

Our Opening Words: *Answers in the Wind* by the Rev. Dr. Charles White McGehee

Wars begin in the mind of humans.
There can be no peace in the minds of humans
So long as their hearts are burdened with fears;
Fear of physical destruction;
Fear of starvation; fear of ravaging disease;
Or the greater fear of that unknown creature
Who is the stranger?
Love of one's neighbor,
The charity of true understanding,
And the responsibility of human for human-
These things stop at no national boundary
Cooperation is now an imperative
Between nations as well as people.
This is the fact for survival.
this is the imperative for religion.

Reading by Arundhati Roy given at a commencement speech for receiving Peace Prize in Australia in 2004:

So, what does peace mean in this savage, corporatized, militarized world? What does it mean in a world where an entrenched system of appropriation has created a situation in which poor countries which have been plundered by colonizing regimes for centuries are steeped in debt to the very same countries that plundered them, and have to repay that debt at the rate of 382 billion dollars a year? What does peace mean in a world in which the combined wealth of the world's 587 billionaires exceeds the combined gross domestic product of the world's 135 poorest countries? Or when rich countries that pay farm subsidies of a billion dollars a day, try and force poor countries to drop their subsidies? What does peace mean to people in occupied Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, Tibet and Chechnya? Or to the aboriginal people of Australia? Or the Ogoni of Nigeria? Or the Kurds in Turkey? Or the Dalits and Adivasis of India? What does peace mean to non-Muslims in Islamic countries, or to women in Iran, Saudi Arabia and Afghanistan? What does it mean to the millions who are being uprooted from their lands by dams and development projects? What does peace mean to the poor who are being actively robbed of their resources and for whom everyday life is a grim battle for water, shelter, survival and, above all, some semblance of dignity? For them, peace is war.

Sermon *Is Peace Possible?* Rev. Christina Sillari

Ultimately all humans want the same thing. We want to enjoy our lives, to feel safe in our communities and homes, to care for our families, to have access to clean water, food, shelter, jobs, and health care, and to experience love and connection. When we have all of these things we are more likely to experience peace. Peace does not come simply through a calm state of mind or an open and generous heart, although these help a great deal. Peace is not about doves and rainbows or quiet walks in nature or meditating every day or singing spirit of life. This can all create inner tranquility but real peace requires action.

When we, as individuals, establish inner peace it does contribute to peace in the world, but world peace cannot exist until everyone on the planet is free and fed and without fear. Peace is actually hard work. For the purpose of this sermon I am defining peace as everyone having a sustainable life with justice and equality: where the majority of people have enough access to all of their needs so they can live free and dignified lives. Does this mean we must live without violence? I am not sure. Many of us have no clue what it means to live with war, violence, and devastation.

Compassion and kindness are as much a part of human nature as violence and cruelty. Yet our world continues to create war. The crucifying powers that put Jesus on the cross over two thousand years ago remain active in power today. Liberal theologian Walter Rauschenbusch named these forces: militarism, religious bigotry, mob-spirit, greed and economic exploitation, and corruption of justice systems. These are the sins he said, that killed Jesus. They are now killing innocent people in this world every day.

Peace is not sexy. Peace is not profitable. Peace does not encourage individualism or fame or power-over. Peace will not allow us to numb out or be unconscious. Peace is hard work. Peace requires us to wake up, to work on our own issues, to take an action when we see injustice, to balance our heads and hearts so we can resonate at a higher level of consciousness so that even our presence with people shifts the vibration from fear to love, from oppression to freedom, from despair to hope. Can we do that? Can we be that brave? I invite you to enter a state of contemplation or reflection. Perhaps by closing your eyes, or sitting up tall, or witnessing your breath. As I ask you the following ten questions followed by a pause and then a quote, notice the thoughts, feelings and images that arise in you.

Do you expect peace to come to you or do you believe you are responsible for creating it?

The reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. showed us that even the simplest acts tilt the world toward peace. When his house was burned during the civil rights movement, he raced home not knowing if his wife and young daughter were safe. And he knew whatever he did could affect the anger brewing in the country. He stepped onto his porch and said, "Remember, this is what Jesus said, 'We are not advocating violence. We want to love our enemies. I want you to love your enemies. Be good to them. Love them and let them know you love them.'"

How do you nurture peace within yourself?

"The first step is to come home to ourselves. You don't need to become a Buddha. You need to become yourself," says Thich Nhat Hanh.

What or who are you angry at that is preventing you from experiencing peace?

American journalist, teacher, lecturer, pacifist, Colman McCarthy said: "Peace is as much about getting the bombs out of our own hearts as out of the Pentagon budget."

What positive things do you focus on that create peace?

"We can never obtain peace in the outer world until we make peace with ourselves," says his holiness the Dalai Lama.

Is there one conflict in your life that you can resolve?

Marshall Rosenberg said: "Peace requires something far more difficult than revenge or merely turning the other cheek; it requires empathizing with the fears and unmet needs that provide the impetus for people to attack each other. Being aware of these feelings and needs, people lose their desire to attack back because they can see the human ignorance leading to these attacks; instead, their goal becomes providing the empathic connection and education that will enable them to transcend their violence and engage in cooperative relationships."

Do you demonize and fear people you don't even know?

Rumi said: "Out beyond the ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field. I'll meet you there."

How much do you attempt to blame others for your lack of peace?

Gandhi said "We want to put an end to wars without giving up our violent intentions and violent relationships."

