

Going Public

Buy Scott Runyon
First Baptist Church of Birmingham
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Isaiah 65:17-25

Baby Dedication - Alyssa Olsen

To parents:

We rejoice with you in the gifts that this child has been to you and to us as a congregation. God has entrusted her into your loving care. We are happy that, moved by a sense of the blessing and responsibility of parenthood, you have brought her here before God and your church family to express your gratitude and to declare your intention to bring Alyssa up in the nurture and guidance of the Christian faith. By doing this, you are observing a custom many centuries old.

In the Old Testament scriptures, we read that Hannah brought the child Samuel, to the house of the Lord in Shiloh.

1 Samuel 1:20, 24, 28, 3:19 (NRSV)

In due time, Hannah conceived and bore a son. She named him Samuel, for she said, "I have asked him of the Lord." When she had

weaned him, she took him up with her, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour, and a skin of wine. She brought him to the house of the Lord at Shiloh; and the child was young. Therefore I have lent him to the Lord; as long as he lives, he is given to the Lord." She left him there for the Lord. As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground.

We also read how Mary and Joseph presented the infant Jesus in the Temple in Jerusalem.

Luke 2:22-23 (NRSV)

When the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the law of the Lord, "Every firstborn male shall be designated as holy to the Lord")

While no ceremony, however ancient or fancy, has power to change the character of this child, the faithfulness with which you exemplify in your own home the life and spirit of Jesus, will build in large measure your child's character and the quality of her life.

Pastor Scott: Do you present this, your child, before God with a heart of dedication?

Parents: We do.

Pastor Scott: Do you hereby dedicate yourselves as your child's parents, to bring her up in the nurture and teaching of the Lord?

Parents: We do.

Pastor Scott: Do you now promise to instruct her in the teachings of Jesus Christ and the practice of prayer, and guide her in the development of Christian character?

Parents: We do.

To sponsors:

Elizabeth and Chris have asked you, Emma and Mark, to be Alyssa's sponsors. This means that they trust you in a special way to support, help, and encourage this little one to navigate life as a person of faith. Do you commit yourselves today and for the future to this responsibility?

Sponsors: We do.

To the congregation:

The responsibility for raising Alyssa in the faith is not the parents' and sponsors' alone. There will be influences on her life from the community, the schools, the church, the state and country, and in fact

she will be influenced by people and events from all over the world. We, as a congregation, are all a part of one another and it is our collective responsibility to support and participate in the faith development of Alyssa as she grows up. Do you, church family, commit yourselves to encourage and support Alyssa as part of the family of God as she grows and matures in her faith?

Congregation: We do.

Introduction of baby to the congregation!

Dedication prayer:

Dear God, accept Alyssa, whom we now dedicate to you. Give us all the grace and wisdom to train her, and guide her that she might grow up to love you, serve you, and serve the people of this community and world. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

SERMON

We finish our series on following Jesus next Sunday before heading into Advent. Today, we are talking about being engaged alongside Jesus to bring to life God's dream for the world.

Next week, we will be talking about the primary nature of our relationship with Jesus and allowing the rest of our life to form around that relationship.

Next week, we will also be looking at our puzzle board and thinking about where we have been these past several months. We will briefly recap all of the pieces that are filled in and consider the empty puzzle pieces. There is a lot more included in following Jesus than what we have covered. So, what else might we include? Be prepared to share during worship about what you think needs to be added to this board.

We are talking about following Jesus, but today we are considering a passage from Isaiah in the Old Testament. How does that fit? Jesus wasn't born yet when Isaiah prophesied for God in Israel.

Well, perhaps God's plan for the world hasn't so much changed throughout history, but can be found woven throughout scripture. And perhaps all of it makes best sense in light of Jesus.

My mentor and friend from seminary, Dr. Harold Ellens, talked about this. I had this in my notes but neglected to mention it in my sermon last week. Dr. Ellens often said that Jesus is the key that has all of history make sense.

So, we consider the life and teaching and impact of Jesus while looking back into history — all the way back to creation, the stories of Abraham, the covenant, the promise, the enslavement of the people in Egypt and Babylon, through the prophets and the ups and downs of the Jewish people.

We can see God's purposes worked out through all of history most clearly when we see it in light of Jesus. God was laying a foundation, working a dream for the world and all of creation from the beginning, and now, as we view Jesus, we can understand better what God was up to.

Then, still from the feet of Jesus, we can turn around and look toward the present day and even

into the future and consider how Jesus brings into focus our lives, our community, our church, and our engagement with the world around us.

The event of Jesus is the pinnacle of all of history. This is our plumb line, our measuring tool, our standard.

So, let's listen to Isaiah, while in the back of our mind remembering Jesus' ministry and mission.

READ ISAIAH 65:17-25

This is poetry, but also contains a very powerful message about the dream God has for the world.

What we cannot do, is read this and think of it as a beautiful picture, then sit back and from a distance wait for God to make it all happen.

No! Instead, let's think of this as a picture of what God wants to build through us. Our faith in Jesus leads us into action, and to engage with the world to bring this dream to life.

As a people, we must take our faith public where it can make a difference in the world.

So, let's look underneath some of these statements of Isaiah to see what might be helpful for us to do this.

* Isaiah wrote that in God's dream for the world there will no longer be infants who live only a few days. No, they will live long lives.

Translated for our time, our faith may be calling us to address infant mortality. Is health insurance including prenatal care available to all women, children and families, especially those who currently do not have it?

In addition, in God's dream senior adults live full and healthy lives. Therefore, our faith has bearing on things like Medicare, Social Security or other structures that allow our seniors to thrive into their golden years.

This is God's dream for the world.

* Isaiah says that in God's dream, people will build houses and live in them.

This means that we work along side Jesus for fair mortgage rates, and affordable housing, along with addressing best solutions for our homeless population.

* It goes on to say that people will plant vineyards and eat their fruit. Food is plentiful in God's dream.

To participate with God, we will consider how accessible and affordable are healthy food options.

* It says that people will enjoy the work of their hands and not labor in vain. How often do we see people stuck in jobs that they don't enjoy or people talk about dead end jobs that leave them feeling empty?

In God's dream people are fairly compensated for their work with sustaining benefits that protect their well being.

* It says that children will be blessed and not born into unsustainable and unhealthy situations. So, in God's dream there is education, emotionally and physically healthy environments in which children can grow up.

It goes on to say that the wolf and the lamb (who are currently enemies) shall be at peace with one another and not at war or hurting one another. Clearly this is not literally about animals, but a picture of a world without war, violence, abuse and corruption. In God's dream, peacemaking is a core virtue and value.

All of these are values in God's intention and dream for this world, our home.

Faith is not intended to only be personal, although it certainly is that. Faith is intended by God to be public, working along side Jesus to build God's dream for the world.

All of this is a picture of the way it is in heaven, in God's realm, and as we know from Jesus' prayer, Jesus has called us to commit to the dream of "on earth as it is in heaven."

I titled this sermon "Going Public" because this is what we are called to do with our faith. Our faith is not intended to be kept private. Faith needs to impact how we live in the world or it isn't worth much at all.

"Public" refers to the shared community of which we are part.

So, are we on board with going public to build God's dream for this world? If so, what part of this dream is God calling this congregation to be engaged in building?