

November 10, 2002

Peace Sunday Worship

Introduction

Nonresistance and Resistance

Is resistance to the powers a faithful response to violence? Nonresistance has been recognized as a classic form of Mennonite peacemaking.¹ Traditionally, nonresistance has been linked with a two-kingdom theology, which has often created a radical separation between the church and the world or at least a selective engagement with the state based on collective self-interest.² This stance has sometimes led to either an apolitical stance, that is, non-engagement with political powers, or at times, to the church blessing the powers that wage war, since these governmental powers are instituted to “wield the sword,” according to this interpretation of Romans 13. It is not necessary

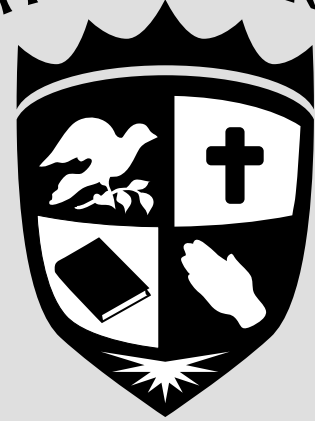
**Resist the devil
and he will
flee from you**

—James 4:7

that the stance of nonresistance be interpreted as passivity in the face of warring powers or acquiescence to malevolent forces in the world. Nonresistance, in its biblical sense, refers to nonretaliation or not offering evil for evil (*Romans 12:14-21*), or to put it positively, returning good for evil. In this sense nonresistance still has a positive role to play in peacemaking by actively seeking the good of others in the world.

Still, there is the need for active resistance to the powers of evil within the world. The biblical witness refers to these spiritual forces as “principalities and powers” (*Ephesians 6:12*).³ We find embodied in Jesus Christ a sacred model of resistance against those powers that produce, legitimate, and engage individuals, institutions, and nations in war, violence, injustice, and dehumanization. For example, in the tradition of the Hebrew prophets, Jesus overthrew the tables of the moneychangers in a public act of symbolic defiance, resisting the elitist and oppressive religious powers that corrupted the temple system (*Matthew 21:12-13*). In our present national and international context of violence and social injustice the church is called, through the example of Jesus Christ, not only to participate in the work of justice and peace, but to nonviolently resist those unseen forces of evil visibly active within systemic and structural powers.⁴

RESISTING
THE POWERS



A call to prayer
and fasting

These worship resources are provided by Peace and Justice Support Network, Mennonite Church USA, as part of a call to prayer and fasting for spiritual discernment and action concerning the Mennonite Church USA's response to imminent war with Iraq.



Peace and Justice
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Sermon Themes

The story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness (*Matthew 4:1-11; Mark 1:12; Luke 4:1-12*) is a model narrative for spiritually resisting the powers. Within a context of prayer and fasting, Jesus resists the tempting options to abuse power, to dominate nations, and to resort to redemptive violence within a context of prayer and fasting.⁵ Still dripping from his baptism, where a voice from heaven identified Christ as "Son of God" (*a term used of kingly rulers—Psalm 2*), Jesus went to the wilderness in preparation for the beginning of his public ministry. While in the wilderness we know he fasted, a common Jewish religious practice. We can assume he prayed, since solitary prayer in deserted places was his regular practice (*Matthew 14:23, 26:36; Luke 6:12*). The Evil One approached Jesus in his hunger and weakness with challenges concerning the nature of his messianic identity and mission (*"If/Since you are the Son of God..."*). We may note that each of the temptations Jesus faced in the desert, he later faces in his ministry. Would Jesus' messianic identity be formed by using his power, at the request of the devil, to miraculously produce bread, not simply for his own hunger, but for the hungry, peasant masses? Remember, how after Jesus fed the 5,000 the crowd wanted to take him by force and make him king (*read—earthly king who rules through force and violence*), but Jesus resisted the temptation and withdrew to a mountain by himself (*John 6:15*)?

The temptation to throw himself off the pinnacle of the temple and float down before the adoring crowds presents Jesus with the option of exploiting the miraculous, the spectacular, to gain followers for a messianic movement. Remember, trusting in the temple for God's protection from the violence of other nations was a temptation for the people of Israel (*Jeremiah 7:4*). This temptation shows up during Jesus' ministry in the form of the religious elite testing him by requesting a sign, whereby Jesus might abuse his power (*Mark 8:11*).

