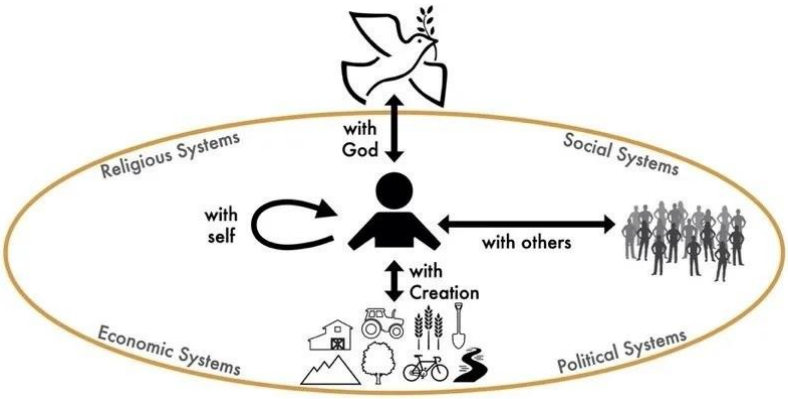
April 19th Peacemaking: Manna Living vs Textile Mountain

I want to start by saying that I preached a sermon rather similar to this in July of 2023. If you are sitting there going "This sounds familiar" I didn't plagiarize this, it is just a very similar theme. If it doesn't sound familiar, then I know you weren't paying attention on July 23rd 2023.

Now that Lent has wrapped up, we are continuing our series on Peacemaking. Brad did a great opening sermon, where he preached the entire Bible in 20 minutes, outlining God's grand vision for shalom. Shalom has a deep theological meaning to it, but it is very close to a proper definition of peace. Unfortunately, the word "peace" has been abused especially in recent months. It feels a bit cheapened, and watered down. So for this sermon, we will take a break and use the phrase Shalom. What is shalom? Brad talked about how it is God's grand vision for the world. Here is a diagram that I find helpful that shows the relationships that need to be in right standing for Shalom to truly exist.



Amongst these relationships, you will see that we need to have a right relationship with the wider creation, beyond humans, for shalom to really exist. I am no environmental expert, and I have not made the switch to an electric car. These thoughts come from a place of interest, and a hope that we can all grow in different ways, and not from a place of condemnation or even expertise.

I have had an interest in consumerism for sometime now. It is a heartbreaking and fascinating phenomenon. When one starts to examine

how prominent it is in our lives, it becomes kind of shocking. I became interested in consumerism, mainly because of my participation in it. I, like many people, love clothes. I love shopping for clothes, I love having lots of options for clothes. I go through strange phases where I buy the same type of clothing over and over, thinking I am just going to wear one type of clothing over and over. It is why I have 12 plain black T-shirts and countless knit sweaters. I switched to almost exclusively thrift shopping in the past several years. I look at it, as the lesser of two evils for both my bank account and the earth. Realistically, I should just stop buying clothes, and I have gone through phases where I try to do so. Since I am not great at that, I thrift everything so it costs a bit less, and more importantly, it is reused. I thought since I would be talking about consumerism, which is hard not to participate in, and since I don't want to come across judgemental, I would show my imperfections and failings represented by my collection of short sleeved, beach themed, shirts.

Slide with collection of shirts

Hopefully this display makes you feel at ease, and not condescended to as we talk about a problem that our planet has. The textile industry is one of the main polluters in the world.

"100 billion items of clothing are manufactured each year. Currently, a person buys an average of 60 percent more clothes than 15 years ago. For this reason, the fast fashion industry has imposed the trend of single-use clothing. Indeed, if people only kept their clothes for a year, CO2 emissions would be reduced by 24 percent." (Sanchez).

Most of the information shared this morning comes from a documentary and its accompanying website called "Textile Mountain: The Hidden Burden of Our Fashion Waste"

"There is no such thing as 'away'. When you throw something away, it must go somewhere"

— Annie Leonard

As an avid thrifter, this documentary convicted me in a lot of ways. The documentary focuses on the second-hand clothing industry in Kenya. They have large “mitumba” markets where merchants try and sell these clothes from other countries. On the surface, the idea of countries reusing clothing that we would throw away sounds great. However, the documentary reveals the more complex issues that arise from overconsumption.

There is a lot of clothing that thrift stores and charities cannot use. If it is damaged, stained or dirty a thrift store generally cannot resell it. These clothes are often thrown away to end up in our landfill, if we cannot find a way to use them. Some thrift stores and charities gather these stained, ripped and gross items. They can be made into bales of used garments. These bales are often sold to other countries and shipped away. Folks trying to make a living purchase these bales and sort through them trying to sell them at markets. Many of these clothes are not in any condition to sell. Now this ruined and discarded garment is a problem for someone else in another country.

What effectively happens when we overconsume, especially cheap materials, is that we need to throw more clothes away. When we throw clothes away, even if we have the best intentions, the responsibility and hassle of the garments is effectively passed down a line.

