

Blessed are the Peacemakers

11th October 2020

Prelude

Whether this is your first time joining with our community,
 or whether you have been with us forever
 – welcome to our time of celebration, reflection and community.
 Let's take a few moments of quietness to invite the Spirit of Life and of Love
 To be present among us and to awaken within us.

Opening Words

The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes within the souls of people
 when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers,
 and when they realize that at the centre of the universe dwells the Great Spirit,
 and that this centre is really everywhere, it is within each of us.

*These words were written by Black Elk – a Holy Man of the Sioux nation – at about the age of 12
 he participated in the Battle of Little Big Horn, and was injured in the Wounded Knee Massacre.*

Chalice Lighting

~ *Universal Peace Federation (adapted)*

Let light fill the sky.
 Let its warmth heal us wherever we are broken.
 Let it burn away the fog so that we can see each other clearly.
 Let our selfishness vanish so we can see all people as our neighbours, as part of our family.
 Let our chalice flame teach our hearts to reach always to the good.
 Our world awaits the light that each of us can bring.

1st Hymn

Purple Book No. 13

Bring Flowers to our Altar ~ *Lena Baxter*

Bring flowers to our altar to show nature's
 beauty,
 the harvest of goodness in earth, sky and sea.
 Bring light to our altar to guide every nation
 from hatred to love and to humanity.
 Bring a dove to our altar its wings ever flying
 in permanent quest for the peace all may share.
 Bring bread to our altar the hungry supplying
 and feeding the poor who depend on our care.

Bring hope to our altar in your gentle dreaming
 of all the good things that will make your heart
 glad.
 Bring love to our altar, a bright witness beaming
 to all who are burdened, or lonely or sad.
 Bring work to our altar to help every nation
 and celebrate all that's already achieved.
 Come yourself to our altar in true dedication
 to all the ideals we in common believe.

Time for All Ages*Parable of the Sandcastles – from the Buddhist tradition*

Some children were building sandcastles by the seaside. Some of them constructed very grand affairs complete with turrets, moats and flags and some built more simple ones. But each child jealously guarded their own castle and shouted to the other children 'mine is better than yours.' Then one child accidentally stepped another child's castle, destroying a turret. The child whose castle had been damaged reacted angrily calling out 'you clumsy idiot' and kicking the child who had caused the damage. He called to the other children to help and punched and kicked the first child, then they completely destroyed his castle. From then on the rest of the children guarded their own castles even more jealously, and shouted at anyone who came near.

As it began to get dark, parents called to their children to get ready to go home. They all lost interest in their castles and soon the tide came in and washed them all away

2nd Hymn Purple Book No. 104 Name Unnamed, Hidden and Shown ~ *Brian Wren*

Name unnamed, hidden and shown, knowing and known. Gloria!

Beautifully moving, ceaselessly forming,
growing, emerging with awesome delight,

Maker of Rainbows, glowing with colour, arching in wonder,
energy flowing in darkness and light:

Name unnamed, hidden and shown, knowing and known. Gloria!

Spinner of Chaos, pulling and twisting,
freeing the fibres of pattern and form,

Weaver of Stories, fabled or unspoken, tangled or broken,
shaping a tapestry vivid and warm:

Name unnamed, hidden and shown, knowing and known. Gloria!

Nudging Discomforter, prodding and shaking,
waking our lives to creative unease,

Straight-Talking Lover, checking and humbling, jargon and grumbling,
speaking the truth that refreshes and frees:

Name unnamed, hidden and shown, knowing and known. Gloria!

Midwife of Changes, skilfully guiding,
drawing us out through the shock of the new,

Woman of Wisdom, deeply perceiving, never deceiving,
freeing and leading in all that we do:

Name unnamed, hidden and shown, knowing and known. Gloria!

Daredevil Gambler, risking and loving,
 giving us freedom to shatter your dreams,
 Life-giving Loser, wounded and weeping, dancing and leaping,
 sharing the caring that heals and redeems.
 Name unnamed, hidden and shown, knowing and known. Gloria!

