

## Makers of Peace

Isaiah 12:2-6, Philippians 4:4-7

Christmas celebrates the revelation of God in Jesus. During the weeks of Advent preparation, we follow the themes of hope, joy, peace, and love. But peace is the overriding theme of this season. The Gospel proclaims Jesus, the Prince of peace. Angelic choirs at his birth promised "peace on earth, good will to all people." But what is this peace we seek? How can we bring peace to the world? How can we find peace in our lives? What will it mean for us to follow Jesus by being peacemakers?

What is peace? It is the cessation of violence, all violence. Peace means simply to stop killing, to stop thinking that the use of force is the answer. It is actively to seek non-violent resolutions to conflict. Peace is to respect others and strongly desire mutual respect among all people. It is to have faith in the oneness of all people and to live in harmony with the natural order.

Peace is intentional work for our own growth and to reach our own potential. It is commitment to the growth of others and to have humanity to reach our potential. All this description is 4. very idealistic and not at all practical, but unless we have a shining ideal to inspire our vision motivate our action, we will certainly aim too low and settle for that which is far from what we need. We need to think idealistically and act practically.

How can we bring peace in the world? There will never be peace in the world, not true and encompassing peace, until each person has peace within their own lives. First, you have to make peace in your heart. Then you must let your actions and choices reflect what is in you. Then you must take action in terms of the need that is in front of you. The old song was correct, "let peace begin with me."

This past week, President Obama's delivered a speech at the ceremony for his receiving Nobel Prize for Peace. In his speech, he spoke of the idea of a *just war*. He said:

Over time, as codes of law sought to control violence within groups, so did philosophers, clerics and statesmen seek to regulate the destructive power of war. The concept of a "just war" emerged, suggesting that war is justified only when it meets certain preconditions: if it is waged as a last resort or in self-defense; if the force used is proportional; and if, whenever possible, civilians are spared from violence.

While I think that there was clearly justification for the United States as a nation, in response to the 9/11 attack, to act with military force against the group responsible for that attack and against the political leadership that harbored them, the criteria for a "just war" are far more stringent than most people ever imagine.

St. Augustine (4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> century) first developed a set of standards for determining what a "just war" might. Many others have weighed in on this debate over the centuries, including contemporary theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, to whom is also attributed authorship of the Serenity Prayer. Unfortunately, many have donned the mantle of just war merely to justify their own wars of revenge, greed, or indignation.

Generally speaking, in order to qualify as a just war, a war must have a *just* cause and it must be waged by a *legitimate authority*. It must be *formally declared* and must be fought with a *peaceful intention*. War must be the *last resort* and there must be a reasonable *hope of*

success. The means used must possess *proportionality* to the end sought. *Noncombatants* must be given immunity. *Prisoners* must be treated humanely. Finally, *international treaties and conventions* must be honored.

Just war theory is a very narrow doorway for any nation to use to enter into violent conflict. And even if all criteria are met, in the end violence cannot create peace. Even if/when it is necessary to stop a great evil, deadly force by itself can never bring peace. War is a failure of all the other alternatives. When the armed forces are sent to war, it is a sign that we have failed to find another way. Jesus calls us to find that other way.

That other way is not to be passive in seeking peace. It is to be pro-active in opposing oppression, injustice, and violence. It is to be pro-active in supporting freedom, human rights, and mutual respect. True peacemaking requires the same commitment and courage it takes for a soldier to go to war. True peacemaking requires the values of a soldier: commitment to service, courage, and self-sacrifice. True peacemaking requires the values of a saint: commitment to service, courage, and self-sacrifice. Successful peacemaking requires the same level of commitment to finding non-violent options as we already seem to have to finding more efficient ways of killing people.

The military is not the problem. It serves only to reflect the problem. Our society relies so heavily on the ability to threaten violence that we have lost the will and creativity to seek compelling, non-violent, avenues to peacemaking. We don't even know what the possibilities can be. We do know that the path of violence does not lead to peace. It only leads to more violence.

My father spent his career as a military chaplain, living in the tension between the call of country to support military action in defense of liberty and the call of Christ to work for peace and brotherhood between the diverse peoples of the world. We who are Christian people and also citizens of the United States need to lead our nation to find the tools, tactics, and vision to move the world away from violence toward peace. This action will hasten the realization that God's reign is among us. On that day, we will begin to live free of the fear that seeks security in military strength. It will take courage, commitment, and self-sacrifice. It will take faith.

As we worship and serve God, we need to hold that knowledge in our hearts together with the hope that God is faithful, that God's mercies never come to an end, and that they are new every morning. We have to trust that God is neither our God nor their God, but the deep spirituality we experience in the face of an enemy who has become a friend. In that reality, we can sing and rejoice with integrity trusting that God is faithful and so very, very good. The making of peace is the way of living in God and is absolutely central to our journey following Jesus through life.

How can we find peace in our lives? To make peace in the world, we must first act to make peace in our communities, in our relationships, and in our own lives. Finding peace within ourselves can be as difficult as making peace in the world. Regardless, it is the prerequisite for such a peace. The apostle Paul gave each of us a clear and brief guide to finding peace within. He began with an instruction to do something: to be joyful. "Rejoice in the Lord always." Happiness is a feeling, but joy is a choice. "Again I say, rejoice."

And be gentle. "Let your gentleness be known to everyone." This is not the same thing as being wimpy or weak. Be strong in your gentleness. Speak only for yourself and say what is in your heart. Strength is not an image of coercive power or military might, but of the life-giving force of the divine Spirit.

Paul said not to worry about anything, but to let your requests be made known to God. Let them be made known by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving. Obviously, said “don’t worry” will never prevent us from worrying. What Paul was communicating was that God is only to be found in the present moment. Peace is only to be found here and now. It is with an attitude of thankfulness and an awareness being present that we can touch the peace that passes all understanding – the peace that means being awake to God.

Whether or not Afghanistan is a just war, the vast majority of wars are not just. It may be that, given the reality of evil and the state of injustice in the world, presidents on rare occasions need to employ deadly force for the cause of justice and peace. As followers of Jesus, however, we need to be opposed to war. “The church is called to nonviolence. It is the way God has chosen to overthrow evil in the world. Christians are to be nonviolent, not simply because it works, but because it reflects the very nature of God. It is the essence of the Gospel.” (Wink, 217)

Ultimately, the best way for any nation to move forward is to develop a vision for acting nonviolently. Such a vision will lead societies to improve the options that are available for non-violence – tools for peacemaking that are better and more effective than what we have now. And the best way for each of us to live is to develop a similar vision for nonviolence, to improve the options available to us for non-violent resolution to conflicts.

Jesus the teacher told us, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they are the children of God. ” You cannot be a maker of peace with others when hostility fills you on the inside. There is a need to be reconciled within yourself and with those around you from whom you are estranged or in conflict. The danger of anger is how close it brings you to the loss of love. Anger quickly turns to judgment and judgment to condemnation. Makers of peace put relationship ahead of everything. Love can be warm and fuzzy. Love can be hard and tough. Love is the sign. Love your enemies as sisters and brothers in Christ.

In this Christian season, we need to appropriate in our hearts and practice in our individual and collective lives the peace promised by the choir of angels. To be peacemakers in our world, in our relationships, and in our own hearts is the sign that we are following Jesus. We need to do our best and trust God to do the rest.