The temptation to rule the kingdoms of this world (*i.e. the Roman empire*), by Jesus bowing to Satan, must be understood in the political context of the colonial power of imperial Rome. Satan is presented as the power behind the oppressive rule of Rome. Bowing to Satan has a practical, first century counterpart in bowing to the "divine" Roman emperor, a constant temptation for God-followers under Roman rule. Political sovereignty could only be grasped through forcefully taking power by the same violent means used by the Romans, a real option for would-be leaders (*e.g. messianic pretenders, Sicarii terrorists, and zealot revolutionaries*). Yet Jesus resisted this option.

Jesus defied the temptation to abuse power, to define his salvific role through redemptive violence, and to seek to grab for dominance over the world. These are the temptations we face as a people living in a nation that in many ways mirrors the Roman empire of Jesus' day. Trusting in God alone, Jesus resisted the temptations. In the same way, so can we.

Sermon Options:

1. Focus the sermon on the nature of Jesus' temptations. Connect them to the socio-political milieu of first century Palestine under Roman colonial rule. Create analogies between Jesus' temptations and the temptations faced by the church and our nation in the context of the American empire. (*See sample sermon The Lost Temptation by Leo Hartsborn on the Peace and Justice Support Network web site: <http://peace.MennoLink.org>*)
2. Explore Jesus' practices of prayer and fasting as forms of resistance to violence and unquestioned allegiance to the state, as practices for spiritual discernment in times of crisis, as ways to resist the temptation to compromise our calling and mission as the church.
3. Jesus resisted the devil's temptations through use of scripture (*i.e. passages from Deuteronomy*). Design the sermon to make explicit how particular biblical narratives and passages can form the church into an alternative society, a peaceful community of Jesus' followers. Some possible passages to use include: Matthew 5-7, Ephesians 2:11-22, 1 Peter 2:1-10.

Sample Service, Litanies, and Prayers

The following worship service can be used as it is, adding elements from your particular congregation, or you can use the litanies and prayers to create your own worship service. If your congregation encourages prayer and fasting on the Saturday right before Peace Sunday, the communion service can serve as a time to break fast. The communion meal might be set within a Love Feast meal or be followed by a fellowship meal for the congregation.



Praising God

Call to Worship

(based on Joel 2)

Blow the trumpet!

Sound the alarm!

Rend your hearts!

Sanctify a fast!

Call a solemn assembly!

A day of darkness and gloom appears!

A great and powerful army comes!

Fire devours everything in front of them.

After the forces come,

there is a desolate wilderness.

Before them peoples are in anguish,

All faces grow pale.

Like warriors they charge,

Like soldiers they scale the wall.

They burst through the weapons

And are not halted.

Yet even now, says the Lord,

Return to me with all your heart,

With fasting, with weeping,

And with mourning.

Return to the Lord, your God,

For God is gracious and merciful

Invocation

God of grace and God of mercy, on your people pour your power. The powers of evil and death surround us and mock the nonviolence of Christ's way. Free us from our fears and our constant clinging to the blanket of human security. Shame our reliance upon material

prosperity, which so often feeds off the exploitation of others' resources. Cure your children's warring madness. Free us from complacency and acquiescence to the powers and principalities that seek to dominate and dehumanize. Let us resist the powers that bring death and destruction. Let the search for the salvation of all humanity be our glory and mission evermore. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour. Amen.

Praise Hymn

God of Grace and God of Glory—No. 366 *Hymnal: A Worship Book*



Praying for Peace

Prayer of Confession

As the winds of war blow in our faces, O God, you call the church to prayer, fasting, and repentance. You have named the church as salt and light of the earth, signposts of the reign of God, ambassadors of reconciliation. But, too often we have been content while the machines of war grind forward leaving devastation in their wake. We have been silent as thousands of God's children have become victims of the politics of fear and the death sentence of falling bombs. Before Isaiah's vision of swords beaten into plowshares and Jesus call to "put away the sword," we must confess to you, Merciful God, our complicity in our nation's violence and our soul's desire for that new world coming. Forgive us our lack of moral imagination. Stir into our eyes your rainbow vision of that day when the lion and lamb lie together in your peace. Amen.

