

PEACEMAKING

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“Let us pray that we ourselves cease to be the cause of suffering to each other”

-Thich N'hat Hanh

Sermon

The Spirit knows what we have seen. Knows our human patterns of hatred, anger, war – We fight with other countries. We fight with people of different religious affiliations. We even fight with those we love. Yet the Spirit does not give up – it moves us toward a newer dream. A dream of peace. Global peace, societal peace, interpersonal peace – even inner peace.

This week marks the 7th anniversary of the Iraq War – I know it is the 7th year because 2003 was the year my daughter Josephine was born. The Iraq war has gone on longer than she has been alive. What does Peace in Iraq look like? What about in Afghanistan? Israel and Palestine? India and Pakistan? What would peace in this country look like – where town hall meetings are filled with hatred, each side demonizing the other? What would it be like to live in a world without violence? To live in a world where we were able to quench our inner thirst for *more* through spiritual means rather than through consumption?

These are some of the questions raised by the Statement of Conscience on Peacemaking found in your order of service. In 2006, at our Unitarian Universalist General Assembly in St. Louis, delegates passed a Study Action Item (SAI) on Peacemaking. This SAI originally focused on the big question of peace in the face of

war, but as the study team received feedback from congregations, they realized that the repercussions of peace extend far greater than simply as an opposite to war.

The democratic process worked! And so the Statement of Conscience that will be voted on at General Assembly *this* year, in Minneapolis, looks at peace from many levels. It distinguishes between peacebuilding, peacemaking, and peacekeeping.

Peacebuilding is focused on institutions and structures that deal with violence.

Peacemaking deals with how we approach hostile parties engaged in conflict.

Peacekeeping is how we stop from getting into those situations in the first place.

With the expansion of these categories, the addition of historical and theological context, and specific calls to action, this Statement of Conscience incorporates a broader range of human, and UU experience:

Whereas the original questions four years ago were limited to whether we, as Unitarian Universalists, wanted to be a Peace church ala the Quakers, the current version has room for us to support and honor those of us who choose to serve in the military.

Whereas the original version came close to calling for pacifism, the current version understands and incorporates that there are those of us who accept pacifism, but there are also those of us who believe that lethal force is sometimes necessary.

And yet, the statement of conscience recognizes that through all our many different convictions, opinions, and experience, there is something upon which most – if not all – of us can agree. That “all people share a moral responsibility to create peace.”

Now that is something I can get behind. I am glad that it took the four years to come to this point, because four years ago, the question was “Do we want to reject the

use of any and all kinds of violence and war to resolve disputes between peoples and nations and adopt a principle of seeking just peace through nonviolent means?" And my initial answer was, um, no. I am not there yet. As I shared on Veterans Day, I have been shaped by a family that was strongly formed by military service. I was not, am not, ready to say that nonviolence was the answer to every conflict – just as I was not, am not, willing to say that violence or war was the answer to every conflict. I felt the issues were more nuanced and deserved more in-depth analysis.

But if we agree that we, as human beings, “share a moral responsibility to create peace,” we must also be clear about what we *mean* by “peace”.

I can't find who said it, but I recall reading a quote along the lines of “Imagine what the world would be like if we spent as much on *peace* research as we do on *war* research.” I remember this quote because my first reaction was “Peace research? Why do we need to research peace? Peace is what there is when there is no war. Easy!” My unexamined view of peace, as simply the lack of war, is what peace researchers, who do exist, consider to be “negative peace.”

Negative peace is defined as “order imposed from above by the threat of violence.” Nuclear deterrence is a kind of negative peace. This is the type of peace the Roman Empire achieved -- peace through strength, peace that is *imposed*, not peace that is *achieved*. The Pax Romana stated two things. One, that “peace only flourishes in the shadow of the sword. 2. If you want peace, prepare for war.” The vision of the Pax Romana was of a “world unified and ordered under an imperial and hierarchical authority, but all founded, ultimately, on the threat of coercive power.”

This sounds scarily familiar to me, and totally insufficient. Henry Wallace said, in regards to WWII, that “in a world of atomic bombs and other revolutionary new weapons such as radioactive poison gases and biological warfare, a peace maintained by a predominance of force is no longer possible.” Is it the best we can hope for, even though it falls so short? Is negative peace the best we can do?

Peace theorists answer a resounding “No! It is not the best!” Beyond negative peace lies a vision of positive peace. Rather than simply the lack of war, this view of peace looks for the abundance of life. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all “distinguish true peace from mere truce.” In Hebrew it is called Shalom. Christians call it the kingdom of God created here on earth. Unitarian Universalists call it “world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.” As Pope Paul VI said, “If you want peace, work for justice.” The theory of positive peace understands that people must be fed, safe, and taken care of in order for life to thrive, and that the prerequisite for sustainable peace is justice for all. Around the turn of the 20th century, Nobel Peace Prize winner, Jane Addams said this vision of peace requires the “rather absurd phrase of ‘cosmic patriotism’.” [And that] Whatever it may be called, it may yet be strong enough to move masses of [humanity] out of their narrow national considerations.”

