



**Mennonite
World Conference**
A Community of Anabaptist
related Churches

**Congreso
Mundial Menonita**
Una Comunidad de
Iglesias Anabautistas

**Conférence
Mennonite Mondiale**
Une Communauté
d'Églises Anabaptistes

Worship Resource

Peace Sunday 2016 **Overcoming hatred, loving enemies (Matthew 5:43–48)**

Introduction

These Peace Sunday worship resources are provided by the Peace Commission of Mennonite World Conference. We encourage their use by all MWC-related congregations on the designated Peace Sunday (18 September 2016), or another Sunday that fits the schedule of the congregation. This year's material was prepared by members of the MWC Peace Commission. Resources included are: sermon notes, stories, prayers, song suggestions and pictures. We trust that we can all be nurtured by the faithfulness of these brothers and sisters.

– *Peace Commission, MWC*

Theme: “The other” is not my enemy

Suggested texts

Primary text: Matthew 5:43-48

Love, not hatred: an initial step toward peace

~ *Joji Pantoja (chair, Philippines)*

A significant part of our time in the Philippines is spent relating to the different factions that have come to exist due to years of ongoing conflict. We relate to government



Dann and Joji Pantoja (centre), Mennonite Church Canada workers among militant rebels in the Philippines. Photo courtesy of Joji Pantoja.

soldiers, the New People's Army, as well as the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (or the Bangsamoro).

When visiting Mennonite congregations, we are often asked, "What were you doing hanging out with those armed men? Aren't you supposed to be a peacebuilding missionary?" "Umm... peacebuilding?" we answered, hesitantly.

We live in a militant 21st century reality. Those whose business is war would like us all to be militant against the outsider-other as much as they would like the outsider-other to be militant against us. We have also been told – by colonizers, those in power, or those seeking to be in power – who our enemies should be and who, therefore, we should learn to hate. Jesus Christ, however, tells his followers to "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you..." (Matthew 5:44).

We are called not to give in to hate. We are challenged to learn how to love even those who some may describe as "enemies."

This year's Peace Sunday resources are focussed on the challenge of overcoming hatred and loving our enemies. This, it seems, may be an initial step toward embodying peace in our world.

Gathering prayer

Lord, as we gather on this Peace Sunday, we acknowledge that it is difficult to love our neighbours and the people who may wrong us without cause. Yet we are here today to confess our sin and pray for your way to rule in our lives. Be honoured in our midst, we pray.

Help us to know all people are our brothers and sisters. When we allow hate to enter our journey, we are hating those who are our family, for we are one. Allow us to overcome hate with your love. Keep us walking in step with your Holy Spirit as you grow your fruit in us, beginning with the fruit of love.

Touch us and our world today as we meet to seek peace within ourselves, our communities, our nations and our world. Help us to be the salt and light of Jesus in a world that desperately needs your peace. Allow your peace to reign over us and let it begin with me.

We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace, our Saviour and Lord, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

Story: War is easy; it is peace that is hard

~ Robert J. Suderman (Canada)

A Philippine military general faced an agonizing dilemma. His orders were to move against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao: an action that would surely be bloody and lethal. Ironically, this general is a graduate of a Mennonite peacebuilding institute where he learned about a wider spectrum of possibilities; and now he was searching for a less violent alternative.



A Mennonite peace delegation prays with a Philippine general. Photo courtesy of Joji Pantoja .

Our MWC delegation had a previously scheduled visit at the military headquarters that afternoon – 8 hours into the 24-hour window he had been given to respond. He was hospitable to us, but clearly troubled at what lay ahead. He shared openly about the decision he was facing. He felt obligated to obey orders from Manila that he disagreed with.

He described the decades-long conflict that had led to this most recent upsurge in violence. His three cellphones kept buzzing and ringing. He glanced at them, but continued our two-hour audience until one message changed his demeanour. We saw him look at it, and we watched his shoulders sag with the weight of decision on his mind. He bowed his head in evident distress.

Then, he looked at us, and in a low, barely discernable voice said: “With a 15-cent phone call, I can start a war in 10 minutes... *War is easy; it is peace that is hard.*”

He asked us to pray for him. We did.

He escorted us to our vehicle, and indicated that we needed to get out of the war-zone before dark.

The next morning we heard the news of renewed fighting, with numerous casualties. The general’s tormented night had given him no evident alternative. He had obeyed his

superiors and given the order to attack. Again, readiness for war won the day against the complexity of peace.

Sermon notes: Seeking just and right relationships

Matthew 5:43–48

In a world that is seemingly becoming increasingly polarized, the idea – let alone the practice – of peace is difficult to imagine. It is a challenge to imagine that people, either locally or internationally, might be able to come together and see how we can walk with one another, making it possible for everyone's needs to be met. *Shalom*, after all, means holistic wellness; we have what we need to be well spiritually, physically and socially. It is a dynamic process where we pursue right living with one another, with creation and with God. If one should lack, it will affect others. If one has too much, it also will affect others. If we try to take things from others so that we may be more comfortable while ignoring the need of others, just and right relationships will not be possible.