Choral Response

By the Waters—No. 148 *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

Silent Meditation

A Word of Assurance

(Based on Joel 2:13-14)

Return to the Lord, says your God, and God will be gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and relents from punishing. Who knows whether God will not turn and relent, and leave a blessing behind?

Prayer for Peace

God of quiet streams and still waters,
calm the storms of war that rage in our world
and the torrents of chaos that crash in our hearts.

We pray for peace to pour down from on high,
for justice to flow like an everlasting stream.
Grant that your river of abundant lives
surge toward those who thirst in body and soul for
peace in the midst of war,
truth in the midst of lies and deceit,
forgiveness in the midst of vengeful anger,
hope in the midst of death and despair,
reconciliation in the midst of estrangement.
Drench us with your peace
that passes all human understanding.
Shine on us the light of your burning Presence
that we might become beacons of reconciliation,
lamps on lamp stands,
a city set on a hill,
that others might be drawn to you
and your goodness and grace
that transforms the world
through Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Passing the Peace

Have congregants turn to those around them, place their palms together, and pass the peace of Christ saying, “The peace of Christ be with you/*and also with you.*”



Hearing the Word

The Word Then

Matthew 4: 1-11

Children's Time

(see below)

Hymn of Assurance

Give to the winds thy fears—No. 561 *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

The Word Now

Sermon



Celebrating Communion

(see below)



Sending Forth

Hymn of Sending

Let there be light, Lord God—No. 371 *Hymnal: A Worship Book*

Benediction

(based on Isaiah 58:6-8, Micah 6:8)

Is not this the fast that I choose:
To loose the bonds of injustice,
To let the oppressed go free,
And break every yoke?
Is it not to share our bread with the hungry
And to bring the homeless poor into our house;
When we see the naked, to cover them. . .

God has shown us what is good

And what God requires of us.

To do justice,

To love mercy,

And to walk humbly with our God.

Then our light will break forth like the dawn,

And our healing will spring up quickly.

Worship Elements

Children's time

1. If the story of Jesus' temptation is used with children, take care not to trivialize the temptations as being analogous to wanting to take forbidden cookies or treats. You may want to invite children forward before the scripture is presented. With children's time following the dramatic reading of Matthew 4:1-11, children could be asked simple questions: Jesus went into the wilderness to pray and went without food for forty days. What does it feel like to be hungry? Some people in our congregation have been going without food. Have you heard why they did that? (In clear and simple terms make connections between the reasons why Jesus prayed and fasted and why people in the church are praying and fasting). Close with a prayer for peace.
2. Give children copies of the banner graphic. Ask them to describe what things they see in the picture. Explain to them the symbols: **1) The Shield** reminds us of God, who is our Protector, and helps us resist those bad things that might harm us or others, like in the story where Jesus resisted the devil's temptation; **2) The Bible** reminds us of God's Word that gives us strength. Jesus used the Bible against the devil in the desert;

3) **The Cross** reminds us of God's power of love shown to us in Jesus giving himself all the way to death, rather than fighting or hurting others; 4) **The Praying Hands** remind us to pray, not only for our families and the church, but, like Jesus told us, to pray for our enemies; 5) **The Sun** reminds us of the light of God. God lights our way by showing us the right ways to live; 6) **The colors and crown** are royal and remind us that we follow Jesus, the Prince of Peace.

3. Give each child a photo of an Iraqi citizen to use when they pray for the people of Iraq. One place to get photos is the MCC web site, www.mcc.org/gallery. Click on "Iraq Today."

Celebrating Communion

Various communion themes may connect with themes of this Peace Sunday worship service:

- **Communion as memorial**—Done "in remembrance of Jesus" liturgical words can be constructed to recall how Jesus resisted the powers of violence and vengeance unto death. A communion prayer or reading of a list of martyrs or a telling of a single story can be performed recalling the broken Body of Christ. It might be created to bring to remembrance nonviolent saints of the past who gave their lives in the cause of social compassion, peace and justice (e.g. Felix Mantz, Maekyn Wens, St. Clare, Martin Luther King Jr., Oscar Romero, etc. See Robert Ellsberg's book, *All Saints* or Dave and Neta Jackson's *On Fire for Christ*).
- **Communion as Eucharist**—Performed as a Eucharist or thanksgiving, communion prayers can be offered in thanks to God for those who work for justice and peace in our church, communities, and world, for our daily bread and the hope of bread for all the world, for the Spirit of Life, that surges through communities of resistance. Thanksgiving may be offered for the life of Jesus, whose God-intoxicated life flows through us so that we might resist the powers.
- **Communion as "break fast"**—Communion may serve as a "break fast" for those who engaged in a day of prayer and fasting before Peace Sunday, and thus have a meaningful significance.

