



the Peaceable MISSION

the interconnection between mission,
evangelism, peace and justice



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November 9, 2003

Peace Sunday Worship

More than a Greeting

Peace. It sounds like a simple greeting. Shalom. Eirene. Those are the words that would have been spoken by Jew and Greek as a salutation when they encountered someone on the street or in the marketplace. Coming from the lips of the risen Christ, who bears in his resurrection body the wounds of crucifixion, this greeting takes on a deeper meaning. The one who had endured the cross, instead of calling down the armies of heaven against the Romans, spoke those words of peace. The risen Christ repeated the eirenic greeting twice, emphasizing the import of his words. His greeting hearkens back to earlier words in John's gospel when Jesus promised his disciples the Holy Spirit: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid" (*John 14:27*). Then, within the same farewell discourses, Jesus told them, "I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace" (*John 16:33*).

Christ's greeting of peace was spoken to quell the fears of his disciples and the Johannine community, the Christians addressed by John's gospel. The disciples feared the loss of their beloved leader. They feared the possibility that they may have to endure the same ignoble fate as Jesus. The Johannine community feared persecution as they went into the world to share the good news of Christ. For Jesus had sent them as surely as he had sent those early apostles, a word which means "sent ones." Following his peaceful greeting Jesus told the disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I send you." This was Christ's missionary charge to his disciples. And that mission entailed forgiveness. They were to live as a forgiving people within a world of fear and hatred, vengeance and violence. Christ blew his sweet breath of the Holy Spirit upon them as a new creation through a Johannine Pentecost, creating a new community and empowering them for their peaceable mission to the world. The impartation of Christ's peace and Spirit were interconnected as empowerment for mission.

John's community heard the words of Christ's peace amid their fears of the world around them. They were to go into that frightening world with Christ's peace and forgiving grace. We modern readers are addressed as surely as John's community and those first disciples. We hear Christ's word of peace amid our post-9/11 world with its fears connected to terrorism, a crumbling economy, unemployment, sexism, racism, homophobia, and xenophobia. The breath of Christ's Spirit has been blown on us. We have been sent to the world, just as Jesus was sent with the healing word of forgiveness. We go forth with more than a greeting, more than an inner peace to calm our fears, but with empowerment by Christ's Spirit, embodied in his healing, forgiving, and nonviolent life to be a new community on a peaceable mission to a fearful world. On this Peace Sunday congregations are encouraged to liturgically explore the interconnections between mission, evangelism, peace, and justice.

Jesus came and stood
among them and said,
"Peace be with you."

—John 20:19b

Other Texts and Themes

Sermons and liturgical themes focused on the interrelation between mission, peace, and justice may be drawn from numerous biblical texts. The following are some possible texts to study on Peace Sunday.

Isaiah 52:7

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, "Your God reigns." In this text from the prophet Isaiah, addressing the exiles in Babylon, images of peace and the evangel or good news are linked. The messenger brings "good news" (Septuagint, Greek translation of OT=euangeli-zomai) of peace and salvation. The good news or evangel of peace is the liberation of an oppressed and captive people, a sign of God's reign. **Theme: The Gospel of Peace.**

Isaiah 61:1-2/Luke 4:16-20

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor. Jesus quotes the prophet Isaiah at the beginning of his public ministry to clearly define his mission. His mission is to bring good news (euangelisasthai=gospel), liberation to those in "debtor's prison," healing to those physically and spiritually blind, freeing the socially, politically, economically oppressed, and proclaiming jubilee (*Leviticus 25*). Jesus proclaims that his mission and gospel will focus upon social justice, as well as spiritual and physical healing. In Jesus' reflection on scripture in the synagogue of Nazareth, he draws upon texts that address God's healing that transcends national, ethnic, and religious boundaries, a dangerous message for any time. **Theme: A Mission of Social Justice.**

Ephesians 2:11-22

For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. Salvation through the blood of Christ is a dominant evangelical doctrine. In this passage of Ephesians salvation through the cross is tied inextricably to peace, that is, the reconciliation of two social groups that were divided and hostile towards one another, Jew and Greek. Christ is the proclaimer and embodiment of peace, creating a reconciled community where God dwells. **Theme: Christ is our Peace.**

Sample Service, Litanies, and Prayers

The following service is based upon John 20:19-23. It can be utilized as it is, added to and adapted for use in your particular congregation, or the litanies and prayers can be used to create your own service. All hymns are from *Hymnal: A Worship Book*.

Praise

Gathering

Call to Worship —(from Isaiah 42:1-3, 6-8)

Here is my servant, whom I uphold,
My chosen, in whom my soul delights.

I will put my spirit upon him;

He will bring forth justice to the nations.

A bruised reed he will not break,

And a dimly burning wick he will not quench;

He will faithfully bring forth justice.

I have given you as a covenant to the people,

A light to the nations,

To open the eyes that are blind,

To bring out the prisoners from the dungeon,

From the prison those who sit in darkness.

