



**Mennonite
Church**
Canada

Formation

Sermon

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Scripture Text: Matthew 5, Micah 6:8

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Remembering

A Peace Sermon

Part 1 – Remembering the victims of violence

I remember, Je me souviens
I remember,
but mostly I'd rather forget
Mostly
I'd rather sit in my corner and cry, wail, lament

I remember the things we do and don't do to each other:
war, injustice,
poverty, torture,
broken relationships, bullying, meanness, gossip,
betrayal, ...
I remember,
but sometimes I'd rather forget

Yeah, I'd rather forget
Denial tempts me
Because I don't care?
or because I care too much?
or because I want to do something about it,
or because I don't know what to do

I don't know what to do.
Maybe I'll try a different verb
Maybe I'll feel for a time
Can I let my spirit take in the weight of the pain
without bouncing into a flurry of fixing?

[Deep breath]

I'll remember

I remember the landmines, the tanks, the IED's,
the cruise missiles, smart bombs, the automatics,
the lasers, the precision shooting, the anti-
personnel weapons, the atomic warheads, the
beatings, the abuse
the tools people design to kill

other people, other souls
guns with cool sounding names and serial
numbers full of x's and o's
I remember a fact: The money it takes to send
ONE North American soldier to fight overseas
could build 20 schools in the same locations,
twenty schools. 1

I remember collateral damage, the casualties, the
heroes fighting for freedom, the lost troops, the
unfortunate incidents, the friendly fire,
Euphemisms for dead people
victims of the power struggles of the powerful
It is not the soldiers who declare war
90 percent of war's casualties today are civilians.
2
I'd rather forget,
But I remember

I remember the refugees of war,
their hunger for safety and hunger for food
Thirst for water, thirst for an absent mother's milk
Wanting things to be as they were, as they might
be, as they never will
Craving for order, craving for comfort,
craving for meaning, craving for change.

I remember people seeking a refuge
A place that can hold unending despair
suspended indefinitely in time
eternally temporary.
I remember another fact:
There are over 45 million refugees on our planet
today
More people than in all of my home country
Canada
I'd rather forget
But I remember

I remember the children
who are the most vulnerable to the violence of
war
and of the schoolyard
The children who have witnessed, participated in,
escaped from
horror
or those with good reason to fear it
The children who have lost, who are lost
Lost limbs, lost family, lost hope, lost innocence
I remember the children who carry guns
I try to forget, my little ones
but I remember

I remember the women
Who,
through the use of sexual violence as a strategy
of war
or as a strategy of dominance with any excuse
suffer brutally,
humiliatingly,
unspeakably
I try to forget, my sisters
But I remember

I remember those emotionally traumatized by war
Who wake up day after day,
to relive a nightmare
Who can't erase the macabre visions that they
witnessed
or that they perpetrated
Traumatic, post traumatic, re-traumatic, dramatic
broken people, breaking others,
broken trust, breaking bones
breaking homes
I remember the veterans who come back with
intact bodies but shattered souls
Stuck in a loop
they remember and remember and remember
but are forgotten by those they thought they were
fighting for
I try to forget, broken ones
But I remember

I remember God incarnate, Jesus,
suffering at the hands of violent men and violent
systems
I remember the God of Peace, the Prince of
Peace,
our Peace
Breaking down walls of hostility

I feel this pain
I will remember even if I don't know what to do
I will remember so that I won't forget

I turn to God with this remembrance lament.

