it. The only way it results in change is when people see what is being produced there and find it compelling enough to try it in their own fields. So it is with us. Our way of life is the compelling alternative. That means our presence in the world is not primarily didactic nor is it primarily accusational. It is embodied in a way that demonstrates the shalom intentions of God.