I am the Lord, that is my name.

Invocation and Thanksgiving

Creating God, we gather in your presence to give thanks for the gift of your creation. May we honor you by being good caretakers of our environment and all creatures who dwell within it. We give thanks for your covenant with the people of Israel and their mission to be a light to the nations. May we live as lamps on a stand, a city on a hill, that those around us might see your glory and give you praise. We give thanks for sending Jesus as our Lord and Liberator. May we live as ones who have been set free and sent into the world with good news to all races, tongues, and peoples. We give thanks for your Holy Spirit, who ignited those first disciples to spread like wildfire from Jerusalem to Judea to Samaria to the ends of the world. May we be empowered to share the gospel of peace across the street, through the marketplace, and all around the world. God of all nations, come to us in your grace, to heal the injustice and violence of our world. Come in your power, to embolden our witness. Come in your compassion, to lift up the oppressed and downtrodden. Come, God of justice and peace.

Praise Hymn—O Prince of peace, HWB 15

Confession

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, we live in a world polluted by violence. The stench of war and death rises daily from the world into your nostrils. We live in fear of terrorist attacks, nuclear or biological holocaust, environmental disaster, and collapsing economy. Or we live free from fear because we are located in a land of privilege, gained through the use of violent power, where we can ignore the realities of violence and injustice experienced on a daily basis in communities within our inner cities and around the world. Forgive us our exaggerated fears and our lack of fear from blinders of privilege. Breathe afresh your Spirit upon us, forgiving God, that we may be renewed and

empowered to be apostles of justice, ambassadors of peace, ready to take to our fearful and violent world the good news of Christ's peace, a peace the world cannot give.

Choral Response—Jesus, stand among us, HWB 25

Silent Meditation

Words of Assurance

Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not let them be afraid."

Passing the Peace- Invite worshippers to turn to those around them and share the blessing: The peace of Christ be with you/*and also with you.*

Word

The Ancient Word—John 20:19-23

Children's Time—(see below)

Theme Hymn—Away with our fears, HWB 292

The Contemporary Word—Sermon

Offering

Introductory Words

Jesus has spoken the word of peace and breathed on the church his Holy Spirit. We have been given the gift of his life in this living, breathing community of his followers. In response to Christ's gifts of peace and Spirit, we come to offer our gifts of self, time, energy, and money as resources for the mission of the church to bring the good news of salvation, peace, and justice to our community and around the world.

Prayer of Blessing

Giving and sending God, you have given us rich gifts of the risen Christ. You have freed us from fear and breathed new life upon your people through the breath of the Holy Spirit. We offer these gifts as signs of gratitude. But our greatest gifts will be offered to you as we go about living your mission in the world around us through offerings of forgiveness and reconciliation, acts of charity and kindness, words of witness and faith, and practices of justice and peace. Bless all these gifts for the sake of God's reign on earth as in heaven. Amen.

Offering Hymn—Breathe on me, breath of God, HWB 356

Offering

Consider taking a special justice and peace offering for local and national peace and justice organizations or divide the offering for one of each. Peace and Justice Support Network (PJSN) of

Mennonite Church USA, which is mostly self-supporting, welcomes your financial support to carry out the vision of promoting peace and justice within the church.

Sending

Introductory Words

Jesus commissioned his disciples with words connecting peace and mission. The one who bore the marks of violence on his body, but showed love for his enemies, said, "*Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so send I you.*" We have been given the inner experience and outward message of Christ's peace. We are a forgiven and forgiving community. Christ has breathed on this community the Spirit, empowering us to go forth with the good news. We are ambassadors of peace, missionaries for justice, bringers of the gospel. Let us respond to the Spirit's call and go forth into our world with the good news!

Hymn of Sending—Here I am, Lord, HWB 395

Sending Forth

Have everyone take in a deep breath and slowly breathe out. Listen to these words of Christ speak to you as you go back into the world with all its fears and violence (speak the words slowly and deliberately): Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me. So I send you.

Children's Time and Activities

1. Read the children a story from Cornelia Lehn's *Peace Be With You*. If you use the text and theme from John 20, I recommend the story, "*Christ Has Sent Me: a story told by Clement of Alexandris about the aged Apostle John,*" which connects with the apostle John and the theme of forgiveness. You might enlist several adults to dress in robes and read and act out the narrative parts of Philip, John, and the two robbers.
2. Read John 20:21. Tell the children that just like God sent Jesus into the world to give us peace, God sends us into the world to make peace. Share a story of someone working for peace and justice within the U.S. or another country (stories can be obtained through Mennonite Central Committee or Mennonite Mission Network or use a story from *Stone Soup for the World: Life-Changing Stories of Kindness and Courageous Acts of Service*). Ask them how they might help others and make peace in their home and among friends. Lead the children to pray that God will help them be peacemakers and helpers.
3. Ask the children if they know what a wolf and sheep look like. Show them a picture of a wolf and sheep together (copy coloring sheet from the Peace and Justice Support Network website under "Resources: Children": <http://peace.mennolink.org>). Explain how some animals don't get along, like the wolf and lamb, just like some people in the world don't get along. Tell the children that there was a prophet named Isaiah who had a

vision of our world at peace, a time when the wolf will get along with the sheep and people won't fight with each other. Tell them that God has sent us into our world, to our family and friends and neighborhoods to get along with other people, even when they are different from us, as different as the wolf and the lamb. Give them copies of the wolf and lamb sheet to color in the service or at home.