The pursuit of holistic wellness becomes even more challenging when systems prevent or restrict right and just relationships. Economic systems capitalize on inequality and need; countries operate according to who is with or against them. These mechanisms, systems and forms of polarization affect our imagination, the way we see “the other.” It affects the way we think and what we perceive is possible.

When such polarization takes root, “the other” – the one who is different than me – becomes something I am not. What's more, “the other” is seen as a threat: a threat to our wants, a threat to what we need; a threat to our safety, a threat to freedom; a threat to others; a threat that must be neutralized. When we allow ourselves to see the world through this lens – us versus them; them and us – we reduce the possibility for the way in which we can relate. It prepares the bed for the seeds of hatred – a precursor to violence – to be sown.

Should we desire peace in our world, we must first learn to view the world through a different set of lenses. We are challenged to see “the other” not as different to us but as part of who we are. We are challenged not to dichotomize but to explore how we belong with one another. We are challenged to pay attention to and serve the “other.” We are challenged not to hate but to love. These are the ways in which we sow peace rather than hatred.

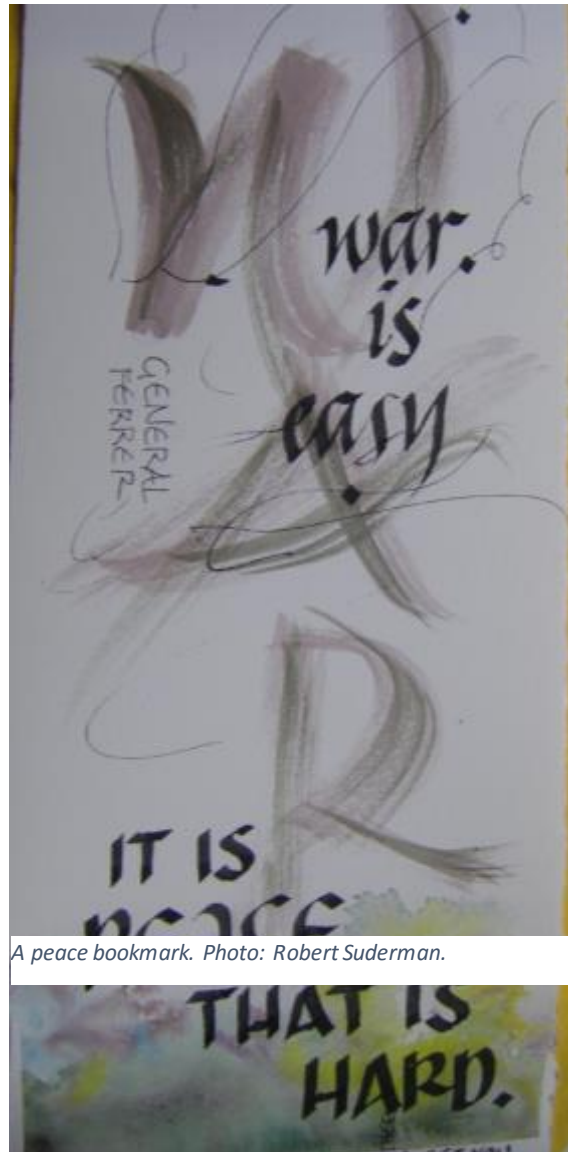
Peace is an activity that requires deliberate, attentive and dogged determination. It is not something that simply happens. It must be pursued – relentlessly (Psalm 34:14).

Such a pursuit may very well cause discomfort and make us vulnerable. And yet it is through this pursuit of embracing “the other” – the one who may be different; the foreigner; the one is not like me – that changes us. As we embrace “the other,” that

person ceases to be “other.” Together, we are shaped into something new – a new relationship, a new humanity, a new reality, a new hope – that provides an example of the peace God desires for all of creation. The pursuit of peace (*shalom*) is to operate from this new imagination.

Notes on Matthew 5:43–48

- In this passage, Jesus offers a lesson to his disciples and those present during his “Sermon on the Mount.” He challenges them not to simply accept the way things are but to embrace a new imagination and embody something new. Jesus offers a new way to see and respond to those whom we may have seen as “enemies.” Jesus simply does not accept the distinction created by conflicting factions. His lesson to “love our enemies” provides a different foundation from which to relate to others, even those with whom we may disagree.
- It is important to see these verses (v. 43–48) in scriptural context. Prior to these verses, Jesus offers other lessons that demonstrate how relationships begin with the way we think.
 - In Matthew 5:21–26, Jesus says that murder begins with the way we see our brother or sister (i.e., with anger). Should we have any unresolved issues (quarrels) with others, we must first seek to be reconciled with them before we can be reconciled with God through our offerings.
 - Likewise, in 5:27–30, Jesus teaches that adultery begins with the way we look at people (i.e., with lust).
 - The emotions we hold toward others and the way we think already determines whether we are murderers or adulterers.
- Jesus’ teaching to love our enemies, which follows these other teachings in the same chapter (see above), challenges us to change the way we may see “the enemy”. By invoking the Leviticus 19:18 text (“You shall not take vengeance, nor



A peace bookmark. Photo: Robert Suderman.

bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself”), Jesus challenges his listeners (v. 43) to change their perceptions of “the enemy” and see them as “neighbours” as well.

