



Matthew 25 Gathering 2017: Anglican Justice and Mercy Contending for Shalom

Daniel Lizarraga – September 27, 2017

I'm very happy to be here. I'm originally from El Paso, Texas, but now I live in San Antonio where I'm the director of a ministry called Faith Ability. It's a ministry for families who have children with special needs. I myself have four daughters, and they are ages twenty, eighteen, fifteen, and thirteen. They won't even let me have a boy dog. Can you believe that? I'm seriously outnumbered.

No, actually it's a true blessing. It's a true blessing in part because they participate in the ministry with me. My oldest daughter, Sofia, has special needs, and the Lord has really used her in great and powerful ways for myself, my family, and those we minister to. There are so many times that people with special needs feel left out, and they need to be connected to community and to realize the beautiful love that exists for them. They need to realize that they minister to us as well. It's a blessing to be a part of that.

I've also been blessed to be a part of our Matthew 25 planning team this year and to be involved in getting us all here. This is very exciting!

I usually try to start with a food analogy, but I heard there are vegetarians in the crowd, and I'm a carnivore, so the analogy probably isn't going to work very well. We won't out the vegetarians or the vegans here, but I will have to change things up a little. I like vegetarians. Don't get me wrong. They make good appetizers! I mean, they *prepare* good appetizers. Let me get this out while I'm still on this subject: I lived in Austin where there are a lot of vegetarians and vegans, and here's the thing, when I have a party—when I have a *barbecue*—I have to provide a vegetarian option. When I go to *their* parties, guess what. No meat.

There was once a doctor I knew who'd been on a vacation that required a lot of driving. He'd been on the road for a long stretch, and he was very tired. He was with his family, and he took a break and let somebody else drive. As they were driving along, they encountered a car accident. There were cars stopped all along the road, and it looked like a very gruesome situation. The doctor and his family pulled over to see what was going on, to see whether they should call for help.

This was before cell phones, but I he had a CB. Millennials, CBs are citizens band—never mind. Anyway, they were trying to call for help on the CB, and so forth, but this doctor ended up getting involved. Despite being reluctant to do so, he cared for the individuals who were involved in the accident, including one man who was severely cut up. He had glass in his head and so forth. Eventually, the ambulance came and took the man away, and the doctor got in the ambulance and rode with that patient.

It had rained a little, and the roads were slick, and as they were turning a corner, the ambulance flipped over one, two, three, four times. It landed on its roof, and the doctor landed on top of the patient. He told me that when he got up, the first thing he did was to try to figure out what had just happened. Then, as he sorted things out, he began to check himself to see if anything had happened to him, to see if he had broken any bones or been stuck with any glass.

Once he did that, the doctor felt that he was okay. After the exhaustion and the frantic business of helping the accident victims and the traumatic ambulance crash, he said he somehow found the strength to open the doors, lift up the stretcher with the patient in it, and walk out. From there, the doctor and the ambulance driver carried the patient to the hospital. I think the patient ended up dying.

I'm sharing this story to highlight that moment right after the ambulance flipped—what did he do there? What was his instinct or reaction to that scenario? It was first to check himself, to make sure he was okay. I think this story provides a kind of antithesis to Canon David's example of the anorexic chef who doesn't care for herself and only cares for others. I think our time together is really about following the lead of that doctor. This is an opportunity for each one of us, and for us as a church, to check ourselves, an opportunity to make sure that we're okay, so that we can help others, and from that, God will give us the strength to do so.

This is about *shalom*. You've heard this term. It's a Hebrew greeting in the Jewish culture. One might say "Shabbat shalom" if it's a Friday, and, of course, in Texas we might say, "Shalom, y'all." In San Antonio and El Paso, it's "Shalom, merci."

