

Make it Right Christmas Eve 2022
Isaiah 61:1-9, Matthew 10:32-42

Well brothers and sisters, It is December 24th – Christmas Eve which means that unless you count picking up a new ice scraper, windshield washer fluid or a car wash pass at the Petro Canada as Christmas shopping, there are no more shopping days left until Christmas.

So... as I have been asking our congregation each Sunday in December thus far, are you ready for Christmas? Do you still have preparations that you need to get done tonight after the service? Or are you ready for Christmas tomorrow morning?

Now we all know that getting ready for Christmas is a lot of work, esp. the first Christmas back to normal after the pandemic! But - have you ever had to get ready for Christmas while also trying to finish off a home renovation? Well, brothers and sisters – as I can personally testify from a few years ago - that is exponentially more work!

You're not just decking the halls – you're patching and painting the halls, hoping that everything will dry up quickly so that the decorations can go up and not mess things up.

But – that extra work is all worth it – again as I can personally testify, there is a great sense of satisfaction in sitting down and admiring the newly renovated and nicely decorated home and enjoying the peaceful ambiance that has been created in anticipation of Christmas.

But there is a certain amount of irony in that peaceful ambiance, as that sense of peace that was anything but peaceful in its creation. My home renovations / Christmas decorations were completed with not just the metaphorical blood, sweat and tears – but literal blood and sweat and tears... ok, they were metaphorical tears of frustration,

And tonight, as we prepare for celebrating the birth of Christ with the Advent them of Peace, it is good to remember there is some irony in that as well. The silent holy night that we reflect upon was anything but silent in the moments leading

up to the birth of the Lord Jesus, there was blood, sweat and literal tears involved...

And since Advent is about identifying Christ's birth as his first coming, in order to prepare ourselves and anticipate his return, his second coming... the peace we have with God and why we don't fear the return of Christ has been brought about with the literal blood, sweat and tears of Christ on the cross.

So, this is an important insight into peace – it is usually brought about in ways that are anything but peaceful.

Now in our contemporary, everyday understanding of peace we usually say it is an absence of conflict or interruptions, a time where nothing is bothering us or annoying us or preventing us from resting or relaxing. A time where we can chill, that's typically what we understand as peace

And that's not wrong – but it is a very limited understanding of peace, or rather what the bible speaks about as “shalom.”

The biblical definition of peace, or shalom is wholeness, completeness. It's when things have been made right, put back to the way they should have been, brought about to the completion that has always been intended for it. And I think the whole concept of home renovations is a helpful analogy to better explain Shalom and how it is part of preparing ourselves for the arrival of Christ – remembering his first while anticipating his second arrival.

So our preparation starts at the point when God originally created this whole world. The bible tells us that He built the whole creation - to be a renovation project for us, not as a fixer upper – but renovation in the sense of customizing and developing further.

It's like when someone buys a new house – now the walls are painted of course – but its builders paint... and the kitchen cabinets have decent knobs and hardware – but it's just standard spec right... nothing fancy or special, and it's the same thing with all the light fixtures and the trim and the baseboard.

It's all perfectly suitable for making the home livable and functional but homeowners will want to paint the rooms different colors, change out cabinet hardware, light fixtures and trim to match their style and decorations and so on...

That's one way to understand what God was doing when He put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and gave them the command to multiply and fill the earth and subdue it. Adam and Eve and their descendants were to start working on developing and customizing, renovating God's good creation.

Now, that sounds wonderful right – but... we've all heard about renovation horror stories haven't we...

There's the homeowner who thought "I can install a new vanity cabinet and sink in my master bathroom, I can hook up the faucet! How hard can that be?" And they quickly discover they were in waaaay over their heads... Or - all the way to the shady contractor who overcharges and does substandard

work, or simply takes your money and leaves with the job half finished.

That's another way to understand that something went wrong with God's plan for us to work on His creation to develop and customize it.

Satan tempted Adam and Eve to rebel and as a result sin warped and twisted human nature, and everything we do and have done since then to customize and develop God's creation is affected by this fall into sin in some way, shape or form.

