

Abiding in Love and Praying for Peace in a World of Tumult and Strife
[Micah 4](#) & [John 15](#) | Knox-Metropolitan United Church
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Abiding in Love

and Praying for Peace in a World of Tumult and Strife

Recognizing that this tumult and strife is often of our own making...

There is a line in our Liturgies for Holy Week

From the prayer "Spirit's Cry" which was written by the Rev. Bruce Sanguin

We often share it on Maundy Thursday

As we meditate on Jesus travailing in the Garden of Gethsemene

Alone

Forsaken

Companions unable to hold vigil with him...

The prayer reads like this:

*We do not do the things that make for peace
but rather do the very things that lead to violence.
We are slow to shed our ignorance
and quick to justify our foolishness.*

It's a prayer of confession,

A prayer of lament.

These sorts of prayers can be challenging.

Challenging to write

Challenging to say.

Many parts in the Christian Household have done great soul damage and destroyed many lives with words that internalize shame, that make people feel worthless.

I would humbly suggest that shame has no place in this tradition, and words used to make anyone feel worthless, spoken from a pulpit of any kind are reprehensible.

But hard words, challenging words, words of confession and lament, when embodied in a theology of blessing, not original sin, I would suggest, are important to root our spirituality in reality.

*We do not do the things that make for peace
but rather do the very things that lead to violence.*

Part of the power of these words is not their individual, but their corporate connotation.

In prayers like this, the “we” is not just the congregation speaking, but “we” who are in one space, even dispersed space, speak of a corporate/societal “we” of which “we” are but a part.

There is the space in the Christian Tradition, and it is not alone among faiths in this, to be both profoundly personal, and global in scope.

Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin, with me.

Sanguin’s prayer for Remembrance Day holds this tension of personal and global:

*O God,
whose heart is broken
by the violence in the human race,
forgive us that we have lacked
the imagination and collective will
to create a warless world.*

*Forgive us for breaking faith
with those who gave their lives,
for the unconscionable gap between the rich and poor,
for corruption and deceit in high places,
for the profit gained by the sale of weapons,
for the spirit of domination in our leaders and ideologies,
for learning so little from the deaths of 100 million
in the past century.*

A spirituality that speaks courageous of human capacity to cause harm, to do evil

But yet that does not reduce the individual to a worm

is one befitting of the Hebrew Prophets like Micah whom we heard from in our readings.

The reading we heard is often used for Remembrance and Peace Sunday services for obvious reasons, the imagery of weapons becoming farming tools to feed a hungry world is a beautiful one, and the commitment to study war no more will be known to any Pete Seeger fans listening.

In other years, the Lectionary selection for Remembrance Sunday from the Hebrew Scriptures is from Amos, another prophet, a favourite of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

It’s a little less cheery:

*Alas for you who desire the day of the Lord!
Why do you want the day of the Lord?*

*It is darkness, not light;
as if someone fled from a lion,
and was met by a bear;
or went into the house and rested a hand against the wall,
and was bitten by a snake.
Is not the day of the Lord darkness, not light,
and gloom with no brightness in it?*

*I hate, I despise your festivals,
and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.
Even though you offer me your burnt-offerings and grain-offerings,
I will not accept them;
and the offerings of well-being of your fatted animals
I will not look upon.
Take away from me the noise of your songs;
I will not listen to the melody of your harps.*

*But let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*

On first glance, the image of God contained herein, and in so many other places in the Hebrew Prophets (and the Christian apocalyptic writings) is angry, harsh, punitive, out to hurt something!

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (who was a close friend and collaborator with Dr. King) in his very aptly titled book, *The Prophets*, discusses this very dynamic.

Pathos Heschel, is the key to rightly understanding the prophets in their Jewish context.

The prophets, Amos, Micah and so on, have tapped into a deep sadness, and grief at the suffering of the oppressed, the violence within human society, a sadness and grief that is at the very heart of the Divine.

Sadness and grief, Heschel writes are part of love.

The Divine love and creativity, the longing for connection from which the world springs forth in its wondrous beauty, abundance, glorious variety.

The prophets, Heschel suggests, are captivated by such a vision of Divine possibility that they are haunted by the reality that falls short within human relationship, and society.

Justice and love, are therefore inseparable...

As Reinhold Niebuhr suggests

"Love is the motive, but justice is the instrument."

From the Gospel of John, we hear Jesus' invitation to abide in love.

To be home in love.

To understand love, self-giving as the prime mover in the Universe.

Sanguin speaks of love as coded into the cosmic miracle of creation.

Atoms long for connection to create matter.

Suns give of themselves to create life-force that makes existence possible.

Abide in this love, not sectarian preference, not ideologies of domination and dominion.

As we understand Jesus as Rabbi, a teacher of human transformation, inviting others on a path to unleash inner potential, not for profit or success, but for love and creativity, abundance and shalom, we recognize that Jesus' call to abide in love is a call to connect with that which is deepest, most true.

That it is a homecoming call.

In that it is a call to transcend it is not to abdicate one's essence, but instead's one's own limited and limiting view, and enter into a greater oneness, a greater connection, a greater communion.

Many then note in Jesus' teaching, as with many Rabbis of the new paths that emerge at the turn of the first century, the echo of Eastern paths, which, remembering that the people of the Hebrew nation, spend significant time in Babylon, and that Jewish Palestine is not just a backwater Roman outpost, but on the key trading route between Northern Africa and the East.

The Ancient world in this area was less disconnected than we may assume.

November 11, at 11am is one of the few moments in which we in the West, collectively enter into silence.

Being a word lover, I like to offer that **the word re-member has at its core member as in the part of a whole, and to re-member is to return the part to the whole.**

We often associate this with thinking again about those we may have forgotten, bringing them into our active consciousness.

But we also, in these moments, return to that which is truest, and understand ourselves not as siloed but interconnected.

So in our prayers for peace, may we also learn to abide.

Both in our prayers on behalf of humanity, and in our moments of longing to integrate these into the simplest moments of our days, relationships, and communities...

I began the service with words from the Rev. Jan Richardson, a blessing for a time of chaos, and I'd like to close this reflection with her blessing for times of violence, which she acknowledges is, in the sad truth of our world, always, and most everywhere...

<https://paintedprayerbook.com/2015/11/16/blessing-in-a-time-of-violence/>

Blessing in a Time of Violence

Which is to say
this blessing
is always.

Which is to say
there is no place
this blessing
does not long

to cry out
in lament,
to weep its words
in sorrow,
to scream its lines
in sacred rage.

Which is to say
there is no day
this blessing ceases
to whisper
into the ear
of the dying,
the despairing,
the terrified.

Which is to say
there is no moment
this blessing refuses
to sing itself
into the heart
of the hated
and the hateful,
the victim
and the victimizer,
with every last
ounce of hope
it has.

Which is to say
there is none
that can stop it,

none that can
halt its course,
none that will
still its cadence,
none that will
delay its rising,
none that can keep it
from springing forth
from the mouths of us
who hope,
from the hands of us
who act,
from the hearts of us
who love,
from the feet of us
who will not cease
our stubborn, aching
marching, marching

until this blessing
has spoken
its final word,
until this blessing
has breathed
its benediction
in every place,
in every tongue:

Peace.

Peace.

Peace.