

Peace is ... healing

Isaiah 35:1-10

December 11, 2016

Dry, barren, infertile, exhausted. Sick, discouraged, broken, afraid. Sorrowing, grieving, empty, homeless. These are the wastelands -- wastelands of the soul, wastelands of the body, wastelands of the earth.

We have all been in wastelands, some of us just to visit for just a short while, but some of us for long stretches of our lives, so long we thought we might never leave. And some, some of our neighbors in this world, have never left the wastelands.

*The desert will rejoice,
and flowers will bloom in the wastelands.*



This photo was taken by Barb Mardis: flowers, blooming in the wasteland, a wasteland of crumbling asphalt and weather beaten fence and dead leaves. Barb's photo was taken in New Orleans in May 2008, not quite three years after the winds and waters of Hurricane Katrina turned much of the city into a wasteland, leaving souls and bodies broken, homes devastated, and earth ravaged. Her photo became for us, the twelve members of our mission team, an emblem of hope, flowers blooming in the wasteland: Hope shall bloom!



Hope blooms when people do not give up. Hope blooms when faith endures, faith in God and faith in each other. Hope blooms as we wield hammers and saws and rollers and paintbrushes, and as we speak words of kindness and kinship, bringing healing to houses and to hearts.

What does peace on earth look like? Like healing. Peace is healing.

Peace is healing souls.

My father was a soul-healer. He was a clinical psychologist and pastoral counselor helping people bloom in the wastelands of broken relationships and shame and loneliness. Anne Hoekstra and Katinka Keith are soul-healers. David and Debbie

Walters, Erika Meyer and Charlotte Driver and Evie Waack are soul-healers, offering support and counsel, encouragement and affirmation and discernment to souls that are vulnerable or dysfunctional or confused or lost. I have been greatly helped in my life by soul-healers, as have some of you.

But you are a soul-healer, too! Listen ...

*Give strength to hands that are tired
and to knees that tremble with weakness.
Tell everyone who is discouraged,
"Be strong and don't be afraid!"*

"Give." "Tell." These are imperatives, commands, given to us, to all of us! It is our job to give strength to a brother who is faltering and tired. It is our job to speak words of encouragement to a sister who is disheartened or scared. And when we do, we make peace. We make peace on earth by healing souls.

Today I want to share with you once more some ideas, some specific actions you might take to make peace on earth, in this case, by helping to heal souls. You could support the work of the Center for Victims of Torture (CVT) (<http://www.cvt.org>). The Center for Victims of Torture is an organization headquartered in St. Paul, Minnesota, that advocates total rejection of torture as a tool for warfare or intelligence-gathering and also provides services to victims of torture to help heal bodies and minds and spirits at centers in Minneapolis and Atlanta, in the Middle East and Africa.



CVT center in Minneapolis

Here is one story:

Jana, a ten year-old Syrian girl, was violently grabbed by a man one day. He threw Jana by her arm into a pickup with other screaming children. She was taken to force her father to turn himself in. They put her with other children in a dark dungeon, underground, for 22 days. The children were beaten. They were given dirty water and one boiled egg for the whole day. One little boy was beaten to death.*

When Jana was released, her mother could barely recognize her. The girl developed severe PTSD symptoms, depression and anxiety. She couldn't forget the soldier's face, his big moustache, shaved head. His harsh voice. Jana had nightmares and guilt as she recalled the boy's voice crying for help as he lay bleeding. When she heard other children at home cry or scream, she would re-experience her trauma.

Jana also had guilt feelings over the death of her father, who was killed ... Jana said "I don't deserve life; my father has been killed because of me."

Through individual psychotherapy sessions at CVT Jordan, Jana was helped to process her trauma, and she learned how to cope with her fears, isolation and sad mood. Jana also received individual physiotherapy sessions and was referred to a social worker for medical and social needs. She made continuous progress, and now Jana is back to being a child again. She said nothing can frighten her now, having discovered that she's been courageous. Jana goes to school and wants to become a teacher.

We make peace on earth by healing souls.

We make peace on earth by healing bodies.

We have many among us who are or have been in the body-healing business: Greg Hoekstra and John Sutherland, Kari Lindaman and Lindsey Panicucci, Craig Driver and Bill Drier and Ali McFadden, Laurie Allbaugh and Sally Walker and Pat Brock and Gyobanna Driver. We have all been helped by body-healers.

But we are body-healers, too. I like to tell pre-marital couples that the best thing a husband can do for his spouse is to take care of himself, and vice versa. In the same way, one of the best things you care do -- for your family, for your friends, and, yes, for the sake of peace on earth -- is take care of your body. An unhealthy body pulls you down and holds you back and deprives the world of something of the fullness of beauty and grace you have to offer. You make peace by taking care of yourself.

