

“Worth the Wait: Peace”

Isaiah 11:1-10; Matthew 3:1-12 (lectionary selections)

Hyattstown Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)

December 10, 2017 (Second Sunday of Advent)

When I travel by car on an extended trip, as was the case recently, I'll sometimes turn off the radio, and rely instead upon an assortment of CD's to keep me company. One valued CD that I often play is entitled "Speeches that Changed the World". It includes 21 memorable orations by the likes of Winston Churchill, Douglas MacArthur, Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Mother Teresa, the only woman. Public addresses of five American presidents are remembered, from FDR to Bush 43. The CD is an articulation, of sorts, of world history from the 1940's to the beginning of this century,

What is notable about the collection is this: More than four out of five of the speeches are directly inspired by war or conflict in the human condition. The so-called "Football War" of 1969 between El Salvador and Honduras, the forgotten U.S. invasion of Panama, and the Sri Lankan Civil War from 1983 to 2009, to name a few, were so trivial that they did not even make the cut!

It seems that notions of "Peace" do not readily qualify as "Speeches that Changed the World".

This is not surprising, when placed in the context of the larger human enterprise. In the history of warfare, the twentieth century stands out as the bloodiest and most brutal: three times more people have been killed in wars in the last 90 years than in the previous 500 hundred years. Three out of four fatalities of war are women and children. Landmines in 70 countries maim or kill 26,000 civilians every year, including up to 10,000 children.

But it is not just the appalling statistics of warfare ravaging humanity that so dismiss notions of "Peace". An analysis of the more "local" manifestations of the human enterprise—manifestations in our own nation—are sufficiently discouraging: According to the Paladin Rescue Alliance, up to 17,000

women and children are trafficked in the U.S. every year. In the last 50 years, there have been more than a million and a half deaths by firearms in the U.S. The Southern Poverty Law Center, the most reliable and respected source of such matters, reports that “hate incidents” in the U.S. since the election in November of 2017 exceed 1000 in number.

Lamentably, but perhaps understandably, notions of “Peace” do not readily qualify as “Speeches that Changed the World”.

My friend David Cortright has spent his professional life trying to make it otherwise. As a Professor of Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, David wrote the definitive book on peacemaking, entitled “Peace: A History of Movements and Ideas”. David received the Ghandi Peace Award in 2004, for his work in nuclear disarmament, counterterrorism, and non-violent social change. David points out: “The book of Isaiah called believers to study war no more, but offered little instruction about learning peace. The study of peace has been neglected over the ages and has emerged as a proper discipline only in recent decades.”

Even so, that is worth the wait!

And when, as we read in the book of Isaiah: “A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse...the spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge...the wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid...and a little child shall lead them...and the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea... “

...then, that will be worth the wait!

David Cortright goes on to point out the difference between “negative peace, which is simply the absence of war, and positive peace, which is the presence of justice. Peace can be slavery or it can

be freedom; it can be subjugation or liberation (catch the nuance here REPEAT IT)...Positive peace means transcending the conditions that limit human potential, and assuring opportunities for self-realization. Ghandi spoke of nonviolence rather than peace and emphasized the necessity of overcoming injustice.”

That kind of peace is worth the wait...and that is where you and I come in.

Yes, peace in the Middle East seems as elusive as ever. Yes, United Nations “peace keepers” are targets of blatant violence. Yes, American and North Korean leaders engage in a war of words.

We may not feel that we have much influence when it comes to conflict raging across the globe, but individually, you and I have total influence on how life is lived in the daily context, how you and I transcend the conditions that limit human potential, how you and I assure opportunities for self-realization, how you and I are involved in overcoming injustices, how you and I MAKE PEACE!

In Jesus Christ, God hits the streets. Preparing for that triumph is the meaning of Advent.

Jesus tells us that how we treat other people, sometimes “the least of these”, is his measure of how we treat Him. Jesus called on his disciples—calls on you and me—to turn the other cheek, to practice humility, to walk the extra mile, to put away our swords, to love our neighbors (even our enemies). Jesus says that it is the peacemakers who will be called “the children of God”. Jesus ends our warring ways, and reconciles us to God and to one another.

In other words, as Isaiah prophesied, the little child in the lead, is “the Prince of Peace”.

And that...is worth the wait! This Jesus inspires us to make positive peace, even to make speeches that might—just might—change our little part of the world!

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