

WE GATHER AS GOD'S PEOPLE

Musical Prelude:

Welcome:

Announcements:

Opening Hymn: *Oh, A Song Must Rise #142 (More Voices)*

Candlelighting:

Listen to the Silence: Be still and know that God is in this place. Let us listen to God. Come and listen to the silence...

Call to Worship:

L: Come and worship; consider all that God has done.

All: God created the earth, filling it with gifts of color and notes of music. Sight and sound, touch and smell, these declare the wonder of God's universe.

L: God embraced the people of Israel, guiding and protecting, calling them to be a chosen people. Set before the nations of the earth, they were a light to reveal the wisdom, the glory, the steadfast love of God.

All: With never-ending love, God sent to us Jesus of Nazareth, Redeemer, Teacher and Friend. Through him we know the true person of God, the God of Justice, Mercy, and Love.

L: God has sent a Comforter and Sustainer, the Holy Spirit. With a love that always is, with a joy that overflows, God moves in our lives.

All: Come let us worship. Let us consider all that God has done.

(Bill Steadman, 1996 *Worship For All Seasons II*)

Opening Prayer: *(in unison)*

God of justice and peace, we draw near to you in worship. Open our hearts in remembrance, our minds to your Word, and our mouths to your praise. May we leave this place with renewed commitment to your will and way for our world; in Jesus' name Amen. (Camillia LaRouche, 1993 *Worship For All Seasons II*)

Hymn: *"In Loving Partnership" #603 Voices United*

Congregational Story-time:

Children's Hymn: *"Jesus Loves Me" #365 VU*

Prayer for Grace: (Matthew 22:37)

L: Jesus said, "Love your neighbor as yourself."

All: We pray for your forgiveness, God, for we find the effort too

damaging, the cost too high to share our love so deeply.

L: Jesus said, "Love God with all your heart, with all your strength, with all your mind."

All: We pray for your forgiveness, God, for we sing, speak, and pray words of love, yet act in the world for our own interests.

L: Jesus said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you."

All: We pray for your forgiveness, God, for we find your pathway of love too demanding. Grace us with your Spirit, that we might truly become your people. (*silent prayer*) (Gord Dunbar 2002, Worship For All Seasons II)

Assurance of Grace:

L: God's grace is boundless; God's forgiveness knows no limits; God's love overflows in spite of our apathy, our selfishness. God's promise, incarnate in Jesus, is that...

All: We are a forgiven people! Thanks be to God! Amen.

(George Allan, 2002 Worship For All Seasons II)

Hymn: "Draw the Circle Wide" #145 More Voices

SHARING THE STORY

Scripture: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Psalm 90:1-6, 13-17

1 Thessalonians 2:1-8

Matthew 22:34-46

Sermon: (*below*)

Hymn: "When I Needed a Neighbor" #600 Voices United

Minute for Mission:

WE RESPOND TO GOD'S WORD

Offertory Invitation:

"You shall love...God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind...You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:37, 39) Let our offering be symbols of our love, shown in service for God and to one another. (Holly Schick, 2002 Worship For All Seasons II)

Offering Hymn: "What Can I Do?" #191 (*More Voices*)

Offertory Prayer: (*in unison*)

Loving God, these gifts which we give are gifts to us in return, for in giving we become what you long for us to be: generous and compassionate people. Amen.

Prayers of the People:

Gracious and loving God, we thank you for the freedom and leisure of summer; for long days, warmth, the beauty of your creation. And we thank you for the beginning of this new season; for children and young people as

they begin a new year in school and church school; for meeting old friends and making new friends, for all your gifts.

We remember those who are ill this day. May they know that you are with them, that your loving arms surround them. We remember those who mourn and ask that you comfort and strengthen them. We remember those who are troubled or lonely. May they know that you are always near.

Gracious God, be with each of us. In worship and in learning may we be so filled with your Spirit that we hear and do your will in every aspect of our lives. May we reach out beyond ourselves to the community around us, and to the global community. May we turn the world upside down by our thinking and our acting, as we pray together the prayer that Jesus taught us...Our Father...Amen.

(Joan Brown, 1993 Worship For All Seasons II)

Parting Hymn: *“We Are Pilgrims” #595 Voices United*

Commissioning and Benediction:

May the grace of God surround you; may the love of Christ reside in your heart; and may you be held in the embrace of God’s Holy Spirit forever. Amen.

(Ralph Taylor, 1996 Worship For All Seasons II)

Sing: *“Love Us into Fullness” #81 (More Voices)*

Message: "Justice and Peace"

The story of Moses' death is quite significant to us when we consider our role as Christians. Moses was unable to go into the "promised land" before he died, but he was given a glimpse of what it would be like.

If we use our imaginations, we see glimpses of what the future could bring. If everyone were to model the commandment that Jesus revealed in our Gospel reading today to, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and, with all your mind, and love your neighbor as you love yourself," we would know a perfect world.