[sung response: What does the Lord require of
you but to do justice, love kindness and walk
humbly with your God]

Part 2 – Remembering who we are

Sisters, brothers, friends, we've called this Peace
Sunday
It's the proverbial string we tie around our finger
every year so we won't forget
On Peace Sunday we remember who we are,
who we propose to be

We are children of God's Peace
"We who were formerly no people at all, and who
knew of no peace, are now called to be...a
church...of peace. True Christians do not know
vengeance. They are the children of peace.
Their hearts overflow with peace. Their mouths
speak peace, and they walk in the way of peace."
(to quote Menno Simons)

We are followers of this Jesus who in his sermon
described the blessed vision for the kingdom of
God
We have decided not to adopt a procrastinating
"eschatology that justifies apathy" 3
Let me rephrase that
We've decided not to just put it off until "some
heaven light years away" 4
We believe peace is to be dared "here in this
place",
We believe peace is to be imagined in our times
In God's name, by Jesus' example, in hope of his
truth

We believe these beatitudes are not just a pretty
metaphor
We don't just pine away for peace,
we believe that with God's direction and
protection
we can actually work for peace — like the button
says
We take this job description seriously: this
blessing and being blessed

We are the ones who value the poor in spirit, the
humble, the meek
We are the ones who will comfort the mourning,
and find comfort with each other and with God
We are the ones who seek nourishment and
fulfillment by seeking justice,
who break this bread and drink this cup with
others and on behalf of others
We crave and serve up mercy, because God is
love and has loved us first
We do not see the world with malice but with
purity
We choose to be peacemakers, in the big things
and in the little,
we choose not to be bullies – not to put others
down so that we can look good,
we choose to be friends – even to the ones who
are ... different,

we choose not to use nor defend violence against others in any way
– even if we think they deserve it ,
even in our cars and on our facebook comments
even if we have to choose to do this everyday
over and over again
we choose to see in the face of the other
the face of another human being like us

We are game for the hard work of disagreement
of not walking away on first instinct
of looking for reconciliation,
of regarding others through the eyes of God's
love
When facing indignation,
we have imagination for transformation 5

We know this is misunderstood and terribly
misinterpreted
by those who believe that we are naïve,
that war is necessary, ordinary
that questioning is unpatriotic, idiotic
Yet
we persist in living out the kingdom of God

Sisters, brothers, friends
We are people of God's Peace.

[sung response: What does the Lord require of
you but to do justice, love kindness and walk
humbly with your God]

Part 3 – Remembering we live by a different story

We're not alone, you know
Everyone wishes for Peace
Even beauty queens, with their tiara's and
sparkling dresses wish for ...
[sigh] world peace
– someday
Everyone wishes for Peace
Even the Lennon's who imagine no countries
[sung] and no religions too (Oh, oh – o-o-oh)

Everyone wishes for Peace
Even the folks who earnestly engage in war,
They believe that their show of mighty force will
bring conflict to a speedy end:
"We'll just go in,
strike with precision
and then we're out.
Balance will be restored.
We're helping people — oh, and democracy."
But, as the general said on the radio: conflict is
never that predictable

Everyone wishes for Peace
However, many live by a story that is scripted to
require violence as a means to that end.

Let me tell you about the misshapen stories
shaping us
Once upon a time there was...

The tale of entitlement that goes like this:
We have power
At the switch of a button, the swiping of a card,
the checkmark on a vote
We can opt, consume, have
"Sometimes we possess things so long that do
not really belong to us
that we come to think they are ours." 6
It is easy to forget that the dear Shalom to which
we aspire
means restoring things to their rightful owners
That God is the ultimate rightful owner

There's the myth of redemptive violence 7:
Coming to a theatre near you
It says (in a very deep voice) that "good things
come through violence,
the only way to have victory over evil is through
violence,
the prize goes to the strong;
peace through war, security through strength." 8
The bad guy must die a horrible death in the end
and that is the end

There's the either/or story that simplifies reality
and mystery:
A Billboard in Toronto currently reads:
Should the military kill the bad people or help the
good ones?
Who, may I ask,
presumes to know the difference?
Glass half empty or glass half full
a thirsty person sees only water.
Good people or bad people
God sees people killing each other
God does not see us and them,
them and us,
them, in our view always worse, stupider, more
evil than us

Then there's the killing is required by God
narrative that lives even in our theology
This is how it goes:
He says killing is wrong
she says, yes but God required it in the Old
Testament.
He says people have always claimed that God is
on their side as a way to justify their violence
Check the history books and newspapers under
crusaders, jihads, zionists, and other isms and
ologies
She says, I will

He says killing is wrong
she says what about Jesus' death?
Didn't God require Jesus' sacrifice to satisfy his
need for justice?
Someone had to pay for humanity's sins, right?

