

"Finding Peace"
Sermon by Rev. Tom Warren
Peace United Church of Christ
Sunday, December 8, 2013

The theme today for Advent is the theme of peace, and I want to share just briefly about two ideas of peace. One peace, of course, is peace in the world. It is a worldly peace.

I have some quotes from some people you will recognize (others you may not) about worldly peace and how worldly peace comes about. The first one is from one of my favorite idols, Mr. Jimi Hendricks, who wrote "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace". Archbishop Tutu wrote "If you want peace, you don't talk to your friends—you talk to your enemies". Mahatma Gandhi said "You cannot shake hands with a clenched fist", and Nelson Mandela, who we just lost the other day, wrote "Courageous people do not fear forgiving for the sake of peace".

Worldly peace comes through forgiveness. It comes through reaching out to our enemies. It comes through a shift in power relations and, as we were talking about in our Sunday School class this morning, the radical change in power that went on in South Africa over the course of the years where Nelson Mandela went from prison to president was an incredibly powerful change for peace.

World peace is part of the promise that Jesus brings, but I also want to talk about inner peace—that is, the peace that we long for as individuals and where we find that peace and some quotes, again, about inner peace. This one is from the Dalai Lama, who wrote "We cannot obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace within ourselves", so the Dalai Lama is simply pointing out the obvious, that we, as individuals, need to work and find, and develop and nurture our own spiritual inner peace in order to be helpful in securing peace for the world.

The great German theologian and mystic Meister Eckhart wrote this. Meister Eckhart, by the way, lived from 1260 until 1327. He wrote, "Peace is not to be learned by flight from the world, or by running away or turning solitary and going apart from the world, rather, we must learn inner peace wherever or with whomever we are with", so Meister Eckhart reminds us that we don't find peace by turning our backs on the world and hiding out alone in a cave somewhere, but we find peace in engagement with our world.

Another healer, Dr. Gerald Jampolsky, whom I did not know, wrote this. He said "Inner peace can be reached only when we practice forgiveness", so, like Nelson Mandela, here the words are pointing us back to forgiveness and that we cannot find peace in our lives until we let some things go.

We all struggle with whatever those things are that we are holding onto. Perhaps there are people in our lives whom we feel have done us wrong, or situations in our lives that have not come out the way we thought they should have, and we carry that "baggage" with us internally, and it disrupts our abilities to find peace. In fact, they say that resentments eventually eat away at our souls, so finding a way to forgive those whom we feel have done us wrong, or situations in life that have not turned out the way that we wanted, finding forgiveness for that is incredibly important in our pursuit of peace.

A final quote is from Mildred Ryder, who died in 1981, and was better known as the "Peace Pilgrim" and did a lot of walking, talking, and teaching about peace in the world. She wrote "To attain inner peace, you must actually give your life, not just your possessions. When you at last give your life, bringing into alignment your beliefs and the way you live, then, and only then, can you begin to find inner peace, so Mildred Ryder was talking about consistency in our lives, a consistency with what we do, what we believe, and how we act, and that when we integrate all those elements in our lives, then we can find the inner peace and the serenity that we seek in our lives.

So, I was thinking, and I encourage all of you to think for just a moment, about where, in my daily life, do I experience moments of peace. I think in the course of a day that I live I have moments of peace—and I would stress, moments—that are fleeting. They don't seem to last too long but, nonetheless, they come in the course of my day. I find moments of peace.

The one place where I consistently find a sense of peace, and not just a feeling, but a moment where I feel like I am enveloped in God's peace is that moment of the day between when I lay my head on the pillow in my bed and the time that I fall asleep, so it is that moment, usually only a few minutes, when I lay my head down on the bed and I actually fall asleep. I have come to find those moments as incredibly peace filled for me, so I have been thinking about why, at that moment, do I feel most in touch with God—why, in that brief two, three, four, or ten minutes, maybe, do I feel so connected to the peace that God provides for us, and here is what I discovered. One reason is that I am in bed. I am warm. I am covered up with a wonderful quilt that keeps me warm, so part of peace is feeling safe, feeling secure in our surroundings. I am in a beautiful home which, again, is about safety and security, so I feel like I am tucked in, tucked into the warmth of my bed, tucked into the safety of my home, and I am also lying next to my wife, so I am feeling the love and security of family, and knowing that my children are just a room away, hopefully safe in their beds.

So, I think inner peace has a lot to do with safety, being secure, being surrounded by loved ones, feeling secure in our lives, in our economics, in our health, and all of that makes for the peace that Christ promises the world, and when I think about what God's intent for the world is, it is an intent that we would all have that security and the love of family and friends and that peace when we feel when we are safe in our lives.

I think peace that Jesus brings to the world is partly about the inner peace. It is about being on the journey as individuals, trying to make peace with our lives, make peace with our neighbors, make peace with those who have wronged us, but it is also about creating those situations so that all people can have the peace of Christ, and Christ's vision for that peace was where everyone would be taken care of and everyone would have their needs met, so the promise of peace in this Christmas time is not just about political peace (though that is very important) but it is very much about well being, individual lives taken care of, where all that we need is provided. It is about doing the hard work of reconciliation and peace, forgiving those who have wronged us, so the promise of Christ is that peace comes and that Jesus calls us into this path. The way of Christ is the way of living. It is the way of mercy. It is the way of forgiveness. It is the way of healing, reaching out to those who are struggling, and finding God's peace.

The Advent season is about this peace. It is about the joy of this season. It is about the promise which is ours to claim through Jesus Christ, so as we prepare for Christ's birth, let us work towards the peace that has been offered to us. We thank God for the peace of Christ. Amen.

Tom Warren, Pastor