Today is Peace Sabbath and a good day to explore the implications of peace, and how justice enables us to have peace. We remember that the Hebrew word for peace is "shalom," which means more than the absence of war; it means health, wholeness, and fair and just relationships between people. When we think of peace in this manner, we might find our definition of justice lacking. When the word justice is mentioned, many people automatically think of retribution...justice must be served...give them what they deserve...an eye for an eye...a tooth for a tooth. Those people who think that corporal punishment should be reinstated understand the word "Justice" in this manner. They believe that one wrong deserves another. This, however, is not the kind of justice that Jesus practiced, nor is it the kind of justice that he wants his people to enact.

So then, what kind of justice are we talking about? The justice that we're referring to here requires that we see with different eyes. Think of the problem child in school. He is noisy, uncooperative, and insolent with his teachers, a troublemaker and bully among his fellow pupils. What should be done with such a child? "Justice" to some would mean that he be punished. But punishment does not solve his problem; it only makes him more hostile even if it squelches him. Or think of the child who is a problem because she withdraws into herself. She does poor work in school because she is paralyzed by the fear of her own inadequacy and she is rejected by her fellow pupils because in her withdrawal she seems "stuck-up." It might seem proper to warn her that if she does not work harder and listen to the teacher, she will fail; that if she does not make an effort to get along better with other people, she will never have any friends. But threats and pep talks only make her feel more insecure and afraid, so that she withdraws and fails all the more.

Psychologists know that what both children need first of all, is to be loved. If the troublemaker learns that he is accepted for himself, he no longer has to draw attention to himself through rebelling against authority and order. If the withdrawn girl learns that someone cares about her, she is freed from the insecure self-image that defeats and isolates her from other people. Neither punishment nor threats can change either child or solve his or her problem. But love can.

The kind of justice that Jesus promoted is something like that. It says God

loves you. God accepts you. God forgives you - without demanding that you be punished, without demanding that you torment and punish yourself, without demanding that you do anything to make up for what you have done or not done. Punishment, threats, and demands only increase fear and lead to increased alienation and separation. Love does away with fear and leads to reconciliation with God, our fellow human beings, and ourselves. The love, forgiveness, and acceptance of God in Christ, make God's righteousness and justice possible within us. The only requirement is that we love God with our whole being and our neighbor as ourselves.

If we, like Moses stood looking into the future...the future in which our children and grandchildren will continue to live and grow, would we not want a better way of living and being...would we not want them to be able to live in peace?

The greatest gift we can give to our children is to raise them in a culture of peace. Raising a generation of children committed to peace should be our most urgent priority. What we learn as children, we live as adults. When children learn violence...whether through video games, emotional abuse, or ethnic warfare...they repeat that violent behavior as adults. If they learn early how to resolve their conflicts nonviolently, and how to respect the differences among us, they will carry these lessons into their future. We've all sung the popular hymn, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me..." Perhaps this means that we begin with inner peace which means we quiet the inner chatter and calm the inner battles and struggles we so often face. A good place to practice peace and perfect the art of conflict resolution is with family and friends. Here we can learn to listen with empathy, and share with straight talk. The workplace is also an ideal setting in which to develop a culture of peace. Whatever our role...wage earner, volunteer, or temporary help; we all can influence the culture of our work life.

Margaret Mead once said, "Never doubt that a small group of dedicated people can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has!" We all live in community. Our personal, family, and work lives are part of that larger context. We're surrounded by neighbors and strangers who, like us, are concerned about everyday matters that affect us all...matters relating to education, environment, health care, housing, land use, taxes, and so on. As we grapple with these issues at the local and national levels, we find many opportunities for conflict...or for peace. We have many opportunities to be conscious about creating the kind of public environment we want for ourselves and for our children. We are invited to build the Peace-able Community...a community that has committed itself to right relationship based on justice, dignity, respect, and nonviolence.

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. reminds us of another aspect of justice and peace in his famous speech where he says, "I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

The human family is extravagantly, delightfully diverse. We come in a huge

variety of sizes, shapes, and colors. Our religions and belief systems, our culture and traditions, our languages and lifestyles, even our geographical challenges and adjustments, are rich in their differences. If we are to live in peace in our local and global communities, we need to learn to live together in harmony. We are one and we are many. If good men and women choose to do nothing then evil will triumph. Our society promotes social, political, and economic conditions that allow some to thrive at the expense of others. This may be a hidden agenda that stacks the deck against people of a certain race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, or other category of our rich diversity. Or it may take the form of outright exploitation or oppression of many for the benefit of the few.

If we want real peace in our lives and in the world, we cannot go along with injustice. Rev. David Giuliano tells us that, "In the work of justice, Jesus himself challenged the powers of his day to stand with the vulnerable. As people of faith, we believe that a new heaven and earth is possible and so we speak up for the sake of the common good." In the words of Helen Keller, "I am only one; but still I am one. I cannot do everything, but still I can do something. I will not refuse to do something I can do."

Through living in harmony with God and our neighbor, as the great commandment requires, we work in partnership with God to meet the emotional, physical, and spiritual needs of a hurting world. Marcus Borg tells us that being Christian is about passion...passion for God and passion for the world...a world of justice and peace. It's about participating in God's passion, loving God and changing the world.