Can you forgive one person in your life that you have not been able to forgive?

"Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies," exclaimed Nelson Mandela

Is it possible for you to believe in peace, to have faith we can create peace on earth?

Archbishop Desmond Tutu said: "Dream. Dream. Dream. Be idealistic. Dream the world can be a better place."

Are you serving the world in a way that creates peace?

"Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve." said Dr. King.

Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi, King, Mandela, Rosenberg and so on... all incredible spiritual leaders and prophets, all working for peace, inspiring millions of people. Where are the women?

Aung Sun Suu Kyi, a hero for democracy in her country, Burma. You probably also know that she has spent 15 years of her life in prison in efforts to bring about democracy. She has become an international symbol of peaceful resistance in the face of oppression. Another woman hero, Dr. Shirin Ebadi, the first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize for her significant and pioneering efforts for democracy and human rights, especially for women, children, and refugees.

Dr. Wangari Maathai – the 2004 Peace Laureate from Africa is the founder of the famous environmental protection campaign "the green belt movement." They call her the "Tree Lady," but she's more than the Tree Lady. Working for peace is very creative. It's hard work every day. When she was planting those trees she was using the action of getting people together to plant those trees to talk about how to overcome the authoritarian government in her country.

Then there is Dr. Rigoberta Menchu Tum from Guatemala. She was the first and only indigenous woman to become a Noble Laureate for peace. She ran for president of her country twice. She is now educating the indigenous people of her country about what it means to be a democracy.

Leymah Roberta Gbowee is a Liberian peace activist responsible for leading a women's nonviolent peace movement in Liberia that helped bring an end to the Second Liberian Civil War in 2003. She, with two other women, were awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work."

And last we have **Nadia Murad Basee Taha**, an Iraqi Yazidi human rights activist who was kidnapped from her hometown Kocho and held by the Islamic State for three months. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for "her effort to end the use of sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict".

Many of these women have been in prison, homeless at times, in exile, or their governments have tried to assassinate them. They are reclaiming the meaning of peace. They are going to war with the ammunition of peace... trust, honesty, tolerance, gentleness, joy, defenselessness, generosity, patience, faithfulness, and open mindedness. They are teachers of God like Jesus and Buddha, Gandhi and King. They all believe peace is possible. They each have affected one of the interconnected spheres of peace work: the personal, the social, the political, the institutional or the ecological. Which sphere of peace are you working with?

These women are helping to create what anthropologists are newly calling peace systems. Peace systems are clusters of neighboring societies that do not make war with each other. A recent study published in *Humanities and Social Science Communications* shows that positive social interconnectedness; interdependence; non-warring values and norms; non-warring myths, rituals, and symbols; and peace leadership all contribute to the creation of peace systems. These values seem very feminine to me...earth based, relational, communal and nurturing.

And the good news is that peace systems are found all over the world: in Nordic Nations, Austrian Aborigines, mobile foragers of Canada, tribes in Brazil, the Iroquois Confederacy and even the United States of America. I must mention that the US military budget is more than seven hundred billion dollars. The US also has a peace budget of forty-five million.

The truth is each one of us is being called to create peace, to help raise the vibration of this planet. As Arundhati Roy says: "Another world is not only possible, she's on the way and, on a quiet day, if you listen very carefully you can hear her breathe." We are responsible for whether the world becomes more chaotic or more peaceful. We cannot wait for someone else. We cannot wait until we are happy or free or better off, we can begin now by believing peace is possible, by bringing our souls into harmony with the divine, by breathing in peace and breathing out love, by accepting and serving another, by forgiving anyone, by changing laws and policies, by joining and supporting a community that promotes peace....the list is endless.

The mission of our progressive faith is to strengthen solidarity by holding fast to what is good, what protects and saves lives, in the presence of crucifying powers that threaten earth and earth's people. The mission of our faith is to embrace the beauty of diversity and the diversity of beauty and together as one confront and resist the powers and principalities that continue to crucify the sacred beings on this planet.

I leave you with a reading from the Course in Miracles:

Teachers of God believe peace is possible. Can we become teachers of God?

Peace is impossible to those who look on war. Peace is inevitable to those who offer peace. How easily, then, is your judgment of the world escaped! It is not the world that makes peace seem impossible. It is the world you see that is impossible. Peace now belongs here and the earth bows down before its gracious Presence, and it leans down in answer, to raise it up again. Now is the question different. It is no longer, "Can peace be possible in this world?" but instead, "Is it not impossible that peace be absent here?"

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silence.

Closing Prayer *Let us Learn Peace* Annie Foerster

Peace is more than the absence of worry.

It is the creation of safe havens for all;

It is the building of security for everyone;

It is the forgiveness of self,

as well as one who would harm you

Let us seek contentment; let us learn peace.

Peace is more than the absence of discordance.

It is the intent listening to diverse points of view;

It is the intentional speaking of all voices, one at a time;

It is the tension within silence that welcomes all thoughts.

Let us seek harmony; let us learn peace.

Peace is more than the absence of tension.

It is studying the hard lesson of letting go;

It is breathing through pain into tranquility;

It is forming friendship out of enmity.

Let us seek serenity; let us learn peace.

Peace is much more than the absence of war.

It is observing the promised truce when anger would say "no";

It is finding the just compromise when the ego would say my way;

It is striving for reconciliation when the heart would say revenge.

Let us seek amity for all the earth; let us learn peace.