

**“Peace, peace...when there is no peace!”**

**Luke 1:39-56**

**December 9, 2018**

**Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)**

Since 1500 B.C.—three and a half millennia--humans have been entirely at peace for 268 years (only 8% of recorded human history).

In the last century, 108 million people were killed in wars.

During World War I, less than 5% of the casualties were civilians. Today, 75% of those killed or wounded in international hostilities are non-combatants.

What will I do to build a more peaceful world: Peace, peace...when there is no peace?

In the build up to World War I, among followers of Christ and others, the concept of pacifism re-emerged as a form of resistance to the physical, violent resolution of conflict. Pacifism then evolved into the “Just War Theory”, the principles of which are as follows:

- 1) **Seriousness of threat.** Is the threatened harm clear enough to justify the use of military force, such as genocide or ethnic cleansing?
- 2) **Proper purpose.** Is it clear that the primary purpose of military action is to eliminate the threat?
- 3) **Last resort.** Has every non-military means of meeting the threat been explored?
- 4) **Proportional means.** Are the duration and intensity of the military intervention the minimum necessary to meet the threat?
- 5) **Balance of consequences.** Is there a reasonable chance of the military action being successful, with the consequences not likely to be worse than the consequences of inaction?

On August 2, 1990, America's Commander-in-Chief initiated military action in the Middle East. 34 other nations joined the effort to defeat Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. 146 Americans died; 1000 Kuwaitis died; 200,000 Iraqis died.

As the Executive Minister for the United Church of Christ in Minnesota at that time, I opposed that military intervention because I believed that it did not meet the standards of a Just War. I participated in a news conference with Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Roman Catholic peers, all of us opposing Desert Shield and Desert Storm on behalf of our judicatories.

On the following Sunday, I was scheduled to preach at the UCC congregation in a town two hours west of the Twin Cities. I arrived to find the church property decorated with yellow ribbon. At some peril, I preached a message of peace that morning before a congregation that was supporting, and praying for one of its sons deployed in the Gulf War.

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Ten years ago, my friend David Cortright published the aptly titled book *Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas*, and inscribed my copy with the directive: "For Jeff—best wishes to a partner in the quest for justice and peace." I guess that preaching on this Sunday morning to a congregation an hour north of the seat of world power is an effort to honor that partnership.

David is a distinguish scholar and professor at the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. As student years ago he served as drum major for the University's marching band, a hallowed position on that campus. Here is what Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, says that "David Cortright's *Peace* shows that it is possible to prevent the scourge

of war and create a more just and peaceful future—if we are prepared to learn the lessons of history and apply proven peacemaking knowledge.”

Regarding the conclusion of the Cold War, David’s historical analysis traces the positive impact of reciprocal moves by George H.W. Bush and Mikhail Gorbachev to reduce nuclear armaments: “The greatest advances for peace occur when political leaders make conciliatory gestures that reduce tensions and prompt reciprocation. Citizen movements play a decisive supporting role when they create the favorable political climate that encourages these initiatives.”

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Regarding Christianity, David reminds us that “The doctrinal basis for the Christian commitment to pacifism is explicitly stated in various New Testament passages: *“You have heard that it was said ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy’. But I tell you ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’...Early Christians rejected the bearing of arms and military service even at the cost of a martyr’s death...As the Christian Church crystallized into an established institution the early commitment to pacifism fell by the wayside.”*

President Jerry Falwell, Jr., of Liberty University, urges students to seek permits to carry concealed handguns.

According to the Pew Research Center, Americans are virtually evenly divided between protecting the right of gun ownership, on the one hand, and strengthening gun control measures, on the other.

The National Education Association claims that 160,000 children are absent from school every day due to the threat of attack or intimidation.

According to the National Coalition on Domestic Violence, a woman is attacked or beaten in the U.S. every 9 seconds.

The Southern Poverty Law Center has identified 953 active "Hate Groups" in the U.S.

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I, for one, do not know where else to seek, and to find peace than in the fulfillment of God's bargain with the human race. That bargain is not more poignantly acknowledged than in the words of Mary, a refugee from Nazareth, the bearer of God's answer, then and now, to a world in turmoil:

*"My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior...for the Mighty One has done great things for me...His mercy is for those who fear him from generation to generation...He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts...He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly...He has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty...(all) according to the promise He made to our ancestors."*

A little more than a week ago, America's former Commander-in-Chief passed away, 28 years after he initiated military action in the Middle East. Last Tuesday afternoon, I joined thousands of my fellow citizens paying respects to a man whom I believe has been correctly described as a worthy leader, a loyal friend, a loving father and grandfather, though an imperfect human being. I paused before his remains in the Capitol Rotunda, to reflect upon our differences, and our similarities.

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