Reading – Gandhi's daily Scripture readings for peace ~ *John Dear – Christian peace activist*
 ~ read by Tim

When writer Louis Fischer visited Gandhi's ashram in 1942, he noticed a picture of Jesus on the wall -- the only wall decoration around -- with the caption, "He is our peace."

"But you are not a Christian," he said to Gandhi.

"I am a Christian and a Hindu and a Muslim and a Jew," Gandhi answered.

"Then you are a better Christian than most Christians," Fischer thought to himself.

Gandhi reportedly spent two hours in meditation each day -- one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening -- for more than 40 years. This became the bedrock for all his daily work for justice, independence and service. Most of his meditation time was in silence, but he always read from the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavad Gita.

"I have not been able to see any difference between the Sermon on the Mount and the Bhagavad Gita," he once confessed.

Gandhi was probably the greatest modern Christian "fundamentalist" because he took Jesus's word seriously and strictly adhered to his fundamental teachings of love, nonviolence and compassion. Gandhi lived his life according to Matthew chapters 5-7 and returned to that handbook on nonviolence every morning and every evening. In his private letters, he was puzzled why other Christians didn't do the same.

"Isn't it more important to do what Jesus wants us to do than to call him, 'Lord, Lord'?" he wrote to one friend, referring to Jesus' lament in the last verses of the Sermon on the Mount.

So let us hear and reflect on a passage from the Bhagavad Gita, just as Gandhi prayed through our greatest Christian teachings.

Those I love are incapable of ill will and return love for hatred.
 Living beyond the reach of "I" and "mine," and of pain and pleasure,
 Full of mercy, contented, self-controlled, of firm resolve,
 With all their heart and all their mind given to Me -- with such as these I
 am in love.

Not agitating the world, nor by it agitated, they stand above the sway of elation, competition and fear, accepting life, good and bad, as it comes. They are pure, efficient, detached, ready to meet every demand I make on them as a humble instrument of My work.

Who serves both friend and foe with equal love, not buoyed up by praise nor cast down by blame, alike in heat and cold, pleasure and pain, free from selfish attachments and self-will, ever full, in harmony everywhere, firm in faith -- such a one is dear to Me.

3rd Hymn Green Book No. 198 For the Healing of the Nations ~ *Fred Kaan*

For the healing of the nations,
 God we pray with one accord;
 For a just and equal sharing
 Of the things that earth affords.

To a life of love in action
 Help us rise and pledge our word.
 Help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us ever into freedom,
 From despair your world release;
 That redeemed from war and hatred,
 All may come and go in peace.

Show us how through care and goodness
 Fear will die and hope increase,
 Fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
 Let it from the earth depart;
 Pride of status, race and schooling,
 Dogmas keeping us apart.
 May our common quest for justice
 Be our brief life's hallowed art.
 Be our brief life's hallowed art.

Prayer

We pray for the peace not past understanding:

 The peace of children laughing and students quietly studying,
 Of young women dancing and men flirting beneath the stars.

The peace not past understanding:

 Where no gunfire disrupts the night,
 Where girls can walk down city streets and not be afraid,

Where voices of hatred and intolerance find no hearing in the public square,
 The peace of decisions democratically determined,

 Where opportunities for a decent life are equitably shared:

Not the peace of gated communities,

 The false security of padlocked doors or walled borders,

But the peace that reigns when people come together to solve their problems
 in a world where national boundaries are rapidly falling away.
 We pray for peace in this world, here and now,
 Not for deliverance in the sweet hereafter,
 But for the kind of promised land foretold by prophets of old:
 Where swords are beaten into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks,
 Re-tooling the economy from military to civilian manufacture,
 Where justice will roll down like waters,
 proclaiming liberty to the captives of the prison of industrial complexes,
 Bringing the oil of gladness
 Instead of dependence on Middle Eastern crude,
 And where a young child shall lead them,
 A rising generation in an emerging global culture.
 Good God, remind us of your vision for us,
 your promise of a peace not far off but close at hand,
 not a mere dream but a better future waiting to be made real,
 when people will build houses and live to inhabit them,
 plant trees and eat their fruit,
 and none shall hurt or destroy. Amen.

Time of Silence

Musical Offering

Sermon Blessed are the Peacemakers...

