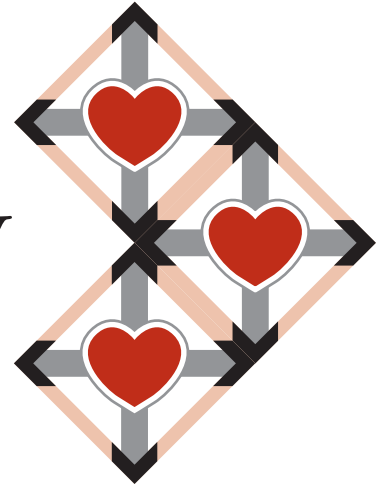


Loving God and Neighbor: a Spirituality of Justice



Peace Sunday
November 6, 2005

Those who do not love a brother or a sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen.

—1 John 4:20

Everything begins in mysticism and ends in politics.

—Charles Peguy,
French Catholic spiritual
and political leader

Introduction

When Jesus brought together the two commandments to love God and to love neighbor he brought together heaven and earth, soul and society, prayer and politics, spirituality and justice. The church has often compartmentalized and separated these two realms of life and faith and in the process has divided itself. This Peace Sunday worship resource is provided as a liturgical offering for the healing of these divisions through focusing upon loving of God and neighbor.

Biblical

As the saying goes, religion and politics don't mix. The Gospel of Mark does not subscribe to this folk proverb. As a matter of fact, many biblical scholars recognize the Gospel of Mark as a "political" and not just a religious document. In Mark's narrative Jesus and the scribes and Pharisees are pitted against each other in a spiritual and socio-political conflict.

Mark 12:28-34 is embedded between texts in which these religious leaders challenge Jesus about taxes to Caesar and are accused by Jesus of economically exploiting widows. The text climaxes a series of debates Jesus has with these rich, elite religious rulers, who collaborated with and benefited from their relationship with the Roman empire. This narrative leads to Jesus condemning the scribal class and predicting the destruction of the temple as a corrupt economic and spiritual system.

Mark 12:28-34 is known as "the First Commandment." Jesus is challenged by a scribe to answer the question "Which is the first commandment?" This was a popular topic for rabbinic discussion. The question does not appear to be hostile, except that it should not be extricated from the broader conflict between Jesus and the elite class of scribes and Pharisees.

Jesus' answer is an innovation. He combines two separated commandments. One is the traditional Jewish *Shema* concerning love for God (Deut. 6:4). The other is a Levitical law concerning love for neighbor (Lev. 19:18). The Mosaic covenant contains both com-

mandments of loyalty to God and commandments concerning social justice and equality, but Jesus brings them together in an illuminating manner. These two commandments were most often kept separate, just as the church has kept separate soul and society, spirituality and justice. Jesus brings them together like two live wires that create new spark and light.

The scribe affirms Jesus' insight. He also recognizes that these combined commandments of love for God and for neighbor are more important even than temple practices of piety, themes reflected in the prophetic tradition (Hosea 6:6; Amos 5:21-24). Jesus responds to the scribe, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." The scribe had recognized the significance of love of God and neighbor and their priority over liturgy. But even such an intellectual recognition by a member of the scribal class fell short of the practical politics of God's realm.

Sermon Ideas

Various angles can be taken with the theme and the text in preparing the sermon:

1. **Piety and Politics**—Speak about how involvement in social and political issues calls for immersion in spirituality. The focus would be toward those who are engaged in peace and justice on various levels, but who need to have it grounded in a vital spirituality.
2. **The Two Dimensions of Love**—Address the inseparable vertical and horizontal dimensions of love. The focus would be toward those who have are engaged in worship, praise, and prayer, but who need to connect them to social responsibility toward the world.
3. **Not far from the Kingdom**—Talk about the need to move beyond intellectual assent to loving God through loving neighbor to concrete acts of justice and mercy. Give particular examples of ways congregants can get involved in local ministry, social transformation, and political activism.

Action Ideas

It is particularly important to bring together worship of God and the church's response to its neighbors on this Peace Sunday. To perform the worship elements without some form of engaging the neighbor would seem to run counter to the truth of the gospel text.

