

A TIME OF PEACE

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St. John's UU Church, Cincinnati, OH

READING: Lt Gen Smedley Butler. USMC (Ret.), author of WAR IS A RACKET, 1935;

http://www.rationalrevolution.net/war/major_general_smedley_butler_usm.htm

SERMON:

Peace!

This afternoon we dedicate St. John's Peace Pole. Thanks to the efforts of Howard Tolley and St John's peacemakers, along with Mauricio Villacis, Bill Leurssen and Stan Loeb, hours of labor have come to fruition. Join us out on the lawn.

Peace!

This is that peculiar Sunday, the 5th Sunday of the month, and coming in May, it feels a bit like the Memorial Day Sunday, still a fit time for the great theme of war and peace.

Where to start?

The point I want to make today is that peace is about the aspirations, the hopes and dreams of people, and because it is about the hopes and dreams of all people, peace is about sharing.

The Responsive reading from the Students of Lincoln School make this point: Peace "is the world's dream of dreams. Peace brings comfort and happiness; it brings bread to the hungry; it brings prosperity to the nations."

As peace is about hopes for a good life, it is not surprising that it is at the core of the story of the birth of Jesus. "Peace on earth" is the promise of the angels. Fear not they say to the shepherds. Is there any mistake about the child being born in barn? The birth of Jesus is about the aspirations of poor people, the common people. When the wise men come to offer their blessing, the corrupt king Herod tries to co-opt them. He wants to kill the hopes and dreams of the people. As the carol says, "the hope and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

We want our lives to be better, the lives of our children to be better. Are we willing for the lives of other people to be worse off so that ours might be better? That's one of the questions that peace poses us. That's why we need people such as Alice Walker to remind us that "love is not concerned with whom you pray or where you slept the night

you ran away from home. Love is concerned that the beating of your heart should kill no one.”

Peace asks us, can we be at peace, if others are not? Can we be at peace without sharing with others? Is humanity one? Is earth a space ship?

Amnesty International answers this question in its recent annual report. They report the worldwide economic decline is leading to greater repression across the globe. Amnesty warns, “We are sitting on a powder keg of inequality, injustice and insecurity, and it is about to explode.” The report says abuses are increasing as marginalized communities demand basic rights amidst worsening economic security. Amnesty International Secretary General Irene Khan said the United States needs to address growing inequality at home. { <http://www.democracynow.org/2009/5/28/headlines> }

Growing inequality, increasing disparities of wealth, divisions between rich and poor breed resentment, hatred, blowback. Peace comes from..... **sharing!**

But one example in the news of increasing inequality weakening the chances for peace is a federal court case in New York City. A landmark trial against oil giant Royal Dutch Shell’s alleged involvement in human rights violations in the Niger Delta begins this week in federal court. Fourteen years after the widely condemned execution of the acclaimed Nigerian writer and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa, the court will hear allegations that Shell was complicit in his torture and execution.

Ken Saro-Wiwa was the founding member and president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, a group committed to use nonviolence to stop the repression and exploitation of the Ogoni and their land by Shell and the Nigerian government. [

http://www.democracynow.org/2009/5/26/shell_on_trial_landmark_trial_set]

A YouTube video tells the story of families and villages destroyed, children starved, water ways covered with oil spills in the Niger delta.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=htF5XEIMyGI>

We need not go to the Niger delta to experience the growing inequalities destructive of children’s hopes and dreams which Amnesty warns us about. A similar narrative of growing inequalities is unfolding upon the mountains of Appalachia.

Mountaintop removal is a radical form of coal mining in which entire mountains are literally blown up. Mountaintop removal is devastating hundreds of square miles of Appalachia; polluting the headwaters of rivers that provide drinking water to millions of Americans; and destroying a distinctly American culture that has endured for generations.

<http://www.ilovemountains.org/>

That water comes down into our water supply here in Cincinnati. And you can see the coal from those mountains on barges just by walking along the river. That coal is burned

in coal fired plants along the river. One of the biggest polluters is the J. M. Stuart coal-fired power plant in Adams County, Ohio, which is adjacent to the Cincinnati metropolitan area. In 2002, this plant discharged over 117,000 tons of SO₂ and over 46,000 tons of oxides of nitrogen. <http://www.edf.org/article.cfm?ContentID=3842>

The energy which runs our air conditioner, lights our bulbs here at St. John's, this electricity comes from coal fired plants. Extraction of this fossil fuel results in polluting the drinking water of people in Appalachia, driving them off their land.

Growing inequalities as destructive of people's hopes and dreams, undermining peace is not just a view of Amnesty International. Last year the US army published its Stability Operations manual. "Stability Operations" is Pentagon language, I gather, for keeping the peace.

Lt Gen. William B. Caldwell, wrote the Forward. He concludes the first paragraph saying, "... the greatest threat to our national security comes not in the form of terrorism or ambitious powers, but from fragile states either unable or unwilling to provide for the most basic needs of their people."

United States Army official doctrine: "... the greatest threat to our national security comes not in the form of terrorism or ambitious powers, but from fragile states either unable or unwilling to provide for the most basic needs of their people." Nigeria? Appalachia? <http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/army/fm3-07.pdf>

It must be that someone else wrote the rest of the Army Manual. The Introduction opens with a sentence that seems to me quite different: "Today, the Nation remains engaged in an era of persistent conflict against enemies intent on limiting American access and influence throughout the world." (Ibid, page vi.)

It seems to me that concern with dealing with enemies who seek to limit American military power is different from a concern with the plight of victims in Darfur, or Somalia.