And you make peace by helping to bring healing to other bodies as well. You can pray. You can pray for healing. Healing prayer matters, because there is a God who cares about us and because we are whole persons, not divided, not just bodily shells with an intangible, detachable soul somehow lurking inside.

Our souls are tangible. There is no soul without a body, and the reverse is just as true: there is no body without a soul. Our bodies are spiritual. So prayer matters, to spirits and bodies, to spiritual bodies and bodily spirits. Treating the body is treating the soul and treating the soul is treating the body.

Another way you can help heal bodies is by being part of a healing team. You could support the work of the Carter Center (<https://www.cartercenter.org>). The Carter Center's byline is "waging peace, fighting disease." The Center is involved on many fronts internationally, fighting diseases like Guinea worm disease, river blindness and schistosomiasis.

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5O0kr7oW-6k>)

Blood in schoolchildren's urine -- a telltale sign of schistosomiasis infection -- has been reduced by approximately 94 percent in Plateau and Nasarawa states and approximately 88 percent in Delta state.

We make peace on earth by healing bodies.

We make peace on earth by healing the earth.

Dave Sheridan is an earth-healer. Before he retired to pursue a call and second career in pastoral ministry, Dave served as an environmental lawyer with the state attorney general's office. He spent many years going after a particularly notorious scofflaw, well known to me as well, an operator of egg farms in Iowa and Maine whose farms are filled with "massive amounts of manure, flies, dead chickens," and who leaves "a trail of illness, injury, mistreatment, and death in his wake." The recent midwest salmonella outbreak was traced back to his Iowa operation.

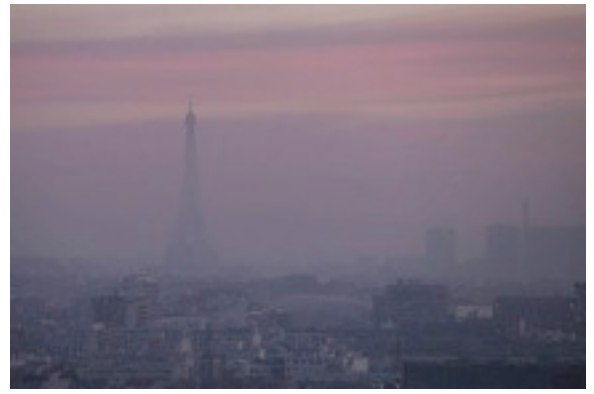
We all benefit from earth-healers, like Dave. We can thank them for helping to protect and preserve the air we breathe, the water we drink and play in, and the wild places that feed our souls and put things in right perspective.

Can there be peace on earth without peace for the earth?



Did you see the stories this week about the risk of imminent extinction for the giraffe? Giraffe populations have fallen precipitously in the last several decades and may soon be gone from the earth altogether.

This is Paris. Can you see the Eiffel Tower? Hardly! Paris is currently suffering from a particularly bad air pollution event.



And this is a water reservoir in California which is experiencing its worst drought in 1200 years. But, as we all know, this has nothing to do with climate change, right?

If you knew there was something you could do today to make the world your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will grow up in a much healthier and safer and more beautiful place, would you do it?

There is something you can do, but not many of us do it. Not many of us do anything. Because? Because it is inconvenient. Because it requires sacrifice. Because it costs money.

But if you knew your inconvenience, your sacrifice, your money could make the world your grandchildren and great-grandchildren will grow up in a much healthier and safer and more beautiful place, would you do it?

You can be an earth-healer, too. You could support the work of the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC) (<https://www.nrdc.org>), an especially effective defender of the earth, employing a strong team of scientists and lawyers and policy advocates. The NRDC is addressing the issue of climate change both by promoting policies to reverse its advance and by researching ways to help people alleviate its effects. For example: the California drought ...

NRDC develops and advocates for drought-response strategies that provide near-term relief and achieve a more resilient and sustainable water supply in the future. We have conducted extensive research and authored several reports that highlight opportunities for cost-effective and technically feasible strategies -- such as urban and agricultural water conservation and efficiency, water reuse and recycling, and stormwater capture. Adopting these solutions would provide 10.8 million to 13.7 million acre-feet more water each year in new supplies and reduced demand. That's enough to meet the needs of all of California's cities.

We make peace on earth by healing the earth.

What does peace on earth look like? Peace on earth looks like ... peace on earth!

Peace looks like cool, refreshing streams flowing through dry and barren lands, flowers blooming in the wastelands, a planet tenderly loved and wisely cared for.

Peace looks like sick, weak, and worn out bodies restored to strength and vigor and vitality.

Peace looks like sorrowing and discouraged and empty souls healed by comfort and companionship, counsel and forgiveness.

Peace on earth looks like this, all of this, as it should be: an earth and its people healed, an earth that is our home, because we have made it God's home. Peace on earth is God's promise, and our duty!