1. Connect prayer and worship to peace and justice. Conclude a church prayer service with a letter writing campaign to your congressional representatives on a peace and justice issue. Organize a group of volunteers from church and community who are willing to gather at community sites of violence or injustice for prayer and worship. Include calls to social and political action as part of the regular weekly worship services.
2. Download Mennonite Central Committee US's *The One Who Showed Mercy: Loving God, Loving Neighbor* (<http://www.mcc.org/us/peaceeducation/showedMercy.pdf>) as a guide for study and action for responding to our post-9/11 political context. Another recommended MCC US resource on immigration is *Loving Strangers as Ourselves: Biblical Reflections* (<http://secure.mcc.org/mccstore>).
3. Christian Peacemakers Teams integrates spirituality and worship with peace and nonviolent resistance (www.cpt.org). Invite a CPT representative to speak at your church during a worship service and receive a special offering to support their work. Better yet, keep informed of their work and join CPT in prayer vigils, public actions, delegations, or special campaigns.

Children's Ideas

1. For the children's story read Lisa Weaver's *Praying With Our Feet*. Teach the children and adults the song "Praying with Our Feet." Make signs and banners with the words "LOVE GOD" and "LOVE OTHERS" on them. Have children march around the sanctuary while the song is being sung.
2. Prepare two large rectangular pieces of cardboard with the word "LOVE GOD" printed on it and another with "LOVE OTHERS" on it. As you read or retell the story of Jesus and the scribe from Mark 12:28-34 show each of the cardboard pieces to emphasize the two commandments. Explain how Jesus taught that loving God must be tied together with loving others. Use a small cord to tie around the two pieces of cardboard to form a cross.
3. Mother Teresa was a leader of the sister who united love for God and neighbor. Share her life story with the children with Demi's book entitled *Mother Teresa* (Ages 4-8).
4. Thirteen fables for children on loving our neighbor for children can be found in the book of an educator specializing in ethics, Arthur Borbin, *Love Your Neighbor: Values and Virtues*. Also recommended is Melody Carlson's *Love Your Neighbor (Just Like Jesus Said)*.



Peace Sunday material was written by Leo Hartshorn, Minister of Peace and Justice, Mennonite Mission Network and designed by Cynthia Friesen Coyle, Peace and Justice Support Network volunteer. For peace and justice resources and to join the network go to: www.mennoniteusa.org/peace. For more information about PJSN or to offer your responses to the Peace Sunday material contact: Leo Hartshorn, Mennonite Mission Network, 202 South Ann Street, Lancaster, PA, 17602, 717-399-8353, LeoH@MennoniteMission.net. **Your financial gifts are crucial for continuing to strengthen the vision of peace and justice in Mennonite Church USA. Thanks for your support.**



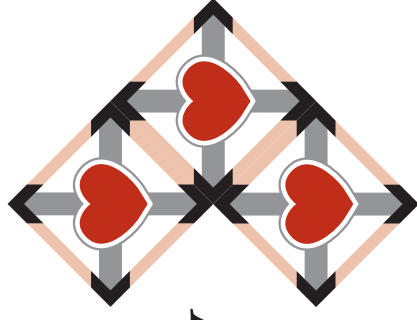
Benediction

God,
through your love—*inspire us!*
through your Son—*liberate us!*
through our neighbor—*call us!*
through your Spirit—*send us!*

Resources

- Robert Beck, *Nonviolent Story: Narrative Conflict Resolution in the Gospel of Mark*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996.
- Arthur Paul Boers, *On Earth as in Heaven: Justice Rooted in Spirituality*. Scottsdale: Herald, 1991.
- Arthur Borbin, *Love Your Neighbor: Values and Virtues*. Scholastic, 1999.
- Melody Carlson, *Love Your Neighbor (Just Like Jesus Said)*. Broadman and Holman, 2002.
- Pedro Casaldaliga and José-María Vigil, *Political Holiness: A Spirituality of Liberation*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994.
- Clarion: *A Journal of Spirituality and Justice*—<http://www.clarion-journal.ca/index.php>
- Demi, *Mother Teresa*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005.
- Donal Dorr, *Spirituality and Justice*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985.
- Carter Heyward, *Our Passion for Justice*. Cleveland: Pilgrim, 1984.
- Kenneth Leech, *The Eye of the Storm: Living Spiritually in the Real World*. San Francisco: Harper, 1992.
- Ched Myers, *Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark's Story of Jesus*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988.
- _____, *Who Will Roll the Stone Away?: Discipleship Queries for First World Christians*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994.
- Richard Horsley, *Hearing the Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001.
- Herman C. Waeltjen, *A Reordering of Power: A Socio-Political Reading of Mark's Gospel*. Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989.
- Lisa D. Weaver, *Praying With Our Feet*. Scottsdale: Herald, 2005.

