

2022.12.04

Sermon

Advent II

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At night in the dark I think - what if I could give the people of this church true peace in their hearts. Imagine if for just one hour God gave me a small cup, maybe like this one... and said - "Here is my peace in this cup. Pour it out over the people tomorrow in church." And I took the cup and it's so small and so fragile - how could it possibly contain enough peace for everyone? But you know what the poet Mary Oliver says -

"Let me keep my distance, always, from those  
who think they have the answers."

So I know that I have to stop questioning God and simply bring this tiny fragile cup and pour it out over all of you. And then.... Imagine, right!? Imagine if that really happened. If I brought the cup, a cup as small and fragile as this one, and I tipped it over and poured it out, and you all felt this amazing sensation of God's peace pouring into your hearts, filling you up, over-flowing inside you... Ahhhhh

How would your lives change? And would it be contagious? Would it ripple out from you to those you love and those you don't love? Would it just keep going and never stop? How far would it go? How would the world change? Imagine!

Pondering on PEACE I ask myself - what are its components? What are its essential parts without which it's meaningless?

Gratitude for sure, because isn't a grateful heart a peaceful heart? And then I think Simplicity. When we live in simplicity, so much becomes less important. Things. Schedules. Life becomes less cluttered. Sounds peaceful, doesn't it? And then there's Kindness, both received and given. We all know that peaceful feeling that comes when someone is unexpectedly kind to us and we experience that generosity of being perceived as totally worthy. And we also know that peaceful feeling when we are kind to someone else and know we did right. So, gratitude, simplicity, and kindness.

And then my list began to grow, because what about justice and mercy and an end to discrimination of all kinds? And what about an end to violence? - violence within families, violence against people who are not white or not housed or unemployed or struggling with mental health issues or addictions... There's violence between countries... And then there's the fundamental violence - that which dwells in the shadows of our own hearts...

Of course God's peace is far more vast than our ideas of peace. God's peace makes our ideas of peace look downright puny, anemic, unimaginative. God's peace includes universal justice, cosmic mercy, infinite kindness, ultimate inclusivity. It's possible we wouldn't even like God's peace. I think it might feel quite alien to us and we might even resist it with everything we've got. Because it would be so different from what we're used to we'd probably find it very hard to say 'Yes' to it. To open our hearts and minds to this new way of being and doing. 'Cause you know us humans - change is anathema to most of us most of the time. And God's peace would ask a lot of us. God's peace *does* ask a lot of us.

Another thing I think we sometimes forget when we dream of peace is that it requires us to be all in, to bring to it everything we've got. To put all our hearts and minds and bodies into this work, this holy work in the world. For who could dispute that if the world needs anything, it's all of us doing the holy work of making peace real and solid and tangible in the here and now. Making peace that is utterly inclusive, leaving no one behind.

There's a Buddhist practice called tonglen in which one breathes in the darkness of the world and breathes out peace and light and love. This poem by Judyth Hill seems to invite us into doing just that:

*Wage peace with your breath.  
Breathe in firemen and rubble,  
breathe out whole buildings  
and flocks of redwing blackbirds.*

*Breathe in terrorists and breathe out sleeping children  
and freshly mown fields.  
Breathe in confusion and breathe out maple trees.  
Breathe in the fallen  
and breathe out lifelong friendships intact.*

*Wage peace with your listening:  
hearing sirens, pray loud.  
Remember your tools:  
flower seeds, clothes pins, clean rivers.*

*Make soup.  
Play music, learn the word for thank you in three languages.  
Learn to knit, and make a hat.  
Think of chaos as dancing raspberries,  
imagine grief as the outbreath of beauty  
or the gesture of fish.  
Swim for the other side.  
Wage peace.*

*Never has the world seemed so fresh and precious.  
have a cup of tea and rejoice.  
Act as if armistice has already arrived.  
Celebrate today.*

Wage Peace

By Judyth Hill\*

One last thing - I believe this holy work of toiling for God's peace on this earth in our time, one last thing it requires of us? To never give up. To never say "this is too hard!" and walk away. Or if we do, that we only walk away while we are catching our

breath, getting a drink of water, taking some time for blessed sleep. And then to return to the task, saying, “Oh did you think I’d given up? I would never give up. I would never desert this holy work for God, for the Creator, for all of Creation. Because I love this world too much to ever give up on it. I’m here. I’m here for this work until God’s peace indeed reigns on earth and in the hearts and minds of everyone. I love God and the world too much to ever give up.”

I think that would be us, wouldn’t it?

Amen