Of course, if the military can be used to rescue those in trouble, the practice of what has been called humanitarian intervention, sending troops in to prevent suffering, then the two concerns might come together. One critic of the concept of humanitarian intervention is MIT professor Noam Chomsky. Chomsky writes:

The inspirational phrase "city on a hill" was coined by John Winthrop in 1630, borrowing from the Gospels, and outlining the glorious future of a new nation "ordained by God." One year earlier his Massachusetts Bay Colony created its [Great Seal](#). It depicted an Indian with a scroll coming out of his mouth. On that scroll are the words "Come over and help us." The British colonists were thus pictured as benevolent humanists, responding to the pleas of the miserable natives to be rescued from their bitter pagan fate.

The Great Seal was an early proclamation of "humanitarian intervention," to use the currently fashionable phrase. As has commonly been the case since, the "humanitarian intervention" led to a catastrophe for the alleged beneficiaries. The first Secretary of War, General Henry Knox, described "the utter extirpation of all the Indians in most populous parts of the Union" by means "more destructive to the Indian natives than the conduct of the conquerors of Mexico and Peru."
http://www.tomdispatch.com/post/175073/noam_chomsky_unexceptional_americans

Whether humanitarian intervention might be possible, it along with any use of American military might, is tainted by the image of Colin Powell, sitting between George Tenet and John Negroponte, addressing the United Nations Security Council in 2003 on the threat of Iraq weapons

The continuing lack of transparency on what went on, and continues to go on, calls for, minimally, a full skepticism of what we are told. Living in a capitalist society, a society where we see criticisms of a prospective Supreme Court Justice, Sonia Sotomayor, and are told that fund raising of various political organizations is the major motive for maligning her, in such a society, can we think war is pure, escapes from the profit motive?

As Smedley Butler told us:

Beautiful ideals were painted for our boys who were sent out to die. This was the "war to end all wars." This was the "war to make the world safe for democracy." No one mentioned to them, as they marched away, that their going and their dying would mean huge war profits. No one told these American soldiers that they might be shot down by bullets made by their own brothers here. They were just told it was to be a "glorious adventure."...

We need peace, we need sharing. Clausewitz's argued "war is a continuation of politics by other means..." And war is a continuation by other means of increasing the inequalities between people.

We started off with the students of Lincoln school, the baby Jesus, and our aspirations for a better life. And it all seems to have gotten awfully complicated.

What can I say? Peace is messy. Sharing is messy. And there is that one word that underscores how messy sharing can get: compromise.

Those of us working with Howard Tolley seeking to have St. John's ideas expressed in UUA peacemaking Statement have a sense of how sharing involves compromise. Some of what the St. John's peacemakers advocated, right of conscience and conscientious objection was introduced. Howard will share more next Sunday in the Invitation to Social Justice.

Sharing is messy. Participating in the UUA's process of developing the Peacemaking statement I have met some interesting people. One is a marine, a student at Meadville in training to be a chaplain. He is an in your face kind of guy, just like I think a Marine officer might be. At one point in a conversation he heatedly said that if UU's didn't want a military, we shouldn't expect to have oil for energy. Like Andrew Bacevich who wrote *THE LIMITS OF POWER, The End of American Exceptionalism* he is among the military personnel who are aware that a primary job Americans expect of our armed forces but don't want to own is that we want our military to maintain our habits of consumption.. Other members of the group have exceptionally strong feelings that America is an imperial power needing to be reigned in.

Sharing is messy. Compromise needed. I have been disappointed with the escalation in the Afghanistan war by the new administration. We need to be building roads and schools if we are to succeed in Afghanistan, not bombing civilian with predator drones. Peace is about people's hopes and dreams for a better life.

Working with China, Russia and Japan to halt nuclear proliferation in North Korea and Iran, and elsewhere, takes compromise.

Compromise: sharing is messy.

One of my favorite books is Richard Sennett's *THE USES OF DISORDER*. Printed in 1970, it's in part how we try to build exclusive communities to take the messiness out of our relationships, and then wonder why we feel lonely and isolated. Sennet finds one of the reasons for this in increasing wealth, abundance, writing

It is the hallmark of abundance that the need for ... sharing disappears. Each family [now] has its own vacuum cleaner, its own set of pots and pans, its own transport, supply of water, heat, etc. Thus the necessity for social interaction, the necessity to share, is no longer a driving force in communities of abundance; [people] can withdraw into their self-contained, self-sustaining homes. This means the feeling of community, of being related and bound together in some way, is cut off from a region that in the past furnished communal experiences. (page 48)

As the centrality of the Jesus birth story affirms, and as the stories of other religions also affirm, it is religions role to affirm peace, to affirm the unity of humanity. We are one is the great cry of all faiths; sharing the great teaching. The blue dot the astronaut sees from space is spaceship earth: finally finite, small

Let me close with story that tells both of the unity of humanity and the messiness of sharing.

An average man died, with the average common man's aspirations, and with the average, common person's good and bad deeds written in the book of life. So when he got to the

Pearly Gates, St. Peter said that he had a choice, he could go to heaven, or he could go to hell.

Well, being a UU, he wanted some evidence. He asked St. Peter if he could explore both and make his decision on what he saw.

First they went off to hell. Didn't seem too bad. Nice sunny day. Birds singing, Very pleasant. He wondered what improvements Heaven could offer. The bell rang for the noon meal. Off everyone rushed to the banquet. He saw that everyone had long eating utensils attached to their arms; three foot long forks and spoons. They were so long that no one could feed themselves. Everyone was hungry as hell.

Turning to his guide, he suggested they explore heaven.

It was much the same: a sunny day, birds singing. Very nice. The lunch bell rang. Sure enough, everybody had attached the same three foot long eating utensils, forks and spoons.

Then he noticed a difference, instead to trying to feed themselves, as in hell, in heaven people were feeding each other.

In your family: share. In your community share, in your nation, share; in your planet, share.

Then shall children dream dreams and none shall make them afraid.

Then shall there be a time of peace.