Just like when homeowners ignore the fact that you can't knock down structural walls without damaging the house, or disregard the safety codes for electrical work, furnaces and ventilation and they put themselves and others in the home at risk - human beings are guilty of ignoring God's Laws and designs and misusing and abusing His creation.

And just like some contractors cut corners on their work and scam their clients by not finishing job properly, leaving them with damaged homes and costly repairs – we human beings

are guilty of selfish behavior, injustice, and destroying relationships and lives in so many different ways.

It's easy to summarize all our renovation faults and failings as human beings by saying that we have NOT loved the Yahweh our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength (Deut 6:5) and we have NOT loved our neighbor as ourselves. (Lev 19:18)

And it's easy to point out all the consequences of NOT Loving God and our neighbors in our own lives and our relationships and in our society and our world... the pride, lust, greed, envy, gluttony, sloth and anger in ourselves and others are as obvious as a botched renovation job.

But brothers and sisters – there is good news, help is on the way.

Just like Mike Holmes from HGTV's show Holmes on Homes comes to help people who have been scammed by shady contractors or fix the mistakes of the DIY Home owners whose efforts and good intentions are just not enough to get the job

right – God had promised to send someone who can make things right in this world, who can restore things for God's people – who can bring about the vision of developing things to the way they were intended to be. Someone is coming who can bring Shalom – Peace – Wholeness, restoration.

And you've seen the advertisements for TV shows where they do this right, describing the help that is needed to make things right. It might go something like *"Frustrated by your leaky roof, do you have trouble with your furnace or hot water heater, are your windows and doors drafty, have you started a project and gotten in way over your head... well – don't you worry, call 1-800-Makeitright and Mike Holmes will come over to make it right!"*

So let me read for you the bible's advertisement that promises help is on the way. It's from the book of Isaiah – you can follow along on the screen...

61 *The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor.*

He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion— to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor.

⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations. ⁵ Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards. ⁶ And you will be called priests of the Lord, you will be named ministers of our God. You will feed on the wealth of nations, and in their riches you will boast.

⁷ Instead of your shame you will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace you will rejoice in your inheritance. And so you will inherit a double portion in your land, and everlasting

joy will be yours. ⁸ "For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them. ⁹ Their descendants will be known among the nations and their offspring among the peoples. All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed."

So this advertisement is all about the promised Messiah who is qualified to deal with what is wrong in the world and in our lives – and his qualification is “*the spirit of the Sovereign Lord is upon [him] because Yahweh has anointed [him]*” (vs. 1) He is hand-picked and chosen for this.

And this Messiah can address all sorts of botched situations and problematic issues, did you catch that list of what He is qualified to fix; in vs. 1-3?

It says that He will: bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim good news to the poor, freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, and Yahweh's favor and the day of vengeance of our God. He can comfort all who mourn, and

bestow on those who grieve; a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.

Brothers and sisters this is the work of making things right, of bringing about shalom and as we take this evening in the Christmas Eve service to prepare ourselves for Christmas tomorrow morning we would do well to reflect on and identify the areas in our lives where we are brokenhearted, or poor, or in captivity as a prisoner of darkness.

Where do we need to experience Yahweh's favor, what do we need to let go of and let Yahweh avenge for us? Are we mourning a loss of someone, or are we grieving for something that has gone wrong in our lives?

You see brothers and sisters the first part of preparing with Peace for the arrival of Christmas is identifying where we need Him to bring us peace - Shalom.

Now the second part is to catch a bigger vision of what this Shalom, this wholeness and restoration will look like. To move from Christmas to the return of Christ.

One of my favorite parts of any renovation show is when they show the renovation plans. They have these amazing 3D modeling programs and they give you a vision of how they are going to take a dark and dingy kitchen and turn it into something absolutely amazing and inspiring.