- Furthermore, to “love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you...” (Matthew 5:44) tangibly and concretely subverts our enemy’s actions by providing an alternative foundation for a relationship where something new can emerge.
- Jesus’ teaching to love our enemies (v. 43–48) immediately follows his subversive teachings of 5:38–42 where, instead of continuing the practice of “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”, Jesus offers new foundations for people to relate with each other. Turning the other cheek, giving one’s cloak if someone sues for one’s tunic, and walking a second mile if we are forced to walk one are concrete examples of nonviolent direct action that challenge the unjust relationship of the one exploiting or degrading the other. It subverts and transforms the situation to allow mutuality and equality to emerge.
 - For example, in Jesus’ time, to slap someone on the right cheek with one’s right hand) meant the other person was subservient to you. (It was customary to use the right hand for personal exchanges as the left hand was used for personal hygiene). Offering the slapper your *left* cheek demands treatment as an equal, not a servant. Thus, the invitation to turn the other cheek changed the power dynamic from subservience to an invitation toward equality.
 - We see the same subversion with Jesus’ suggestion to give one’s cloak should one be sued for one’s tunic. In Jewish tradition, the tunic was the one garment that could not be taken away from someone. This ensured a sense of dignity even in the midst of a financial dispute. And so, Jesus suggests that if one should try to “take the shirt off of your back,” a person could give the cloak as well (i.e., go naked) making a spectacle of the one who misuses his or her power to cause such disgrace.
 - In the last concrete example, Jesus suggests getting a Roman soldier into trouble. A Roman soldier was allowed to force anyone to carry his bag for one mile, but he could get into trouble if he forced someone to carry his bag for more. Thus, once again, Jesus’ suggestion, rather than a passive acceptance of a power imbalance, subverts it and invites the possibility of equality and mutuality.
- All of these lessons serve as backdrops to Jesus’ commandment to love our enemies. It is a commandment that actively rejects the distinction of “enemy.” It subverts such a distinction so that a new possibility in the way we see “the other” is created. It creates the possibility to imagine a new type of community – a new humanity (Ephesians 2:11–22). Such an alternative reality overcomes hatred,

allowing us to love our enemies, who are no longer enemies because of Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace, through whom this new humanity is found.

Prayer

Our Lord and Creator,

We know that the true peace that surpasses all human understanding is not limited to the simple silencing of guns when living in a war, not only reconciliation when there is conflict and hostility, and not even harmony when in a fight. The peace that the Father gives to his children exceeds all of these. It is a holistic blessing that provides tranquility, safety, health, prosperity and material and spiritual comfort for all.

Yes, Lord, this is the peace that your people need now. This is our hope when we lose hope of living in harmony with others.

Hate has been Satan's weapon which separates brothers and sisters from the same family, church, country, continent and world. We become separated when the conditions are ripe, when justice is missing and when oppression furthers division and enmity.

Lord, we know that the solution we desire rests in the true peace that comes through you; even though we often search for it in all the wrong ways and places.

Father, as your children we come together before you on this day, praying that you may grant the peace we need and desire; peace that overcomes hate and enmity; that teaches us to love our enemies; that helps us to nurture families, churches, societies and nations so that the world may be increasingly favourable in your eyes.

This is our prayer, O Lord, in the name of Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, Amen.

Song: "Let There Be Peace on Earth" (Vince Gill)

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be.
With God as our Father
Brothers all are we.
Let me walk with my brother
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now.
With every step I take

Let this be my solemn vow.
To take each moment
And live each moment
With peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth,
And let it begin with me.

(sung by a child)

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be.
With God as our Father
Sisters all are we.
Let me walk with my sister
In perfect harmony.
Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now.
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow.
To take each moment
And live each moment
In peace eternally.
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me.

(Listen to a rendition of this song here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vXFeeJ6LSMc>)

Other song suggestions

“Hamba Nathi” – #3 MWC International Songbook 2015

“Kirisuto No Heiwa” – #22 MWC International Songbook 2015

“La Paz de la tierra” – #24 MWC International Songbook 2015

“Somos el cuerpo de Cristo” – #26 MWC International Songbook 2015

“Love God, Love each other” – #51 MWC International Songbook 2015

Benediction

Lord God, we have confessed our shortcomings. We have acknowledged your call in our lives and your call to love all people as you have loved us. All people includes our enemies as well as our friends. As we conclude this time of gathering, we commit ourselves again to your call to be reconcilers in the world.

We pray we may walk in your grace and peace in all we do. As we go, we ask that we may give your grace and peace to all we meet.

May the blessing of God – Father, Son and Spirit – rest on us as we go.

May the love of Jesus be seen in us by all as we live the Kingdom of God in our world, to God's glory, honour and praise.

Amen.

—Resources contributed by members of the Peace Commission

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