Right?

Someone from another conversation says:
Jesus' life so threatened the powers that be
that they resorted to their only strategy:
extermination
Having God's character of love,
Jesus absorbed the violence,
stopping the cycle by not seeking retribution
by not seeking revenge
There will be no battles to watch here
"Forgive them, they don't know what they're
doing"
God is mercy,
Life, not death, wins in the end

Everyone wishes for Peace
Do you follow me?
How do we alter the story?

Jewish peacemaker Marcel wonders this about
the Israel Palestine issues:
"We've tried violence for so long and it hasn't
worked,
isn't it time we try something else?"

Christian and Muslim Peacemaker Teams
wonder what would happen if non-violent people
were as willing to put their lives on the line for
peace without war.

Such imaginations place their hope in a different
strategy, a different history.

Everyone wishes for Peace
Christians don't have a corner on that wish
We've simply decided to place it in a different
story
A peace story that is grounded in our hope in
God who owns life and death,
A peace story that sprouts deep inside of us,
by the work of the Spirit
rather than through activism and human
potentialities
A peace story that shows up in all our
relationships
A peace story that lives right now
by different values, different assumptions,
and by an audaciously different plot

The Peace story pokes holes in the plotline of
violence,
it re-reads reality
There is no simple connection between soldiers
killing and dying
and the privileges we benefit from
The peace story wonders about those privileges
and cares about the soldiers and the other dead
The peace story un.masks the roots of injustice
and domination
that lie beneath the surface of the industrial
military complex

The peace story listens to the people at the
bottom
and challenges those at the top

The plot of hate is fast, enticing, with the illusion
of no strings attached
Peacemaking is a long-term commitment
with each other and with the God of history
Lots of strings attached

The Peace story is not either-or,
it is a both-and, yes-but, see-it-from-a-different-
angle, question-your-assumptions, surprise-
ending, new-beginnings kind of story.

Everyone wishes for peace

We wish it from within a different story

Part 4 – Conclusion

Some final things to remember

Peace happens in relationship
Jesus, sometimes called Truth said:
Folks are lucky, blessed, fortunate, on the right
track
by living out compassion
"dethrone [yourselves] from the centre of our
world and put another there" 9
This is the kingdom of God

Driving under the influence
of the good ol' Protestant work, work, work ethic
We quickly rush to what we might do
To remember is to work for peace! 10
I say,
To remember is to work for peace.
In the wise words of another:
"The hope of a disciple is never based on one's
own agency
but on one's following the acting God
who acted then in Jesus Christ
and is now in and among us all in the world." 11

I have listed, enumerated, deliberated, cogitated,
Here is my piece about peace
Weave these threads into your faithfulness,
knit them into your remembering and forgetting
lace them around the warp and woof of your life,
that horizontal and vertical scaffolding
that keeps you grounded to God and to others
– as if there is any difference

Peace be with you.

Endnotes

1

<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/29/opinion/29kristof.html>

2 “In World War II [– why do we capitalize it? – in world war too] 50 percent of war’s casualties were civilians; today that number is 90 percent” MCC Peace Packet 2010

3 Walter Bruggeman, “Voices of the Night – Against Justice”, in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An agenda for ministers.*”

4 HWB 6, “Here in this Place” by Mary Haugen

5 Bruggeman.

6 Walter Bruggeman, “Voices of the Night – Against Justice”, in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An agenda for ministers.*”

7 Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*

8 J. Denny Weaver, *The Non-violent Atonement*

9 <http://charterforcompassion.org/>

10 Text from buttons distributed by MCC

11 H. Russel Botman, “Hope as the Coming Reign of God”, in: *Hope for the World: Mission in a Global Context.* Sermon body text