Textile overconsumption inevitably leads to more textile waste. While we have very good intentions about preserving and making a market of second hand clothes, this still comes at a cost. The summary for the 20 minute “Textile Mountain” documentary says:

> *Many of us donate our unwanted clothes to charity shops & clothing collection banks - but do we really know what happens to them then?*
>
> *Globally, 70% of our donated clothing is baled and sold to textile merchants who ship them overseas for resale in Sub-Saharan Africa.*
>
> *Textile Mountain exposes the social and environmental cost of the second hand clothing trade, tracing the path of our unwanted garments from recycling bins in Europe to landfills and waterways in the Global South.*

Shot in Kenya, Ireland and Belgium, this film calls on us to re-imagine the way the way we design, wear and reuse our clothes - so that our fashion waste no longer becomes another country's burden.

I would encourage you to take some time to watch the documentary if you have a moment. I think it is important to note that this congregation is far better at upcycling and reducing waste than I am, so a lot of these suggestions are ideas for myself more than anything.

- Buy consciously, and deliberately

Whether you buy from the thrift store, a local boutique, or larger company, buy your textiles consciously and deliberately. Some questions that I have sometimes asked myself to help with this process are:

  - How long is this item going to last? How long will I wear it?
  - Is this something I want now, because of a micro trend or an impulse, or is this something I genuinely want?
- Look at what recycling/repair Work you can do yourself

Be aware of what the thrift store can and cannot accept. If an item is unacceptable to sell at the thrift store, donating won't do much as they often do not have the staff or the time to process unsellable items. They are either sent to the landfill, or end up in bales in a different country. If this is the case, see what you can recycle on your own in various ways. Whether that is repairing or finding a new use.

- Get crafty and creative

Finally, this doesn't have to be a boring thing, there are tons of fun creative crafts and projects that can help you to reduce textile waste.

You might be wondering, what on earth does this rant about clothing have to do with Peacemaking and Manna from heaven? As we mentioned earlier, the textile industry is incredibly harmful for the environment. The textile industry is also full of labour practices that defy the dignity of human beings. A world of Shalom cannot exist if the earth is being polluted, and people are being exploited.

I have just been loving the book “Manna and Mercy”, so thank you Ruth for giving me a copy. In Manna and Mercy, the author actually centers God’s grand design for the world on the story read this morning. Manna in the wilderness. Manna living is the way we are supposed to live. But what does it mean to see the story of Manna as God’s grand design? Are we supposed to go back to foraging? Are we too supposed to eat the snow-like precipitation on the ground? If that is the case God has blessed us greatly this spring!

To explain Manna living, I am just going to read right from the book itself, because I like the language it uses a lot! After recapping the scripture we read this morning, the book summarizes the things that the Israelites were supposed to remember by keeping a jar of Manna with the ark of the covenant. This summarizes our scripture reading well:

“Yahweh asked the people to carry a jar of manna with them and to keep the jar when they settled down. This precious jar of manna would remind them of the lessons they had learned in the wilderness school.

- *We own nothing. All is God’s. All is gift*
- *God gives enough for all to be shared by all*
- *Hoarding causes rot. It stinks*
- *Work is helping God distribute manna, the gift God promises to all.*
- *God gives rest so humans can practice full time what life is all about*

FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

FRIENDSHIP WITH OTHERS

FRIENDSHIP WITH NATURE

God poured out manna day after day, dreaming of a universal manna society- a world where all receive, thank and share. Yahweh dreamed of a world where there are no big deals and little deals, no rich and poor, no oppressors and oppressed- where humans live in harmony with all creation, each part living for the good of the whole. Yahweh dreamed of SHALOM, a mended universe.”

Based on this, consumerism, or at least overconsumption, stands in opposition to manna living. One cannot practice Manna Living, if they live on Textile Mountain. Let's break down why.

- We own nothing. All is God's. All is gift

Consumerism is about owning things. Textile mountain was created because of ownership. People did not want to borrow or share. They did not view the resources used to make textile mountains as gifts. They viewed them as assets.

- God gives enough for all to be shared by all

There is enough in this world. The problem is some have lots, and others have none. How can there be people foraging textile mountain to make a living, if there is enough for all? Some people have too much. People are exploited to make too much, and then forced to sift through the leftovers to make ends meet.

- Hoarding causes rot. It stinks

  In the textile mountain documentary, people noted the literal smell that comes from these garment landfills. Overconsumption is rotting our world, and it is caused by hoarding. People hoard money, and to do so, they maintain a system where there are always people with too much, and always people with too little. The stink of pollution is rising from textile mountain.

- Work is helping God distribute manna, the gift God promises to all.

Can we stop focusing on hoarding wealth and items, and start focusing on making sure everyone has enough? Is there a way that we can live where jobs are not simply about creating items and making money? A manna world would be a world where most jobs are focused on making sure people have enough. At textile mountain, jobs are about making too many things, so people can have too much money, to spend on too many things.

- God gives rest so humans can practice full time what life is all about

Textile mountain wants our lives to be about work. Exploitive labour, no breaks, and a constant need for more. Manna living, where everyone has enough, is about friendship with God, each other, and nature.

May we choose manna living, instead of textile mountain living. Let us pray.

God give us strength to live different. Give us inspiration to live in shalom with this beautiful world. May we show our love to you, by loving all that you have created, treating it as something treasured, and not a resource for our consumption. Help us keep learning, and thrifting, and creating, and innovating, and loving. Amen.

Works Cited

Sanchez, Edith. “Some Curious Facts about Consumerism.” *Exploring Your Mind*, 8 Apr. 2023, exploringyourmind.com/curious-facts-about-consumerism/.

https://www.textilemountainfilm.com/home