"We're going to start by putting in base cabinets on this wall, adding new floor to ceiling cabinet on that wall. We're going to open up the entrance way and add a window over the sink to allow more natural light to come in. Then we'll install new tile floors and matching backsplash and new stainless steel appliances to give it that modern updated look."

That's the next part of Isaiah, describing what Shalom, this renovation, this wholeness is going to look like. *"They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the Lord for the display of his splendor. ⁴ They will rebuild the ancient ruins*

and restore the places long devastated; they will renew the ruined cities that have been devastated for generations.

⁵ Strangers will shepherd your flocks; foreigners will work your fields and vineyards... and everlasting joy will be yours!"

So brothers and sisters, have you caught a vision of shalom? Can you imagine yourself as sturdy as an oak tree in terms of always being righteous and faithful to God, so much so that your life being an example of God's splendor and grace and mercy!

And this vision is bigger than just yourself – when we catch the true biblical vision of Shalom it includes a vision for cities and societies; it includes other people who will find you a blessing and want to work for you and bless you. In the bible, Shalom and restoration always includes relationships and community, it's never just about the individual.

Now, the rest of this passage is essentially Yahweh declaring that He is the one who will be responsible for bringing about this Shalom - He says *"I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery*

and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.... All who see them will acknowledge that they are a people the Lord has blessed." (vs. 8-9)

This is just like Mike Holmes declares on his show that he is the one who has to fix the mess that someone else made and that he is going to be the one to roll up his sleeves get to work and do what it takes to make it right for the homeowners and they are going to be so happy with the results.

So, this is what Shalom is all about, and what it looks like coming into our lives and into our world as we find it presented to us in this passage from Isaiah.

And as we celebrate Christmas Eve and the birth of Christ this is why we emphasize the idyllic, tranquil, restful aspect of this first coming – because Christ was born to bring this peace.

Now brothers and sisters – it might feel like this is where we want to stop, with the peaceful little baby in the manger

asleep on the hay, enjoying the Christmas feeling as it soothes the areas in our lives where we need shalom – restoration.

However, to stay with the renovation theme, all we've done so far is just talk about what was botched and put forward a new vision for restoring it and acknowledged that it isn't going to be us who makes it right and that Jesus was born for this purpose.

But there is additional preparation that needs to happen and anyone who has gone through a renovation knows that its fine to have plans but you need to be prepared for the reality of what it takes to bring that vision into existence.

So I'd like to read you as second scripture passage, spoken by Jesus himself who is advising his disciples, and therefore us - on what it will take to bring the vision of peace into reality. And as I read it keep in mind, this is about that irony that I was talking about earlier where the peace and calm and wholeness of the end product is brought about by a process that is anything but calm and peaceful.

Jesus says in Matthew 10:32-42 “³² *“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. ³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven. ³⁴ “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵ For I have come to turn “a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law— ³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’*

³⁷ *“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

⁴⁰ *“Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Whoever welcomes a prophet as a prophet will receive a prophet’s*

reward, and whoever welcomes a righteous person as a righteous person will receive a righteous person's

So, what Jesus is saying to his disciples and to us in Matthew 10 needs to be understood in two ways. First that Jesus is going to renovate us personally and secondly that Jesus has recruited us to be a part of His renovation crew and sent us out into the world to “make it right” for others as a sign that he is coming back to make everything right, all things new,

And in both instances, there is the temptation for us to disown and disassociate with Jesus – which is why Jesus includes a warning about this to us. We're ok with little baby Jesus in the manger – he doesn't really interrupt our lives, but grown up Jesus, the messiah... well He's here to renovate us and to recruit us for his crew.

So when we are face with that we can be tempted to think that we don't need Jesus to renovate us, that we can take care of that work ourselves – we just need a bit more time, a bit

more training, the right tools etc... and we can bring about Shalom on our own. So we refuse Jesus' salvation.

Or we are embarrassed or afraid to tell others that we are part of Jesus' renovation crew that has been sent out to make things right and offer to help fix things up in Jesus' name.

You know a lot of other contractors don't like Mike Holmes – his standards are so high and he is so thorough in what he does that he makes others look bad in comparison, and it works the same way for us when we are followers of Jesus.

