

GIVE PEACE A CHANCE

Veterans Day, Sunday, November 11, 2007

St. John's Unitarian Universalist Church, Cincinnati, OH

Frank Carpenter, D.Min.

MEDIATION: Pablo Neruda's "Keeping Quiet."

READING: Mark Kurlansky, NONVIOLENCE, Modern Library, 2006; pages 165-168.

SERMON:

The eleventh hour of the eleventh day of November, 1918, an armistice began, marking the end of the Great War, World War I. In 1954, President Eisenhower signed legislation making Armistice Day Veterans Day, a time to honor Americans who risked their lives for our country.

I want to begin then, by recognizing those who have served in our country's military. Would those of you in active duty stand; in the reserve or guard; now, would veterans stand. Now, would family members of someone currently on active duty stand; families of those in the reserve or guard; families of veterans. Those who have given support such as nurses, doctors and social workers, would you stand. Would conscientious objectors stand, and their family members?

These are some of the people we know who have been prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. Let us express our gratitude for their readiness. There are poppies on the Flower Table prepared by the Program Planning Team of the Contemporary Service for those of you who stood.

For myself, I think of two family members. A cousin of mine served in Viet Nam and returned with serious alcohol problems. My father gave thirty years of his life and about all he got for it was a burial plot for him and my mother in Arlington National Cemetery. I still have some resentments for what happened with my father, especially as it meant that I spent seven of the first ten years of my life in children's homes. If nothing else, it was an eye opener for me to see what all too frequently happens to those who sacrifice for our country. Swift-boating is nothing new. Chicken hawk's denigration of the sacrifice of a Viet Nam War hero such as Max Cleland who lost three limbs is all too common.

For perhaps personal reasons, I am sensitive to the stories of how those who have sacrifice and gotten short shrift. For example, recent stories around this Veterans Day remark on the number of homeless veterans. Close to 200,000 veterans are homeless on any given night, one quarter of all homeless. But also, the number of homeless veterans from the Iraq

and Afghanistan battlefields is alarming to observers. Daniel Tooth, director of veterans affairs for Lancaster County, Pa., has said "We're going to be having a tsunami of them eventually because the mental health toll from this war is enormous."

<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/huff-wires/20071107/homeless-veterans/>

This is but one indicator that something is wrong with the present war. Jonathan Shay, a Boston psychiatrist specializing in post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, has written a book entitled *Achilles in Vietnam*. Shay describes the record of PTSD throughout history. In the *Iliad*, Homer spoke of the Greek concept of *themis* – a sense of “what’s right.” Shay goes on to comment that “the specific content of the Homeric warriors’ *themis* was often quite different from that of American Soldiers in Vietnam, but what has not changed in three millennia are violent rage and social withdrawal when deep assumptions of ‘what’s right’ are violated.” (Kurlansky 179) So far 48,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD.

<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/news/localnews/stories/111107dnnatvets.35aeae.html>

The alarming number of homeless Iraq War and Afghanistan War vets tells us that there is an alarming number of people who feel that their deep sense of ‘what’s right’ is being violated in that war. This is a spiritual, moral indicator. There are other indicators. A significant indicator is the economic one. A large part of our looming economic woes results from the present war, and thus is another indicator that this is a failed war. Speaking of the Vietnam War, one of the foremost political thinkers of that time, Hannah Arendt, said “inflation and currency devaluation are inevitable after lost wars, and only unwillingness to admit a disastrous defeat leads and misleads us into a futile search for ‘deeper causes.’ Only victory together with acquisition of new territories and reparations in a peace settlement can make up for the entirely unproductive expense of war.” [RESPONSIBILITY AND JUDGMENT, 2003; 271]

Yet, I personally believe, that not only this war, but all war in a nuclear age is failure. The military historian Gabriel Kolko concludes his massive history of the Vietnam War, *ANATOMY OF A WAR*, with this observation, “All that the United States has the ability to accomplish today is to impose immeasurable suffering on people whose fates its arms and money cannot control.” (Page 558) It seems to me this is the outcome of centuries of human development. At the end of World War II, Albert Einstein called for an end to war, remarking “A new type of thinking is essential if mankind [*sic*] is to survive and move to higher

levels.” (Kurlansky 180) Carl Jung pointedly said that the evolution of human morality has not kept pace with our technological development. Perhaps it is only in the extremes of violence and war that we can see how close to the abyss our slow moral evolution has led us.