But positive peace takes work – we don’t just fall into it. Wendell Berry reminds us that “We can no longer afford to confuse peaceability with passivity. Authentic peace,” he said, “is no more passive than war. Like war, it calls for discipline and intelligence and strength of character, though it calls also for higher principles and aims. If we are serious about peace, “ Berry says, “then we must work for it as ardently, seriously, continuously, carefully, and bravely as we now prepare for war.”

The theories of positive and negative peace require us to ask, “Is there such a thing as a *bad* peace?” Is negative peace better than no peace at all? Can there be such a thing as a *just* negative peace? I have the image in my mind of a benevolent dictator who imposes justice on the land, but where the violators of justice pay an exorbitant price. I have to confess; I do not know the answers to many of these questions. I do know, however, that these are questions that we must ask ourselves in order to enlarge our understanding of peace and of the possibilities that it holds. My unexamined view of peace was simply the lack of war. That is not an inspiring vision. Positive peace gives some depth to the vision of peace – it inspires, it is hopeful, it is something that we can grab onto and *work* towards rather than just dream about.

But *how* do we work towards a just peace? Though we look for the “right” answer to this question, we eventually conclude, again, that there is no, one, right answer. The original Peacemaking Study Action Item reminded us that “Our [Unitarian Universalist] principles are models for peacemaking yet we *act* as if violence is more effective than nonviolence in certain situations.”

Our culture in the United States has a love/hate relationship with violence. We know it harms our children if they are exposed to too much of it, yet even a rated G movie will contain enough violence to give many children nightmares. We shield our children from sexual innuendo, yet expose them to violent cartoons – this seems more than a bit backwards to me. We lament the gangs but don’t offer other alternatives for safe community for many those stuck in poverty. We glamorize serial killers before we kill them ourselves. We congratulate singer Rhianna on leaving her abusive boyfriend,

Chris Brown, but the duet they recorded, post beating, topped the charts. Actor Charlie Sheen has been at the center of multiple domestic violence incidents, and his television show is still getting top ratings. The list could go on.

Judy Roy reminds us, however, that we must stop the cycle: we must stop hating the people who commit violence. Same gun, she says, different target. Instead we must find compassion for those who commit violence, even as we find compassion for ourselves and disengage ourselves from the cycle.

Indeed – compassion is a powerful way to disengage from the cycle – compassion for ourselves, and for others. We can work to create peace in our own lives and relationships with those around us. When we experience the discomfort of putting ourselves in the shoes of “the other,” we find that they are not as different as we thought they were. Thomas Merton wrote, “The root of all war is fear... the fear...of *everything*.” Including ourselves. So perhaps this last method should be the first – confronting the fear we have of ourselves and of those around us.

This was the lesson of our Story for all Ages this morning, the story of the Ant Bully. Peace is a bottom up process – if we create peace in our own lives, we can better connect with and have compassion for those we consider “other.” As our compassion deepens, we are more willing to take a stand to protect those in our widening community.

Albert Einstein wisely said that “A human being is part of the whole, called by us the 'universe,' a part limited in time and space. [All of us] experience [ourselves], [our] thoughts and feelings, as something separate from the rest,” he writes, “a kind of optical delusion of [our] consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to

our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.”

Compassion – standing on the side of love.

Which leads to another method to disengage from the cycle of violence: through the study and practice of nonviolent resistance. Of course we’ve heard about Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. But I had no idea how prevalent and *effective* nonviolence can be. Theologian Walter Wink has this to say about nonviolent methods:

“In 1989, thirteen nations comprising 1,695,000 people experienced nonviolent revolutions that succeeded beyond anyone's wildest expectations . . . If we add all the countries touched by major nonviolent actions in our century (the Philippines, South Africa . . . the independence movement in India . . .) the figure reaches 3,337,400,000, a staggering 65% of humanity! All this in the teeth of the assertion, endlessly repeated, that nonviolence doesn't work in the 'real' world.”

Nonviolence does not mean passivity. It does not mean standing by while your child is threatened or while genocide occurs. As Wink points out – violence, war, require preparation. Soldiers are trained in how to commit violence effectively. So too does nonviolence require training with an equivalent amount of groundwork laid before the threat is presented.

Nonviolent resistance does not come naturally to most of us. It is something that we must study, prepare ourselves for, and practice. We cannot simply get thrown into a violent situation and expect to summon a non-violent response. So if we hope to

practice non-violence, we must engage in a study of it.

Our Chalice Night programming has just completed a two month course called *Solutions to Violence* that taught nonviolent methods. It used classics in peace and justice literature to teach peacemaking. If anyone here this morning attended that course and would be willing to talk about it with others during coffee hour or beyond, would you please stand up? Thank you.

Imagine – Imagine what would happen if, once we realized there were not weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, if we had sent an army of nonviolence peacekeepers there to work for positive peace. Imagine what might happen in Afghanistan if we were able to find creative, nonviolent means to convince people not to throw their lives away on suicide missions. I am not a policymaker, and I am not a military strategist, but I can't help but believe that these methods would be more effective, in the short term and in the long run, than continued military campaigns. Seven years of war is too long.

The Spirit knows what we atrocities we human beings are capable of. Know about war, violence and hate. But the Spirit moves us toward a newer dream. A dream that requires effort, that requires work, as all really worthwhile dreams do. But just a violence is within our human capabilities, so too is peace and compassion. Hope inside us will lead the way. May it be so. May we make it so.