Shalom, which is mirrored in the Greek New Testament by the word *eirene*, has three aspects to it. These aspects I take from the writings of Professor Perry Yoder.¹

The first aspect of shalom is, as Yoder suggests, most frequently used to describe the material and physical state of affairs, particularly in the sense of things being as they should be—it's a state of well-being, an all-rightness, or as he says, an *okayness*. It is used to describe prosperity and abundance when marked by the presence of physical well-being or health rather than the English negative of that, which is the absence of physical threats, like war, disease, and famine. This points to a positive idea about shalom; it is the presence of something rather than the absence of conflict. So there is a fullness to that understanding of shalom.

The second aspect of shalom is justice. This meaning of shalom can describe a close friend or friendship. It is also sometimes translated as the English word *peace*, but shalom in the Bible involves a much wider and more positive state of affairs than a narrow understanding of peace as anti-war or anti-military. Shalom-making is thus work toward just and health-giving relationships between people and nations. It focuses on this sense of relationships.

Then there's a third aspect of shalom, and this is shalom as straightforwardness. It's applied in moral or ethical contexts, and there are two specific ways that this meaning of shalom is used in opposition to deceit. In one sense, which we see in Psalm 34, the psalmist exhorts the seeking and pursuing of shalom, which is the opposite of speaking evil and lies; likewise, the man of

¹ See Yoder, *Shalom* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2017).

shalom in Psalm 37 is shown to be an honest person of integrity and straightforward character. In the other sense of straightforwardness, shalom means to be blameless, innocent, or without guilt.

However, when we speak of shalom, the idea is not that we should choose one of those aspects; instead, we mean all three. It's not either/or; it's all three aspects together.

Shalom is also not utopia. Utopia is imagined; shalom is real. We have to make that distinction mostly with our secular friends, who may say, "Oh, it's just like utopia." No. There is an important distinction. In a recent edition of Fuller Theological Seminary's journal—I strongly encourage you to order a copy of it, as the entire issue is dedicated to shalom—the president of the seminary, Mark Labberton, writes the following:

The idea of *shalom* is no idealist fantasy. It is a word that, in fact, names what is already true of both the character and intention of God. God's own three-in-one exists in perfect communion; in God's being, the love, justice, and peace of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit flourish. From this union in shalom God's intentions emerge. From a world that God named 'good' and 'very good,' the intent for us is to live in, embody, and nurture shalom together with God.²

So shalom is wholeness. It's completeness. As believers in creation and redemption, it's our baseline. It's the baseline that is real, and if that's the case, then I would suggest that our reality,

² Labberton, "Whose Shalom?," *Fuller* 9 (2017): 8.

as we perceive it, is an aberration or a deviation from shalom. It's maybe what some might consider an alternative fact.

Now, we gather together as a people of faith, a community of believers, a church, and for many, this would seem an appropriate place for shalom to be grasped and fully realized. To that end, as Anglicans, we see ourselves as having distinctives that mark our identity—for example, the three streams—but also as part of the one holy catholic church.

There's an author, a Lutheran pastor and theologian, Martin Marty, who recently came out with a little book to commemorate the five-hundredth anniversary of the Reformation, which is coming up next month. It's called *October 31, 1517: Martin Luther and the Day that Changed the World*. Marty writes there about where the church has come in the past five hundred years, mostly through the Roman Catholic and Lutheran dialogues that have taken place, culminating in the signing of an agreement on justification.³

This landmark document is something that he says has changed both sets of believers', the Roman Catholics' and the Lutherans', understanding. He talks about this priest, Father Walter Ong, who is his mentor, and how the use of the term *catholic* came about and what it means, because *catholic*, as we know, is something that we think of as meaning “universal.” However, the choice that the Latin church made, he says, was not for *universalis*, which comes from the Latin *uni* (“one”) *vertere* (“turn”), but the Greek term *katholikos*, and that term means “whole.”

³ See Marty, *October 31, 1517: Martin Luther and the Day that Changed the World* (Brewster, MA: Paraclete, 2016).

