

# Peace

World peace must develop from inner peace. Peace is not just mere absence of violence. Peace is, I think, the manifestation of human compassion.

Dalai Lama XIV

Until he extends the circle of his compassion to all living things, man will not himself find peace.

Albert Schweitzer

You find peace not by rearranging the circumstances of your life, but by realizing who you are at the deepest level.

Eckhart Tolle

## **Peace Like a River, Strength Like a Mountain**

Nature provides ready metaphors for peace and justice. Jesus' peaceful kingdom is described as a mustard seed that grows into a large bush, providing shelter to all. The Hebrew prophet Amos cried for justice to roll down like water, and we sing, "I've got peace like a river" and "strength like a mountain."

But it takes more than mere words to join nature to action. Truly experiencing ourselves as a force of nature in all its varied circumstance is something beyond just symbolism.

The next breath I take is not a metaphor. It is, if I am mindful of it, a reminder that I myself am a force of nature, linked to all that exists on our living, breathing planet. In many American Indian traditions the medicine wheel honors the natural forces that can guide us into harmony with all living things. Our suffering, our victories, and the passions and beliefs that move us to action are part of a larger system that appears at times to seek harmony and at times to tear us apart. In engaging each fully we become forces of nature.

Officials laughed when Wangari Maathai said that the women of her country would plant fifteen million trees. The natural strength of the trees they planted began flowing through the women who planted them and they discovered their own power. Through the simple planting of trees women who lived in poverty and despair began to transform the landscape and themselves. The trees helped reduce soil erosion and water pollution. They provided shade and produced sustainable crops. Wangari Maathai's vision transformed the landscape of Kenya, and the Greenbelt Movement she started has spread to more than thirty countries.

Growing and producing enough food for their families gave Kenyan women a greater vision and unexpected courage. They began to challenge their leaders' dictatorial and

environmentally destructive policies. They faced brutal oppression with a strength they could not have imagined when the first trees were planted. When you plant a tree and you see it grow, Maathai says, something happens to you. You want to protect it, and you value it. The same thing happens with a vision.

Stephen M. Schick, *Be the Change: Poems, Prayers & Meditations for Peacemakers and Justice Seekers*

The day the power of love overrules the love of power, the world will know peace.

Mahatma Gandhi

Peace cannot be kept by force; it can only be achieved by understanding.

Albert Einstein

Many people think excitement is happiness.... But when you are excited you are not peaceful. True happiness is based on peace.

Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Art of Power*

### **Making Peace**

A voice from the dark called out,  
“The poets must give us  
imagination of peace, to oust the intense,  
familiar  
imagination of disaster. Peace, not only  
the absence of war.”

But peace, like a poem,  
is not there ahead of itself,  
can't be imagined before it is made,  
can't be known except  
in the words of its making,  
grammar of justice,  
syntax of mutual aid.

A feeling towards it,  
dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have  
until we begin to utter its metaphors,  
learning them as we speak.

A line of peace might appear  
if we restructured the sentence our lives  
are making,  
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and  
power,  
questioned our needs, allowed  
long pauses. . . .

A cadence of peace might balance its  
weight  
on that different fulcrum; peace, a  
presence,  
an energy field more intense than war,  
might pulse then,  
stanza by stanza into the world,  
each act of living  
one of its words, each word  
a vibration of light—facets  
of the forming crystal.

Denise Levertov

## **The Sower and the Seed, A Parable Interpreted**

There was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart and all sorts of good things, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read the newspapers and get depressed. One day she decided to go shopping, and she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus because he looked just like the pictures she'd seen on holy cards and devotional pictures. She looked again and again at him, and finally she got up enough nerve and asked, 'Excuse me, are you Jesus?' 'I am.' 'Do you work here?' 'No,' Jesus said, 'I own the store.' 'Oh, what do you sell in here?' 'Oh, just about anything!' 'Anything?' 'Yeah, anything you want. What do you want?' She said, 'I don't know.' Well,' Jesus said, 'feel free, walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is that you want, and then come back and we'll see what we can do for you.'

"She did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air, careful use of resources. She wrote furiously. By the time she got back to the counter, she had a long list. Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up and smiled, 'No problem.' And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid out the packets. She asked, 'What are these?' Jesus replied, 'Seed packets. This is a catalog store.' She said, 'You mean I don't get the finished product?' 'No, this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them to grow and someone else reaps the benefits.' 'Oh,' she said. And she left the store without buying anything."

Megan McKenna, *Parables: The Arrows of God*

It's so hard to forget pain, but it's even harder to remember sweetness. We have no scar to show for happiness. We learn so little from peace.

Chuck Palahniuk, *Diary*

## **Living in a War-Driven Culture**

We are well aware of the usual consequences of war: lists of casualties, photos of destruction, debates of causes. But, what about less obvious consequences. What about the effects of living in a culture which is driven by war?