Practicing Peace, Justice, and Mission

Bible peace is not an extra-cost option. It is central, and it is for the whole church. So peace is a word we could use to designate our churches. When people say to us, "Tell me about your church," we could respond, "We're a peace church. God is a God of peace, and we're learning what peace means. It's exciting. Want to come and see?"—Alan Krieder

As the prophet Amos reminds us, justice cannot be separated from worship (*Amos 5:21-24*). In the same way, peace cannot be separate from worship, discipleship, and mission. Congregations are encouraged to link missional practices of justice and peace with not only their worship, but all facets of the church's life and witness. Acts and words of peace and justice are a means of witness to the community of God's peace. Below are some ideas for focusing on peace and justice as practices of mission.

- 1. Make sure peace and justice are integral to the whole life of the church.** Peace Sunday is a good way for congregations to emphasize peace in the congregation's life. But if we consider peace and justice to be essential to the gospel, then it will permeate the congregation's life, breath, and mission through worship, discipleship, ministry, and outreach. It is important that the message of Christ's peace be part of the church's communication of the gospel and when instructing new believers in the basics of the faith. Check with congregational leaders responsible for new member instruction and ask about instruction in peace and justice. Resources, such as the Second Mile curriculum for congregations (www.gosecondmile.org), can be utilized for introducing new and ongoing members to how peace and justice are integral to Christian faith and practice. A Peace Sunday bulletin for Second Mile is available on their web site.
- 2. Hold a peace festival.** This could be done by one congregation or in cooperation with other congregations in the community. Invite a special speaker to make a presentation on a peace and justice topic that would be appealing to adults in the area. Celebrate the good news of peace and justice with colorful banners, worship services, outside activities. Include activities for youth and children that teach them how to be peacemakers. Invite local organizations to set up booths. Provide refreshments. Advertise in the community. Contact PJSN for connections to congregations who have already enacted peace festivals.

- 3. Create a peace and justice booth.** Gather printed and video materials that share what your church does in peace and justice. Obtain pamphlets and books that explain who Mennonites are and our beliefs about peace and justice. Purchase peace resources from PJSN, such as peace flags, t-shirts, bumper stickers, and Peace Drums, to sell. Design a backdrop and cloth with the church's logo or possibly use the Mennonite Church USA peace dove. Set up the booth in the local congregation, at conference assemblies, local peace fairs, or at a peace festival.
- 4. Encourage members to be involved in local peace and justice groups.** Connecting with others in the community who share a passion for peace and justice provides opportunity for witnessing to how our faith motivates us to create a more just and nonviolent world. There are many examples of persons with a passion for peace and justice who have become Christians or who have joined the Mennonite church through our peace witness.
- 5. Make your congregation's peace witness public.** In your congregation's advertisement within the community or when telling others about your church, share our common emphasis on peace, justice, and service as a gift to others. Silence and timidity concerning the good news of Christ's salvation and peace need to be overcome. Don't hide your light under a basket. Make your community aware of work your congregation does to create peace, promote justice, and serve human needs—not to glorify your church, but as a lamp reveals the light, that people will give glory to God. This is our mission.

Resources

- Myron S. Augsburger, *The Peacemaker* (Nashville: Abingdon), 1987.
- Myron S. Augsburger, *The Robe of God: Reconciliation, the Believers' Church Essential* (Scottsdale: Herald Press), 2000.
- John de Gruchy, *Cry Justice! Prayers, Meditations and Readings from South Africa* (Maryknoll: Orbis Press), 1987.
- Samuel Escobar and John Driver, *Christian Mission and Social Justice* (Scottsdale: Herald Press), 1978.
- Alan Kreider, *Peace Church, Mission Church: Friends or Foes? Mission Insight No. 6* (Elkhart: Mennonite Board of Missions), 1999.
- Marriane Larned, ed., *Stone Soup for the World: Life Changing Stories of Kindness and Courageous Acts of Service* (Berkeley: Conari Press), 1998.
- Cornelia Lehn, *Peace Be With You* (Newton: Faith & Life Press), 1980.
- Robert Ramseyer, ed., *Mission and the Peace Witness: The Gospel and Christian Discipleship* (Scottsdale: Herald Press), 1979.
- Wilbert R. Shenk, *Anabaptism and Mission* (Scottsdale: Herald Press), 1984.
- John Walsh, *Evangelization and Justice: New Insights for Christian Ministry* (Maryknoll: Orbis), 1982.