To illustrate this, Marty uses the image of a compass. Again, my Millennials, I don't know how to explain what a compass is, because I never liked compasses. I never liked math, for one, and compasses always looked so dangerous. I was always afraid the math genius was going to pull it out of his pocket and do something. Anyway, a compass helps you figure out a point and to then draw a circle around that point. This is what *universalis* is; it's something that is contained. *Katholikos*, the Greek term, is this *and* all this; it's the whole. The church in the early stages chose *this* term, the whole.

But of course, we know that isn't necessarily the case anymore. The wholeness, as *shalom* is wholeness, is broken and divided. We've come up with more than 40,000 *universalises*, 40,000 denominations within the Christian church. And here we have another math term: *denomination* is related to *denominator*, which describes part of a fraction, and *fraction* is of course etymologically related to the word *fracture* or broken.

I think this makes it hard to realize the church as *shalom*. We need to get to a place of healing, and in order to do that, we need to check ourselves first. Are we hurt? Are we well enough that we can help heal others? Do we have strength to pick up those in need and carry them out, to do, as our prayer is on Sunday, the work God has given us to do?

I'm one to look to history when thinking through these kinds of things, and I believe we must do so courageously and faithfully. And so, if we look back at our own roots and ask where Anglicanism originated, it was first, of course, through Jesus and the apostles and the missions, and then came Saint Augustine of Canterbury, who is the one who is credited with evangelizing

England. Then someone comes on the scene by the name of Henry VIII. Everyone knows *this* part. Right? When he's brought up, we all cringe. Good old Henry. There's a lot that could be said about him, but let's get to the punch about this: Henry comes on the scene, and we see fracture and separation, not only in the church but through divorce. We were birthed, in this regard, from brokenness.

It was a long time ago, and we've moved on. But that history is still there, isn't it? Did Henry ever repent? I don't know if he did, but we must acknowledge our need for God's grace and forgiveness for this fracture; we must acknowledge this so that we may be well enough to contribute to the healing of brokenness in the church and in the world.

There's a blog called *Awakening Grace* that I came across recently. Robert Sturdy is the name of the blogger, and he writes the following:

It was not the divorce, but rather the challenge to papal authority on the grounds that the pope was not above Scripture which furthered the Reformation in England. As was shown in the earlier posts, this challenge was not something that originated with Henry's divorce. Rather, Henry's divorce gave the Reformers the chance to advance ideas they had been forming in secret for nearly a decade. Namely, that no man is above Scripture. King Henry, his infidelities, and his temper remain a black mark on the period. But good

was brought from this evil. It was through this evil that the English Bible eventually emerged, as well as gospel-centered preaching and Reformation liturgies.⁴

There's no mention in this dark period of the fractures that took place, the murder that resulted from Henry's condemnation of people, no mention of the misogyny in how he treated women, of the mockery that was made of the sanctity of marriage.

I'm not saying we must undo these things of the past or that we are responsible for Henry's immoral behavior. But it's important to simply to acknowledge that even though it resulted in positive things, there was this abuse and aberration of shalom in our history.

Perhaps if *dystopia* is the opposite of *utopia*, this would be *dis-shalom*. I don't think that merits a term in itself, but it's something I also have to come to terms with on a personal level when I look at my own cultural history. My ancestors are from Mexico, and the Spanish conquest of Mexico was brutal. No doubt there were rapes and abuses and murder that took place, perhaps by my ancestors, and I'm a product of that. So in some ways I want to condemn what took place there, yet I also have to embrace what took place there as it's a part of me. It's a part of who I am.

This wrestling with history is, of course, not limited to the Anglican Church. I was Roman Catholic. I was *muy catolico*—now I'm *muy anglicano*, which doesn't quite have the same ring. I

⁴ Sturdy, "Was the Anglican Church Started Because the King Wanted a Divorce?," *Awakening Grace*, September 11, 2013, <https://awakeninggracedotorg.wordpress.com/2013/09/11/was-the-anglican-church-started-because-the-king-wanted-a-divorce/>.

attended Catholic seminary and I worked for the US Conference of Catholic Bishops in Washington, DC, which is the Vatican, if you will, in the United States. I was there for ten years, including during the height of the sexual abuse crises and scandals. It was not a pretty place to be.