I grieve that war creates a climate of scarcity.

When more than \$100 billion per year are siphoned from our collective resources to support war, those resources are not available for enhancing, visionary programs. In the name of patriotism and security, we are forced to sacrifice in other aspects of our lives. But, when we have already reached a bottom line in terms of health care, education, and public services, to sacrifice means to have our own pockets picked to fill the coffers of war.

It is as if, while you are in the kitchen preparing a snack for your guest, someone you trust quietly rifles through your drawers in search of valuables to pay for an expensive addiction. In a society which has not yet fulfilled its promise to all of its citizens of an equitable share of the American dream, war is like that thief who silently robs everyone but then labels our losses patriotic virtues.

Do you really want someone—anyone—to rob you of your future and then tell you the imposed scarcity is a virtue? I know I don't!

I grieve that war creates a climate of fear.

War cannot happen, nor can it be justified, without some threat. The psychology of conflict requires a perception of danger. It might be a threat to our homes, or a threat to our resources, or a threat to our self-image, or a threat to our principles. Threat is then made personal and real through fear. But fear is a double-edged sword.

Without fear, all of our fight-or-flight reflexes are relaxed, and our higher thought processes can function. But introduce fear, and the most primal responses rise to the surface—enlisting specialized hormones, enzymes, perceptual changes. A person in fear becomes attuned to threats. Filled with caution and terror, one perceives the whole world as a potential threat. Fear, once bred, reproduces itself rapidly, engendering a continuity of fears.

You know how long it takes to get your heartbeat down, to get your head clear, to get your eyes sharp after you have been frightened by something. You know how hard it is to return to your normal, trusting, hopeful self. Until you regain that sense of control, you waste your energies irrationally on what you want to avoid, not what you want to achieve. Those who promote a sense of fear are also like thieves: robbing you of your best self, stealing your deepest dreams, leaving only the empty whispers of anxiety.

Do you really want someone—anyone—to rob you of your capacity for higher thought and visionary action, and then tell you that fear is the norm? I know I don't!

I grieve that war creates a climate of division.

In our current time of war, sharper lines of dualism are once again being drawn—often to the detriment of not only our community, but of the essential diversity which we cherish. Rather than weave a rich pattern of complexity and diversity, we are asked to see things one-dimensionally. In the process, we lose the potential for wisdom and insight offered by the radical openness which is our heritage. For example, if we consider all military personnel to be our antagonists, we will miss the wise counsel of people like General Anthony Zinni, whose first-hand knowledge of war led him to advocate peace. If we consider all who oppose war to be our allies, we may abet some who advocate violence against the system.

Whenever our world view becomes one of division, not unity, we sacrifice one of our greatest assets: our ability to perceive connections more than differences.

Do you really want someone—anyone—to rob you of your capacity to reach across divisions and make meaning, and then tell you those divisions are meaningful? I know I don't! But, if you don't want to be robbed, if you don't want to have your values and vision eroded, if you don't want to see your future clouded, what can you do?

You can find your voice.

You can say "Yes!"

You can say "Yes" to abundance, hope, and inclusion, rejecting visions of scarcity, fear, and division.

You can say "Yes" to the ways of peace, rejecting summons to war.

Your profound “Yes” can challenge scarcity thinking which claims that the wealthiest nation in the world cannot care for its people and their future because of the demands of war. Your “Yes” can express a domestic agenda of abundance—our nation appreciating its abundance would be our greatest peacemaking agenda, not only for us but also for the world.

Your “Yes” can stop the spread of fear which tries to make us think that terrorism defines our lives more than our hopes and dreams. Your “Yes” refuses to let the words, symbols, and institutions of fear become yours. You will speak of hope when others speak of fear.

And your “Yes” can deny all the divisions which try to separate people into “us” versus “them.” Your voice can help us all resist the seduction of “either you are with us or you are against us” thinking. You can work to create dialogue, including true, non-defensive listening, with anyone and everyone, no matter how divergent they may seem . . . on any issue, be it war, abortion, economics, politics, or religion.

Find your voice!

Excerpted from a sermon by Randolph Becker (worshipweb@uua.org)

### **For Reflection and Discussion**

1. Is the connection between your own personal peace and peace in our world real to you?
2. Do you agree that we live in a war-driven culture? How does this impact your day to day life? Are there obligations that go along with this realization? How do you say yes to abundance, hope, and inclusion?
3. Does the idea of internal peace feeling as if you are a force of nature resonate with you? What does peace feel like to you and how do you cultivate it? What stops you or gets in the way?
4. Are you able to keep a vision of external peace alive? How do you do this? Do you cultivate peace in the world? How do you do this?
5. Has your understanding of peace changed over time? If so, how has it changed? Has your participation at All Souls had a role in this changing understanding?

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