Yet moral thinking progresses. Our reading this morning suggests the collapse of the USSR resulted from the nonviolence of the peoples of the Soviet Empire. One of the early indications of that was twenty years before when the Soviets invaded Czechoslovakia to put down unrest. The Czech leader, Alexander Dubcek had grown up on the north side of Chicago where his father was a pacifist and involved with Quaker's

Dubcek urged nonviolent resistance on the Czechs. After the Soviets put down the Czech revolt, Mikhail Gorbachev was among a commission sent to look into matters. Gorbachev noted that no Czech would speak with them. He wrote in a 1995 memoir, “I returned home weighed down by gloomy thoughts.” He had seen the end of the Soviet empire.

Is it too much to say that violence, war is a losing strategy in today's world; while love, non-violence, pacifism is a winning strategy? What about Gandhi, it will be asked. Gandhi only won against the British because the British were such fine fellows, it is argued.

Yet it should not be forgotten that the British ruled an empire over which it was said the sun never set. Some of the least fine fellows were ruled by this empire, including Afghanistan and other areas not known to the Victorian Age for civilized behavior. The greatest Poet laureate of England wrote this poem of British valor:

Half a league half a league,
Half a league onward,
All in the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred:
'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Charge for the guns' he said:
Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!
Was there a man dismay'd ?
Not tho' the soldier knew
Some one had blunder'd:
Theirs not to make reply,
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to do & die,
Into the valley of Death

Rode the six hundred.

Cannon to right of them,
Cannon to left of them,
Cannon behind them
Volley'd and thunder'd;
Storm'd at with shot and shell,
While horse & hero fell,
They that had fought so well
Came thro' the jaws of Death,
Back from the mouth of Hell,
All that was left of them,
Left of six hundred.

It is because many believe that there are alternatives to this grizzly approach to life issues that more and more people are becoming involved in various peacemaking activities. Members of St. John's are active in a number of ways. Every Monday evening, several St. Johnners join with members of First Unitarian, Sister Alice and other people of faith down on Central Parkway during evening commuting. The Women in Black as they call themselves walk with signs protesting the Iraq war.

Yesterday, Judy Cirillo was among those soliciting people to sign the IJPC's peace pledge. The pledge reads, "I will support a federal candidate that will bring a speedy and responsible end to the War in Iraq." Judy will be available during coffee hour to answer questions and offering you an opportunity to sign the pledge.

Last March, Howard Tolley preached a sermon on Peacemaking. He invited us to gather afterwards in the Chapel and vote among three options he outlined in the sermon. The options were for a statement of conscience on peacemaking.

- 1) *rejects the use of any and all kinds of violence and war to resolve disputes*
- 2) *approves military defense against attackers and UN force to stop genocide*
- 3) *promotes UU peace activism without embracing either pacifism or Just War*

Howard's framing of peacemaking in this way came from an initiative of our Unitarian Universalist Association. At our annual gathering in 2005 it was agreed that **The Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) for 2006 - 2010 is "Peacemaking."** It is hoped that all congregations will engage in this dialogue, multilogue, and Howard kicked it off for us.

The General Assemble voted the issue, Should the Unitarian Universalist Association reject the use of any and all kinds of violence and war to resolve disputes between peoples and nations and adopt a principle of seeking just peace through nonviolent means?

<http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issuesprocess/currentissues/44160/resourceguide/44160.shtml>

Given our strong commitment to the inherent worth and dignity of each person, and to the right of conscience and freedom of belief, we are drawn in several directions. Even if we all have a similar commitment to peacemaking, in what ways can we expect our brothers and sisters of the faith to agree with us?

What we as a continental organization have set out on is a process of conversation to explore the issues. It is hoped by the General Assembly in 2010, some sort of Statement of Conscience for the denomination can be agreed upon. It is also hoped that it will be acted upon not just by people attending the General Assemblies, but also, by the people who sit in the pews Sunday to Sunday in our Unitarian Universalist congregations.

The process that is now underway is composed of several working groups. From the **Working Group Updates:**

- Peacemaking Activism Resources WG - Frank Carpenter/
sabbatical
 - Assembling peacemaking success stories.
 - Ultimate object is to assemble a peacemaking “story book” to be used as a resource for congregations and at the GA CSAI workshop on congregational activities.

- Curriculum WG - Jeanette Ruyle
 - Fliers on the LMG were made available at the recent LREDA annual conference and CWG members talked with several attendees. Judith Kreiger is working with LREDA on CWG items. Still trying to determine best way to get the word out - Reach list, UU Peacemaking Newsletter,...

- Congregational Involvement WG - Dick Kopp
 - The first newsletter was sent out to congregations. Follow-up is planned
 - The 2nd issue of the newsletter is ready to go out. By the third issue we should have gotten significant feedback on the utility of the newsletter.
 - The CIWG is planning to contact the UUA districts by grouping them into “regions” and then dividing up the responsibility among members to be “point persons” for each region. The aim is to encourage districts to produce programs at their annual meetings to promote congregational involvement in the peacemaking CSAI.