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Loving God and Neighbor: a Spirituality of Justice

Worship Service

Gathering Songs (Options)

Ubi Caritas (Where true love)
Confitemini Domino
Sing the Journey No. 39
Sing the Journey No. 59

Call to Worship

Hear, O people, the Lord, our God, is one.
God created us with a heart for passion, compassion, and love
We shall love the Lord, our God, with all our heart
God created us with a soul for worship, contemplation, and awe
We shall love the Lord, our God, with all our soul
God created us with a mind to think, study, and explore
We shall love the Lord, our God, with all our mind
God created us with will, power, and determination
We shall love the Lord, our God, with all our strength
So, we come into this space of God's presence to worship God
With all our heart, soul, mind, and strength

Hymns of Praise (Options)

Sing praise to God who reigns

Hymnal:A Worship Book No. 59

Come, now is the time to worship

Sing the Journey No.9

Call to Confession

Ours is a world of either/or, black and white, polarizations, and dichotomies. We have separated love for God from love for neighbor. Let us confess this painful divorce and remember that what God has joined together no one should separate.

Prayer of Confession

Merciful God, forgive us for disconnecting our love for you from our love for our neighbor, the vertical from the horizontal. How can we walk humbly with God without doing justice and lovingkindness toward our neighbor? Bring together the works of our hearts and of our hands. Heal our division between soul and society, spirituality and justice, prayer and politics, mystical and prophetic. Renew in us the vision of an undivided heaven and earth.Amen.

Choral response

Kyrie eleison

Hymnal:A Worship Book No. 144

Words of Assurance

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled.

The Word from the First Testament—Deuteronomy 6:1-9

The Word from the Second Testament—Mark 12:28-34

The Word for Today—A Contemporary Reading (below)

Love, like truth and beauty, is concrete. Love is not fundamentally a sweet feeling; not, at heart, a matter of sentiment, attachment, or being “drawn toward.” Love is active, effective, a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one’s friends and enemies.

Love creates righteousness, or justice, here on earth. To make love is to make justice. As advocates and activists for justice know, loving involves struggle, resistance, risk. . . . For this reason loving involves commitment. We are not automatic lovers of self, others, world, or God. Love does not just happen. We are not love machines, puppets on the strings of a deity

called “love.” Love is a choice—not simply, or necessarily, a rational choice, but rather a willingness to be present to others without pretense or guile. Love is a conversion to humanity—a willingness to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and broken lives. Love is the choice to experience life as a member of the human family, a partner in the dance of life, rather than as an alien in the world or as a deity above the world, aloof and apart from human flesh.

—*Carter Heyward, Our Passion for Justice*

Theme Hymns (Options)

Let justice flow like streams

Sing the Journey No. 65

O bear, my people

Sing the Journey No. 68

The Word Proclaimed- Sermon

Offering Prayer

You have united, O God, politics and prayer, liturgy and liberation. Love of God and love of neighbor have been bound together by your child, Jesus Christ. As we offer our gifts to you in thanksgiving, we also offer ourselves to our neighbor in doing justice. Grant that these offerings bless both the church and the wider community. We pray in the name of the one who loved God and the world, even Jesus Christ. Amen

Offering Hymns (Options)

Grant us, Lord, the grace

Hymnal:A Worship Book No. 388

How can we be silent?

Sing the Journey No. 61

Prayer of Blessing

Bless these offerings, Giver of all good things, in response to your many common gifts of life. Bless the gifts your people offer in teaching wisdom, nurturing prayer, advocating peace, and resisting injustice. Bring that which is divided into unity, that which is in discord into harmony, that which is broken into wholeness. Amen.

Benediction Hymns

As tranquil streams

Sing the Journey No. 51

Will you let me be your servant

Hymnal:A Worship Book No. 307