Because I was on staff, I was in the room in Dallas where all 450 bishops gathered, and there were witnesses who were before them, five victims of sexual abuse by priests. Those victims spoke directly to the bishops and told in graphic detail what happened to them—not once, not twice, but several times in some instances. These victims were telling the bishops, these men who were my bosses, my heroes, my authorities, what they had done because of their negligence, because of what they *didn't* do and sometimes what they *did* do.

That's the kind of church experience that makes one realize a lack of shalom. What other sins have fractured the body of Christ yesterday and today? What divisions in our society today continue to point to a need for healing and wholeness, for shalom, and can we talk about what shalom is when we still have the wound?

That was then, and this is now. More recently, of course, there has been our separation from the Episcopal Church (TEC) and the prospective divisions of the Anglican Communion. I don't question the motives of this separation and I recognize the basis for it, but I simply note that even now we are in the midst of experiencing fragmentation. While it is necessary, the pain of division is clearly something we live with.

I pause here now to acknowledge the very real pain for all of those in our Anglican Church in North America who experienced the many difficulties during this separation. I don't bear the battle wounds and scars that many of you who are *here* bear; many of you were in the trenches and had to confront and sacrifice so much of yourselves to be faithful followers of Christ and the gospel.

Even though I was not there and many of you also weren't there, we bear those wounds with you. Today, the fragmentation continues with the Anglican Communion, and while we know that fragmentation is a high price to pay, we also know that adherence to truth and faithfulness and the Word of God makes this necessary.

I also wish to express to Archbishop Foley, who has joined us this evening, our prayers, our love, our support for you, Archbishop, to have to go through what you are going through personally. We pray for your faithfulness, for strength, and for your spiritual and emotional well-being.

Of course, we know that unity can only be a unity in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ and the authentic saving gospel message we have lived and preached. I bring all of this up not as a blame game but to ask what shalom means for us as the church? What does it mean to be catholic, to be *katholikos*, and how do we, as Anglicans, foster shalom today and every day?

There are opportunities for unity on a large scale, for example, with other denominations, but there are also opportunities at the local level, opportunities with the other congregations and organizations that we serve with.

The brave doctor I told you about was checking externally for wounds, but he was not able to check internally for hereditary conditions like, for example, type 1 diabetes. It's possible that if he had been able to check internally, he might have found that he needed treatment, that he wasn't whole for something that wasn't the result of his own actions. How do we check ourselves and recognize our woundedness so as to heal into wholeness? The Lord continues to beckon us as a church, now as he did with his apostles, flawed though they were, having abandoned him on the cross, to proclaim his Word and seek healing. The diagnoses of conditions, illnesses, and diseases compel us to acknowledge rather than deny that we are in need of healing. We find that we must do things differently, that we face limitations, that we must take medications or change our behaviors. We cannot merely return to our baseline.

I probably don't need to point out to you the need to realize shalom in our society, our world, our nation, or our communities. There are so many divisions in our society, and I'm going to ask you to name them. What divisions or issues do you see, face, or read about?

Urban versus suburban communities, returning war veterans, income equality, political division, the legacy of civil religion, ageism, education inequality, sexuality, segregation in the church, differing ideas about patriotism and nationalism—the list, I know, can go on longer than we would want it to, but I think we need to recognize that these divisions are there, that these issues hold us back from full realization of shalom.

Truly, we seek shalom in so many places. We name these divisions in our own country and in our own communities that we experience, but overseas we see that these divisions are widespread as well.

The Lord gave me the privilege of taking three of my daughters to the Holy Land during their spring break. I arranged a personal pilgrimage with them, and it was a very moving experience. While there, we had a Shabbat dinner with a Jewish family we were blessed to know through my sister. We also went to Bethlehem and Palestine, and we met with a group of teenage girls who were their ages, and we spent the day with them. We had a meal, and then they taught each other dances. The young ladies taught my daughters a traditional Palestinian folk dance with a lot of kicking, and my girls taught them an “Achy Breaky Heart” line dance. That was the cultural exchange. I didn’t have anything to do with it, obviously.