One activity that the UUA's process is urging is for congregations to consider a peacemaking pledge. This is a draft of a suggested pledge (Was in the order of service on Sunday, November 11th):

**Unitarian Universalist Congregational Peacemaking Pledge
Draft – 10/21/07**

Following is a sample pledge that can be adapted by each congregation. Congregations are encouraged to develop their own Peacemaking Pledge in a creative and inclusive way, engaging the whole congregation actively in discussion about what peacemaking is and how we can be effective peacemakers as individuals and as a community

If your Pledge is completed by June 1, 2008, we invite you to forward the language of the Pledge to the Peacemaking Congregational Study/Action Issue Core Team (contact info below) as input toward a denominational draft Peacemaking Statement of Conscience that will be disseminated November, 2008 for review and discussion among congregations.

We suggest that the Pledge be for a limited period, such as five years, so that it is periodically revisited and revised.

On _____, the congregation of _____ formally pledges itself to building a culture of peace. We pledge to express our commitment to peace in the following ways.

Inward Peacemaking

We pledge to continue to learn as a community to create deeper peace within ourselves as individuals. Peacemaking starts from within, in building our own inner harmony, self-acceptance, compassionate understanding of our own needs and feelings.

Interpersonal Peacemaking

We pledge to create deeper peace in our relations with others, through learning to: listen more deeply; communicate our feelings and needs in effective, non-blaming and non-shaming ways; handle conflicts skillfully and respectfully; see always the 'inherent worth and dignity' in the other.

Congregational Peacemaking

We pledge to create deeper peace within our congregation through:

- building norms of respect and understanding for those who differ from us by belief, ethnic background, culture, gender orientation, or style
- making congregational decisions in ways that build consensus through finding common ground and 'win-win' solutions, avoiding power struggles and factions

- having in place an effective process for resolving conflicts within the congregation.

Societal Peacemaking

We pledge to build a deeper understanding of systemic violence and to be active in the wider community in reducing systemic causes of violence. We do this through:

- participating in local, regional, and national efforts to build a more peaceful and just society
- addressing racism, classism and other forms of cultural and economic oppression
- working toward changes in life style and policies that lead us toward greater harmony with our natural environment
- envisioning and working toward a society that respects the inherent worth and dignity of each person.

International Peacemaking

We pledge to build a deeper understanding of the causes of, and ways to prevent, war and intercommunity violence. We pledge to support:

- peaceful approaches to international conflicts
- international programs that encourage healthy and balanced economic development in all countries
- international efforts that address the causes of violence – poverty, economic instability, lack of education, etc..

We commit ourselves to the following specific actions in each of these areas over the next ___ years::

Inward Peacemaking

- Create at least one ongoing programs for individual spiritual development each season, such as meditation, yoga, reading and discussion of spiritual texts
- Include inner spiritual development as a significant theme in at least ___ Sunday services

Interpersonal Peacemaking

- Sponsor workshops and classes in Nonviolent Communication and other conflict resolution approaches
- Create a recommended process for handling conflicts between members of the congregation
- Hold a workshops in deep listening and empathy
- Have people share experiences in creatively building peaceful relations within their families or in the congregation, at one service each year.

Congregational Peacemaking

- Hold a film series on the subject of peace

- Dedicate at least one worship service a year to peace and justice
- Dedicate a children's chapel to peace
- Sponsor a peace essay, poetry, and art exhibition for children and adults
- Develop a Covenant of Right Relationship, including guidelines for handling conflicts
- Provide training in decisionmaking approaches, such as consensus, that are inclusive and respectful of divergent perspectives.

Societal Peacemaking

- Hold a vigil once a year in our community for peace
- At Sunday services sell Equal Exchange products ie. Fair Trade Coffee
- Write letters to the editor for the local paper on peace issues (start a letter writing campaign)
- Organize a public forum, workshop or conference once a year on peace issues
- Network with other peace organizations
- Invest some of the congregation's assets in "socially responsible" funds.

International Peacemaking

- Educate people about fair trade and where to buy these products
- Write letters legislative officials on issues of peace
- Organize a group to go to large demonstrations for peace
- Hold a petition drive for important legislative peace initiatives
- Do something to commemorate International Peace Day September 21st

Following worship this morning, join Howard Tolley, Judy Cirillo, Frances May Brooks, and St. John's Social Action Coordinating Conical Chair Jim Decker, along withy me in the Chapel to see where we go next with a draft pledge.

I close with a poem by the Israeli poet Yehudi Amichai:

"After we beat the swords into ploughshares,
 let us beat the ploughshares
 into musical instruments.
 That way, before they start a war,
 they'll have to beat the musical instruments
 back into ploughshares before they can beat them back into swords."

Let us be about the making of peace.