And what Jesus goes on say in this passage about him not bringing peace, but that he brings a sword instead and that people will not get along with members of their own family because of Him - is an acknowledgement that when people really understand who Jesus is and what His vision of Shalom and restoration and Peace is truly about – they are either on board with Jesus or they are against Him.

And we tend to struggle this way with Jesus ourselves don't we – just like the homeowners on the renovation show who end up fighting with Mike Holmes about what he knows will be a good design and repair for their home.

They protest and object, but Mike is the expert and goes ahead anyways - and then in the end the homeowner is always won over and agrees that what was done was the right choice for the renovation.

It's the same in our lives as Jesus is changing us in what we believe and think and how we feel and act in every area of our lives.

Brothers and sisters I hope can you identify ways in which you have seen yourself change in this manner because of the work Jesus is doing in your life? And I hope you can identify a before and after renovation picture of yourself that you could show.

The most notable transformation is when we start to put God first instead of ourselves, and when we are willing to take up

the task that Jesus has assigned us on his renovation crew to Go Out and make things right. We become willing to put our own interests aside – and we take up our sledgehammer and work boots to follow Him.

Jesus is quite clear on this in this passage from Matthew – that anyone who does not take up their cross and follow Him is not worthy of Him; meaning that if you are not willing to join in hard work of Shalom-making in this world, it is quite questionable as to whether or not you have really experienced Jesus bringing His Shalom into your own life.

Now let me just briefly pause here for a moment and say that if you are feeling convicted about this – you have two choices; you can decide right now that you will do something to publically participate in Jesus' renovation work in this world and you won't be afraid or ashamed to let others know that this how you are following Jesus.

Or - maybe you need to choose to let Jesus do some deeper renovation work in your life so that he can get down to the

root of what needs to be fixed in order for you experience wholeness and peace – His Shalom - and then you will be changed and you will take up your cross.

You see brothers and sisters Jesus doesn't just want to forgive our Sin – he also wants to break the power of Sin in our lives, He wants to deal with whatever prevents us from being fully restored, so if that's what the Holy Spirit is nudging you about this morning - let's talk after the service and set up a time to do some reno work with Jesus in the New Year.

Now if you are taking up your cross to follow Jesus as part of His renovation crew then its important that you understand that as we Go Out and encounter other people while we work at making things right - if they are people who oppose Jesus... they will oppose what we are doing – even if they would do the same thing for humanitarian reasons.

And if people love Jesus... then they will support what we are doing – even if all they are able to do is offer us a cup of cold

water to help refresh us as we are digging in and doing the hard work and the heavy lifting.

And Jesus wants to us to know this so that we don't get distracted, discouraged – most importantly so that we don't switch our focus – because brothers and sisters the temptation for us as while we are waiting for Jesus' second coming is that we become peace-keepers instead of shalom-makers.

We need to remember that renovation requires demolition, it makes a mess, it's not pleasant to live through it – it's actually quite inconvenient, and we often discover unexpected challenges or problems that need to be fixed and require us to adjust the plans, and it often takes longer to complete than we had expected... and all of this activity is not peace-keeping - but it is peace, shalom, restoration in the making.

So brothers and sisters, enjoy the peaceful ambiance of baby Jesus in the manger tonight as we celebrate his birth, his first coming...

But now that you know Jesus was born to bring in shalom, and what it takes to prepare and participate in making shalom and bringing restoration into our lives and this world in anticipation for Christ's return...

may reflecting on Christ's birth and celebrating it here at Valleyview tonight give the Holy Spirit the opportunity to turn you from a peace-keeper... into a peace-maker.

The baby in the manger grows up and ministers as the Messiah and becomes King and Lord! So let us remember the words of our Lord and King "Blessed are the peace-makers for they shall see God." (Matt 5:9)

Brothers and Sisters Christmas is here, so as we celebrate it let us say Lord Jesus come – come soon, come quickly and make things right! Amen.