... for they will be called children of God. How can we be peacemakers? And what does it mean to be children of God?

I would love to be able to tell you that I hold an aspiration for a utopia of complete world peace at some stage in the future, but I'm afraid that I just don't believe that absolute peace is possible. It seems that the flawed nature of humanity is not willing or able to live in complete peacefulness.

In thinking about this sermon a song of David Bowie's which often gave me pause for thought in my younger years kept coming back to me. Bowie sang:

President Joe once had a dream... he told them his scheme for a Saviour Machine
 its answer was law... Its logic stopped war, gave them food
 How they adored till it cried in its boredom
 "Please don't believe in me, please disagree with me
 Life is too easy"

Is there something of the truth in this? Is it in the nature of humankind that we are just too downright contrary to live in a great utopian peace? In thinking about this I turn not to any great works of spirituality or philosophy, but to science fiction – the new mythology of our age – where great themes are taken on, by way of telling stories – the most effective way that great themes are always explored. I love listening to radio drama. Some time ago I listened to the serialisation of a sci-fi adventure 'Journey into Space.'

In the story some astronauts find themselves back on earth in the time of prehistory, with Neanderthals roaming the planet. But the Neanderthals are not the only beings on the prehistoric earth; there is also a race of very highly technologically evolved beings living alongside them. These beings have been happily living on the earth for thousands of years, but recently with the emergence of the violent Neanderthals they are making plans to leave the earth and find another planet on which to live. The space-travelling humans come into contact with the alien beings and ask for assistance in getting back to their own time, the beings are happy to assist but when they discover that the Neanderthals are ancestors of the space travellers, they inquire as to whether human beings are still violent creatures. The astronauts at first say, “of course, not” but as they go on speaking of their own race they find they can't say in all honesty that humans never kill each other. For the other beings the concept of violence is completely alien. They think back to their first meeting with the humans, and remember the humans first reaction of repulsion on seeing these new and strange beings. They ask whether the humans are still repulsed by them. The captain replies that, now that they have got to know them, they are no longer afraid of them; to which the alien perceptively replies – I think you are still repulsed by us, but you are working towards suppressing this feeling.

This part of the story brought to my mind a not altogether comfortable acknowledgement of my reactions to the Pope's visit to Scotland while I was living there. I have to admit that I harboured some not altogether logical animosity towards this visit. There may be logical reasons, to do with issues such as the manner in which the institution represented by this man has dealt with accusations of child abuse, and the unwillingness to recognise the priestly ministry of women, but there is also some sort of illogical animosity, probably to do with the zeal of the converted. Having left the Catholicism of my childhood behind me I seem to want to shake the dust from my feet. I'm aware of this twinge of animosity within me, but I very much hope that I work towards not acting out of these feelings in any antagonistic way towards any Catholic, rather treating them with compassion and respect, just as the astronauts suppressed their feelings of revulsion towards the alien beings. It is to be hoped that as human beings we can constantly work our way through hostile feelings which arise in us, in a way that can promote peace.

In thinking about the alien beings later, the astronauts conjecture that they seem to be beings who operate purely on principles of logic, they have seen no evidence of an artistically creative side to these beings and they conjecture that the part of humanity which makes us creative and open to the appreciation of creative beauty is, in some way, the same part of us which makes us volatile, restless and prone to disagree with each other, and thus having our propensity for violence. This isn't a new idea – the notion of the temperamental creative artist, and maybe there is some truth in it. Echoes of that David Bowie song: in which a completely orderly utopia is just too boring for us contrary human beings – and unfortunately we don't seem to be very good at keeping that contrariness within safe limits to stop it spilling over into warmongering.

I don't think complete peace is ever a possibility but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't work towards it and pray for it – work towards it first in our own hearts and then in our family and communities – ripples spreading outward. There's a story of a man who spoke with a friend who worked in a soup kitchen in New York city; he asked his friend why she bothered, saying “the problem is so great that there is no way it can ever be solved” and she replied “that's what you don't understand about the spiritual life; just because something is impossible, doesn't mean that you shouldn't do it.”

