

Peace is ... walking

Isaiah 2:1-5

November 27, 2016

What does peace on earth look like?

I can conjure a scene ... (And I'll bet you can, too!) I am sitting on a huge block of granite jumbled among other huge blocks of granite, looking out over waters stretching as far as I can see. I listen to the thrum and slap of ocean surging in and out of the cavities between the rocks below me, and I watch the twinkling dance of sunlight upon the tips of the restless waters. A sailboat slowly eases its way across the horizon before me, and behind me in the woods, a white-throated sparrow sings: chew-ee-eeooee-eeooee.

What's wrong with this picture? I'm the only one in it! Yes, this is the kind of scene that feeds my soul and brings me peace, but that's all it is: a vision of peace for me, of peace of mind, not peace on earth.

Glory to God in the highest heaven and peace on earth.

That's what the angels sang: about peace on earth, peace among people, peace among nations. Peace at last for those who are bullied and peace at last for those who are harassed. Peace at last for those who have too little and peace at last for those who have too much. Peace that is not a state of mind, but a state of being. Peace that is not just mine, but ours, all of ours. Peace on earth. Peace for the earth. This is what we wait for. This is what we long for. This is what we pray for, dream about, sing about: "Give peace, O God, give peace again!"

"In days to come ..." the prophet said. In days to come, there will be peace on earth.

*They will hammer their swords into plows
and their spears into pruning knives.
Nations will never again go to war,
never prepare for battle again.*

Never! Never! No more war ... ever! Can you imagine it? Do you long for it?

In days to come, there will be peace on earth. Because? Because they will walk in the paths the Lord has chosen. They will walk in paths the Lord has chosen. There are two key words in this phrase, two indispensable keys to Isaiah's vision of peace on earth: "walk" and "Lord."

The first word: "Lord." They will walk in the paths the Lord has chosen. Lord translates the Hebrew יהוה ("Yahweh") a particular name, a particular God, the personal name of Israel's God. In days to come, there will be peace, not because we have put away all our gods, not because we have relativized all our gods and decided that one is as good as another, but because we have all have chosen to follow the counsel of one particular God, Israel's God.

In days to come, people of many nations will turn their eyes to the hill of the Lord's Temple and will go there to learn the ways of the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, Israel's God. That's what it says: "Israel's God," but I think it is not so much that the Lord is Israel's God, but that the Hebrews are God's people. It is not that God belongs to Israel, but that Israel belongs to God, and that Israel's mission, Israel's purpose, Israel's primary reason for being, is to let the rest of the world know that everybody -- not just them, but everybody -- belongs to God!

This God -- the Lord, Yahweh -- is a particular God with particular desires and particular ways. The Lord's desire is peace and the Lord's way is love -- being patience and kind, unselfish and forgiving. The Lord's desire is justice and the Lord's way is righteousness -- being honest without fail, generous without limitation, being humble before all, being a servant to friend and stranger alike. It is when they listen, when they learn, when they walk in the paths, not of their own choosing, but the paths this God has chosen that there will be peace, no more war.

The second word: "walk." They are walking. That's the other thing wrong with my first conjured scene: I am sitting, not walking! Sitting, hoping, wishing, praying, singing, longing: these express a desire for peace on earth, but can never by themselves bring peace on earth.

In days to come, they will walk in the paths the Lord has chosen. And, in the meanwhile? We walk! "Let us walk in the light which the Lord gives!" "They will walk" means many nations, one day. "Let us walk" means us, right now, today.

What does peace on earth look like?

It looks like people walking, going somewhere, purposeful, active, engaged.

It looks like people restless, not yet home and walking, walking, walking 'til they get there.

It looks like people ornery and bothersome, sticking their noses into everybody's business, not letting unfairness go unchallenged, not letting injustice, even the smallest injustice done to the least of people, slide by "just this time."

It looks like people not just talking, but doing something: about racism, sexism, economic inequality, an imbalanced justice system, greed, gluttony, the death penalty, torture, pollution, civil rights, elder rights, nationalism, imperialism.

It look like people working and giving and sacrificing not for the good of one family, but all families, not for the good of one nation, but many nations, not to "keep the peace," but to make peace.

What does peace on earth look like? Like this ...

*“I have a dream”, a man once said,
“where all is perfect peace;
where men and women, black and white,
stand hand in hand, and all unite
in freedom and in love,
in freedom and in love.”*

*But in this world of bitter strife
the dream can often fade;
reality seems dark as night,
we catch but glimpses of the light
Christ sheds on humankind,
Christ sheds on humankind.*

*Fierce persecution, war, and hate
are raging everywhere;
God calls us now to pay the price
through struggles and through sacrifice
of standing for the right,
of standing for the right.*

*So dream the dreams and sing the songs,
but never be content:
for thoughts and words don't ease the pain:
unless there's action, all is vain;
faith proves itself in deeds,
faith proves itself in deeds.*

*Lord, give us vision, make us strong,
help us to do your will;
don't let us rest until we see
your love throughout humanity
uniting us in peace,
uniting us in peace.*

Words © Estate of Pamela J. Pettitt (1954 – 2005)

Peace is walking. Unless there's action, all is vain. Let me suggest three possibilities for action, three ways you might choose to walk for the sake for peace on earth.

1) Considering signing the statement of conscience against torture sponsored by the National Religious Campaign Against Torture (NRCAT) (<http://www.nrcat.org>) and take other action steps to put an end to torture. Here is the statement:

**A Statement of Conscience of the
National Religious Campaign Against Torture**

Torture violates the basic dignity of the human person that all religions, in their highest ideals, hold dear. It degrades everyone involved -- policy-

makers, perpetrators and victims. It contradicts our nation's most cherished ideals. Any policies that permit torture and inhumane treatment are shocking and morally intolerable.

Nothing less is at stake in the torture abuse crisis than the soul of our nation. What does it signify if torture is condemned in word but allowed in deed? Let America abolish torture now -- without exceptions.

2) Educate yourself about the military application of drone technology. You might start with a balanced and thoughtful essay on drones in the Atlantic magazine entitled "The Killing Machines" (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/09/the-killing-machines-how-to-think-about-drones/309434/>). Decide for yourself whether or not it is a morally justifiable form of warfare and if using drones to kill people is walking in the paths the Lord has chosen. If you think not, do something about it.

3) Call on Congress to pass the International Violence Against Women Act (<http://p2a.co/frZf35d>). Here is some commentary on the need for the act from the Justice and Witness Ministries of the United Church of Christ:

Time Magazine recently published an article "[The Secret War Crime](#)," revealing the horrendous realities around wartime rape. The stories of survivors from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, who refuse to be silenced, should move us to action. ISIS's sale of women as sexual slaves in Iraq and Syria is not a distant problem. As people of faith it is our problem: Too many women in our country and abroad suffer sub-personhood status. Our faith demands that we act to recognize the God-given worth of women everywhere.

What does peace on earth look like? Peace is walking ...