The Eucharist has lost much of its eschatological import precisely where the church has come to feel at home in the world, forfeiting its sense of the transitory nature of the Christian sojourn among the earthly kingdoms.⁷

The cross and Resurrection in all eucharists are signs of the redeeming and reconciling love of God in Christ...and of the universalism that includes even enemies.⁶

If it is offered as a "break fast," this then should be made explicit in the observance of the meal. Those who have fasted might be called forth to be served first, and serve as embodied liturgical symbols of others in the world who face hunger, like those in Afghani camps, disrupted by the ravages of war.

- **Communion as a meal of liberation and solidarity**—The Passover meal was a remembrance of God's liberation of the children of Israel from slavery. Words of liturgical celebration can present the communion as a meal of God's power to liberate us from the chains of violence and call us to solidarity with those who are poor, hungry and oppressed. A communion offering might be taken and given to people in need in the local community or around the world.
- **Communion as a sign of the messianic banquet**—As a foretaste of the eschatological feast of Christ communion can be formed as a finger pointing to that day when there will be no more tears from death and grief, when we shall learn of war no more, and all races, tongues, and nations shall come before the welcome table of Christ, the Sovereign. Songs like, *Twelve Gates to the City, Soon and Very Soon, or Beyond a Dying Sun*, could be sung while communion is being received.

Prayer and Fasting

"To pray is to learn to believe in a transformation of self and world, which seems, empirically, impossible...What is unbelief but the despair, dictated by the dominant powers, that nothing can really change, a despair that renders revolutionary vision and practice impotent...Faith entails political imagination, the ability to envision a world that is not dominated by the power."⁸

"Prayer is the armor of the spirit 'against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness' (*Ephesians 6:11-12*) To disarm the powers, we must first disarm ourselves before God. Prayer makes us face our own complicity in the world's hate and violence, our worship of false gods, our blasphemous usurpation of God's judgment. Prayer, reinforced by disciplines of fasting and penance, tempers our passions, our indulgences, and our ambitions...Prayer makes us instruments of a peace that is not our own."⁹



“We can experience many moments of solidarity on fast days, when we bring to mind the lives of those victimized by evils we are resisting...”¹⁰

“But this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.”
(*Matthew 17:21*)

This year’s Peace Sunday is a call to prayer and fasting for the church amidst our national ethos of war making. Prayer and fasting are traditional spiritual disciplines practiced for discernment and as empowerment to resist malevolent spiritual forces. Fasting may be in the form of self-denial of not only food, but of other necessities or pleasures (*e.g. television, talking, treats*). Fasting is practiced as a call to prayer, a means of self-emptying, a way of expressing dependence upon God, as an instrument of discipleship, as a means of solidarity with the hungry and oppressed, as an invitation to serve our neighbors, and I would add, a means of inwardly/outwardly resisting the powers of destruction.¹¹ Mahatma Ghandi,

Cesar Chavez, and others, have practiced fasting as a spiritual discipline and a practice of “political holiness.”¹²

One way fasting may be practiced is by engaging in a 24-hour fast beginning on Saturday and ending on Peace Sunday. This time of fasting can include scripture and spiritual readings, acts of service or peacemaking, and silent meditation for discernment concerning individual or corporate responses to potential or actual war. The fast may be broken with communion or a congregational fellowship meal. Time should be spent corporately sharing the experiences of prayer and fasting and senses of God’s movement for congregational discernment.

A more detailed guide on prayer and fasting can be found on the PJSN web site: <http://peace.MennoLink.org>.

The Senses

Creating diverse worship elements that connect the senses and with the theme of Peace Sunday can assist the worshipper in getting in touch with God. The following are some suggested ideas.