After that we sat down and started asking the girls questions. I asked them, “If I saw the president of the United States, what would you have me tell him? If I returned to the United States and told people I had a message for them from you, what should I tell them?” This fifteen-year-old girl stood up and in English said, “Tell them we exist.” I said, “Tell them you exist?” “Tell them we exist,” she said. “Tell them we’re not terrorists. Tell them we are Christians and that we happen to live in this place and we can’t go anywhere.”

That was sad to hear, of course. “Yes, that must be difficult,” I said, and then I asked another question. I said, “What is your hope?” And she said, “We have no hope.” A fifteen-year-old

beautiful young lady told me she had no hope. I carry that with me to know that there is a need for shalom, and we prayed together for that purpose.

But there are other places where we do see glimpses of shalom. In my ministry, for example, in working with people with special needs, there are wonderful opportunities to see that. I know there's a person here from Virginia who works with the L'Arche community, which is a community for people with special needs to live out life in Christ together with those who don't have special needs. Young Life Capernaum is another example where there are interactions and dancing and so forth involving people with and without special needs.

I also have had the privilege to travel overseas as part of my work, and on many of those trips, I had the opportunity to visit places that focus on people with special needs. One of those places was in Cuba, and I remember that the music started as soon as we arrived at the organization, which primarily served people with Down syndrome. We were embraced and welcomed and hugged and kissed by each and every person who was there, and then we started to dance. I loved it—everyone loved it. And I came away from there thinking, “You know, if the president of the United States or Fidel Castro had walked in, both men would have received the same exact greeting.” That was a glimpse of shalom.

I also had the opportunity to travel to Rwanda in 1998. I know some of you have had interactions with the church and the people of Rwanda; you know what they experienced in the genocide and how they've tried to come to terms with that, particularly through reconciliation retreats that

they've had at various churches. That's hard, hard work, because there are people there whose family members were killed by murderers who are in the same room.

At these retreats, they spend three or four days together trying to reconcile, trying to figure out where it is they can move to from that trauma. They have to forgive in order to reconcile, and that's the hard part—to ask forgiveness and to grant forgiveness. We arrived at the end of that process, when they were gathered around giving their concluding talks. Once again, everybody rose at one point and began to dance. That seemed to be the way this reconciliation was going to happen. As part of that dancing there was a greeting, a very intimate greeting, where you grasped each other and put your forehead together, one forehead to another, and you looked directly in the other person's eyes. When I did that, I did not know whether I was looking into the eyes of a murderer or of someone who had survived a murder. That's how they forgave and reconciled. That's what shalom is about.

Here, we as a church are desiring to live out our call to be shalom, recognizing that hurt exists in our world and doing all that we can so that as a church we can truly say, “Lord, when you were hungry we gave you food to eat. When you were thirsty we gave you water to drink. When you were a stranger we welcomed you. We visited you when you were in prison, and we clothed you when you were naked,” and so on. This is how we realize shalom, and I know that many of you are involved in ministries of homeless assistance, feeding programs, immigration centers, and so forth, ministries in which you live Matthew 25 out.

There's also the Luke 4:14–21 passage, which is an invitation by Jesus:

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.”

Can we as a church also say, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon us, because he has anointed us to preach good news to the poor. He has sent us to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor”? And can we say, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing”? It’s an invitation. It’s the message of Jesus about charity and justice—not one or the other but both/and.

We care for those who are victims, but we also speak truth to power for right relationship in our economic, political, and social systems. Jesus gave his power in the Holy Spirit so we can be emboldened to make change as faith-filled citizens in a free and democratic society, through advocacy, congregation-based community organizing, peaceful demonstrations, and at times,

perhaps, even civil disobedience. And through this we are also called to be faithful witnesses to the gospel.