Just because complete peace isn't possible doesn't mean that we shouldn't try to be peacemakers. When we think about peacemakers, we might think of the great figures from history Mahatma Gandhi; Martin Luther King; the Dalai Lama: and we may think “I don't have the capacity to follow in the footsteps of these great leaders.” Maybe not – but what does it mean to be a peacemaker? Does one have to live out the life of a peacemaker in the public arena? Not necessarily.

The biblical scholar William Barclay writes about the word peace in this verse from Matthew's gospel. He says that the Hebrew word *shalom*, which is translated as peace, never means only the absence of trouble; in Hebrew, peace always means *everything which make for a person's highest good* – not only freedom from all trouble, but enjoyment of all good. There is another meaning for this word *shalom*, on which, Barclay says, the Jewish rabbis loved to dwell, and which they held to be the highest task which anyone can perform; this is to establish *right relationship* with other people.

All of us can consciously work towards being in right relationship with the people whom we meet every day. In the same way that perfect world peace is unlikely, it is unlikely that we will be able to be in right relationship with our fellows at all times – but this does not mean that we should stop trying, or that when we fail, as fail we will, that we can give up trying.

Barclay also notes that this beatitude says that the blessing is on the *peacemakers*, not necessarily the *peacelovers*. Sometimes we can love peace in the wrong way – we can refuse to confront a situation in order to maintain a quiet life. It could be that in this way we are storing up trouble for the future by smoothing over issues that need to be dealt with. What this beatitude demands is not the passive acceptance of things because we are afraid of the trouble of doing anything about them, but the active facing of things, and the *making* of peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle; working towards being in right relationship with others even if it is a struggle to do so.

And what of the second part of the beatitude – that the peacemakers will be called children of God. What does this mean? What can it mean to us?

There's a Celtic creation myth, the essence of which is that "in the beginning there was only God, and when God went to create the world there was nothing but God and therefore God created the world out of Godself, so that all of us and all that is are in fact just emanations of God." This coheres well with my understanding about the nature of God – immanent within each one of us. And so to be a child of God is really just **to fulfil one's potential as a human being**.

But to be God-like: is this necessarily to be entirely good? In a discussion group once some of us were discussing the nature of God and the general feeling of the group was not towards an entirely good and all-loving God, rather the feeling was that God is the ground of all being and therefore contains within it both good and evil. And this seems to me to cohere with how we experience the world – a constant struggle between all the contradictions within creation. This is what reality is.

However there is some strong feeling within me that somehow the consciousness of the universe – the mind of God – tips towards the prevailing of good over evil. And as Teresa of Avila contended "God has no hands on earth but our hands" so it is up to us to make sure that the balance keeps tipping towards the good in the constant struggle between the contradictions of life.

We must continue to work and to pray for peace, **and** we must continue to live with hope. Czech poet and president Vaclav Havel wrote about the need for leaders to have hope:

Hope is not prognostication. It is an orientation of the spirit, an orientation of the heart. Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. Hope is definitely not the same thing as optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. It is this hope, above all, which gives us the strength to live and continually try new things.

We must work towards peace and hope for peace, regardless of how it will turn out, and in working towards this goal let us hold in our hearts a re-visioning of the beatitude:

“Blessed are those who produce right relationships one with another,
for they are fulfilling the potential of that of God within themselves.”

Time for Silent Reflection

Notices Tim

4th Hymn Green Book No. 226 This is My Song, O God of All the Nations ~*Lloyd Stone*

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine;
This is my home, the country where my heart is,
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;
But other hearts in other lands are beating
With hopes and dreams as true and high as
mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine;
But other lands have sunlight, too, and clover,
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine

Closing Words

Go in peace.

Live simply, gently, at home in yourselves.

Act justly.

Speak justly.

Remember the depth of your own compassion.

Forget not your power in the days of your powerlessness.

Do not desire to be wealthier than your peers.

and stint not your hand of charity.

Practice forbearance.

Speak the truth, or speak not.

Take care of yourselves as bodies,

for you are a good gift.

Crave peace for all people in the world,

beginning with yourselves,

and go as you go with the dream of that peace alive in your heart.

Extinguish Chalice

Postlude