1. Create a Reader’s Theatre for Matthew 4:1-11 with parts for the narrator, Jesus, and the devil. The voice of the devil could be amplified and read off stage. The sound of wind could be used behind the readings and the sound of rattles could be used behind the devil’s voice. The reader for the part of Jesus might hold a wooden staff and be dressed in a robe or cloth sash.
2. Create the banner using the pattern included on the PJSN web site. Use the time for constructing the banner as a time to discuss fears of war and hopes for peace. Questions for discussion: Does God shield or protect us from destructive powers? In what ways? How does God help us to resist the powers of violence and death? How are prayer, fasting, and Scripture tools for peace and for confronting malevolent powers? What does the cross tell us about the love of God and the nonviolent stance of Jesus?
3. Place on the communion table symbols of Jesus’ temptations, for example, a loaf of bread, a stone, a crown, and a sword.
4. Have people prepared with trumpet, bell, and cloth(s). After the opening phrases of the Call to Worship are read (*i.e., blow the trumpet, sound the alarm, rend your hearts...*), have individuals make the corresponding sounds. Sounds may need to be amplified with a microphone.
5. If communion is celebrated in the service, homemade bread may be baked for use in a closing communion on Sunday as a conclusion to the time of prayer and fasting conducted on Saturday. Using a bread machine in the sanctuary before the service leaves the scent of bread.



Resources for Resistance

- James W. Douglass, *Resistance and Contemplation: The Way of Liberation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., Inc.) 1972.
- Hendrick Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers* (Scottsdale: Herald), 1962.
- Arthur Boers, *On Earth as in Heaven: Justice Rooted in Spirituality* (Scottsdale: Herald), 1991.
- Perry Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1998.
- Pedro Casaldáliga and José-María Vigil, *Political Holiness: A Spirituality of Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis), 1994.
- Marva J. Dawn, *Powers, Weakness, and the Tabernacling of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 2001.
- Leo Driedger and Donald B. Kraybill, *Mennonite Peacemaking: From Quietism to Activism* (Scottsdale: Herald), 1994.
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- Robert Ellsberg, *All Saints: Daily Reflections on Saints, Prophets, and Witnesses for Our Time* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co.), 1999.
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- Dave and Neta Jackson, *One Fire for Christ: Stories of Anabaptist Martyrs* (Scottsdale: Herald), 1989.
- Marlene Kropf and Eddy Hall, *Praying with the Anabaptists: The Secret of Bearing Fruit* (Newton, Kan: Faith and Life Press), 1994.
- William Stringfellow, *Free in Obedience* (New York: Seabury Press), 1964.
- _____, *The Keeper of the Word: Selected Writings of William Stringfellow* Bill Wylie Kellerman, ed., (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1994.
- Willard Swartley, ed. *The Love of Enemies and Nonretaliation in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press), 1992.
- Marjorie Thompson, *Soul Feast: An Invitation to the Christian Spiritual Life* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press), 1995.
- Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 1992.
- _____, *Naming the Powers: The Language of Power in the New Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 1984.
- _____, *The Powers That Be* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 2001.
- _____, *Unmasking the Powers: The Invisible Forces that Determine Human Existence* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 1986.
- John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster 2nd ed.* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1994.

Footnotes

1. Guy Franklin Hershberger, *War, Peace, and Nonresistance* (Scottsdale: Herald), 1953.
2. For a history of two kingdom theology among American Mennonites, see Perry Bush, *Two Kingdoms, Two Loyalties: Mennonite Pacifism in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press), 1998.
3. For an early discussion of these principalities and powers, see Hendrick Berkhof, *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Howard Yoder (Scottsdale: Herald), 1962.
4. For a thorough examination of the resistance to the powers, see Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 1992.
5. John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 1994.
6. Horton Davies, *Bread of Life and Cup of Joy: Newer Ecumenical Perspectives on the Eucharist* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 208.
7. William T. Cavanaugh, *Torture and Eucharist* (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 225.
8. Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988) 255,305.
9. The United Methodist Council of Bishops, *In Defense of Creation: The Nuclear Crisis and a Just Peace* (Nashville: Graded Press, 1986), 84.
10. James McGinnis, *Journey into Compassion: A Spirituality for the Long Haul* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), 29.
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