Our motives, tactics, and actions may be questioned, but one thing we know is who we are and what we're about. Dom Helder Camara, a Roman Catholic bishop in Recife, Brazil, who worked with the poor during the Latin American conflicts of the 1970s said something like: "I give someone something to eat, and they call me a saint. I ask why this person is hungry, and they call me a communist."⁵

How do we check ourselves? Even though we're not here for a retreat, it really is a retreat. We come here not to retreat in the military sense but so we can confront. That's how we retreat, to confront. Many of us are wounded healers, wounded warriors. We ourselves are broken and unwhole, and we serve others who are broken and unwhole. All of us are in need of healing, and all of us are in need of tasting the reality that is shalom in our own lives.

I was blessed with a very spiritually courageous mother who believed in shalom for her family. She was a strong believer in healing and that the Lord worked through physical, emotional, and spiritual healing. She was determined to stop the dysfunctions in our family from being passed on to a different generation.

⁵ See Zildo Rocha, "*Helder, O Dom: uma vida que marcou os rumos da Igreja no Brasil*" ("Helder, the Gift: A Life that Marked the Course of the Church in Brazil") (Petrópolis, Brazil: Editora Vozes, 2000), 53.

One year, when my siblings and I were adults, we had a retreat in which my parents took us through their life journeys using a book called *Healing the Hidden Self* by Barbara Shlemon. They took us through the various parts of their relationship—what it was like when they met, when they started dating, when they got married, what the circumstances were—and they assured each one of us that we were conceived in love. They told us about my father going through medical school and their needs as they started having children. I came nine years later, a surprise but not a mistake—that’s my mantra—and they talked about the difficulties that surrounded that.

As we talked, my brother asked my other brother, “Hey, when I was in seventh grade, I brought my friends over, and you stole them from me. What was that about?” We addressed things like that, things from our past that continued to haunt us and kept our relationships from flourishing, and we came to forgive and reconcile.

Seven years later, we had another retreat, this time with our spouses. It was a long weekend, and there was a facilitator, a counselor, who was also a Catholic nun. She helped us go even deeper to confront issues about my father’s recovery from alcoholism. Just like I had to witness when the Roman Catholic bishops heard the abuse victims speak, I had to learn of my father and the sins he had committed against my siblings. It was painful, but my mother was determined that shalom would be something our family would be able to realize.

So I say that charity not only begins at home; justice and shalom begin at home too. As I speak about that realization of forgiveness and reconciliation, I also want to point to the words of Jean Vanier, who is the founder of the L'Arche movement:

If you enter into relationship with a lonely or suffering person you will discover something else: that it is you who are being healed. The broken person will reveal to you your own hurt and the hardness of your heart, but also how much you are loved. Thus the one you came to heal becomes your healer.

If you let yourself be molded thus by the cry of the poor and accept their healing friendship, then they may guide your footsteps into community and lead you into a new vision of humanity, a new world order, not governed by power and fear but where the poor and the weak are at the center. They will lead you into the kingdom Jesus speaks of.⁶

Following the example of my dad, that doctor who helped someone else through the turbulence of that ambulance ride and the trauma experienced there, who carried that person on the stretcher, I am reminded of three lines from the poet Khalil Gibran:

When you love you should not say

“God is in my heart,” but rather,

⁶ Vanier quoted in Neil Paynter and Helen Boothroyd, *Holy Ground: Liturgies and Worship Resources for an Engaged Spirituality* (Glasgow, UK: Wild Goose, 2009), 237.

“I am in the heart of God.”⁷

For me, this speaks to who I am in relationship to God; it reminds me that shalom emanates from God, and that is what I do—who I am and what I do is part of that wholeness.

I am Christian, I am Anglican, and I am *katholikos*. We are here in this place together to ground ourselves in the spirit of shalom. It’s only appropriate, then, in the next couple of days, to accept the invitation before us to renew our hearts and souls, as did Saint Francis, the founder of the Franciscans—who is also a part of our spiritual lineage, the redemptive part of it—and respond to the call of the Lord to serve him as instruments of shalom.

⁷ Gibran, *The Prophet* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1923), 13.