

A Word of Peace

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I have always known that Christmas has something to do with peace. The carols sing of peace on earth, goodwill to all humanity. On Christmas, soldiers lay down their weapons and play soccer instead of fighting. On Christmas, people who typically aren't all that nice to each other suddenly become friendly. Even Lucy is nice to Charlie Brown!

When we light a candle at the 10:00 p.m. service and then light the candle of the person sitting next to us, we can't stay angry with that person very long. There may have been some anger upon entering the church, but when we light the candles, at least for that moment, it is as if the whole world were at peace.

I heard the story the other day of the little boy who headed out the back door announcing to his mom that he was going in search of God. His mother suggested taking a snack along, some potato chips and soda. Off he went to the park! His child-like curiosity carried him to a bench where an elder woman sat alone. He stared at her for some time. Then, she smiled at him. He took a step closer and offered her some of his potato chips. Accepting them, munching them, swallowing them, she gave him an even bigger smile. He took a giant step closer and offered a sip from his soda can. Taking a swig of the root beer, wiping the foam from her lips onto the sleeve of her coat, she now gave him an even bigger smile, the ear to ear kind of smile. Turning to walk home, he paused, looked around, ran back one more time and gave her a hug. Now, her smile was more like a radiant globe of warm energy. Off he ran back home. His mother asked him where he'd been. And he said, "I met God! She's older than I thought! But she sure can smile!"

I heard that story and I thought of keeping a case of potato chips in my Chevy truck all the time, just in case! I thought of the scene on the park bench as an image of peace. If the shepherds can meet God in a mangy stable, we can certainly meet God on a park bench. If wise men from the East can bring to God gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, we can bring to God potato chips and root beer!

I've always been convicted by that song that sings, "Let there be peace on earth, and let it begin with me." Though it has a wonderful melody, it also has a challenging message! It has a way of slapping me in the face and forcing me to reflect on what I am and am not doing to advocate for peace, either in the world or at the corner of Main and High Streets. "Let it begin with me."

One of the signs that there is progress toward peace is the diminishment of poverty in the world. I have always believed that poverty is what stands in the way of lasting peace. I think I tend to over-simplify things. But I am thrilled by the latest recipients of the Nobel Prize for Peace. It was awarded jointly to Muhammad Yunus and a bank known as Grameen Bank. This man from Bangladesh believes it is possible to bring an end to poverty. Working through the Grameen Bank, he makes very small business loans, called Micro-credit, to third world villagers. Especially women have taken advantage of this opportunity. A loan is made to buy fabric. A woman sews the fabric into a garment and sells the garment. She feeds her family on the profit. A loan is made to buy fertilizer. A young man spreads 10-20-10 on his maize field, and he clothes his family with the money he makes. A loan is made to purchase a pottery wheel. A potter molds the clay to make a water jug. He spends the money on school fees for his children to get an education. There is no end to it because one person actually believes it is possible to end poverty!

He evidently sang that song that I like, felt convicted by it, and acted upon the simple truth that peace really does begin with me. I'm glad he got the Nobel Prize! He is not a theologian nor an ethicist nor a philosopher. He is an economist, a business man, a business man with a vision, a business man with a conviction, a business man who believes in being a peace maker!

I believe in being a peacemaker. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers. They shall be known as the sons and daughters of God." Imagine that! To be known as one of God's own sons or daughters! And all it takes is to be committed to the way of peace.

At the very end of the Christmas story, the wise men are visited by an angel who warns them about Herod's violent intentions regarding the Christ child. The angel urges them to take a different road home so as not to participate in the king's murderous plot. This, of course, can be read literally. Take Dug Road instead of Old Maids Lane. Take Hopewell Road instead of Chestnut Hill Road. Or it can be taken figuratively. Take the way of peace instead of the way of violence. Take the way of Shalom instead of the way of chaos. Take the way of peace instead of the way of war. For in this way, we shall be known as the sons and the daughters of God.

This Christmas message I share with you all in the greatest of hope. Amen!