

"WAITING ACTIVELY FOR PEACE"

Preached by Douglas Norris at First United Methodist Church, Palo Alto, California
November 27, 1983
Isaiah 2:1-5

How many of you watched "The Day After" on channel 7 last Sunday evening? It was especially impressive for those of us who have never experienced war firsthand. Perhaps the vivid portrayal of nuclear war helps us understand the deep feelings of the protesters in England and Germany over the deployment of the Pershing and Cruise missiles.

Another graphic illustration of the situation today is a sheet of dots distributed by the Friends Journal. One dot on this page represents all the firepower of World War II - three megatons. There are 6,000 dots on this page representing the firepower in existing nuclear weapons today, stockpiled by the United States and the Soviet Union. 6,000 times the power of all the weapons in World War II! One dime covers enough dots on this page to destroy all the large and medium-size cities in the entire world. What are we intending to do with all that remain?

And now we deploy missiles in Europe. The Soviets have announced they will retaliate with further development and deployment. Where will it all end? Both sides claim to be behind the other. If both the United States and the Soviet Union are behind each other in the development of nuclear weapons, as both claim, and both continue to accelerate and add more dots to this chart, where does it end? If both are behind, what is ahead for humanity and the planet earth?

Herb Caen wrote in the San Francisco Chronicle the day after "The Day After":

We go to the Big Game, we feast our eyes on the glories of the Vatican at the deYoung Museum, we watch Sunday football, we talk about the latest restaurants, the lousy traffic, the crummy politicians, but all the while we know that only one thing matters - Peace...The Russians don't want war, we don't want war, what's the problem? The problem is the power game, the clash of ideologies, the stubbornness on all sides, the endless playing of games by boys posing as men, and we are the helpless pawns. Well, not so helpless.

No, we are not so helpless. And it is time to exercise the power we all have as people to abolish war on this planet. Today is the first Sunday of Advent. Advent is the season of waiting. We wait for the coming of Christ. We wait for the coming of the Lord in fuller, deeper splendor this Christmas into our lives, our church, our world.

The Advent hope includes peace. Our Old Testament lesson from the prophet, Isaiah, described our hope in a vivid, dramatic picture. Isaiah 2:4, "*They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.*" Idealistic? Fantasy? This verse either becomes a reality or we say farewell to existence on this planet as we know it.

We hope. We wait. For the full coming of the Lord, we wait. For peace, we wait. Wait in the Bible is an active verb. It is not passive. To wait in the biblical sense, and especially as the Advent directive, is not to sit down, put the mind in neutral, the body in coma. The root of the Hebrew word for wait connotes "tension" and "endurance". To wait for God is to set one's hope. To wait is active, to keep to God's way, to work for that for which you are waiting. Wait is an act of faith, for we expect in faith to receive that for which we are waiting.

Waiting actively for peace is to work for peace; yearn, long, expect and act for peace. Dwight D. Eisenhower phrased it well, "*I like to believe that people, in the long run, are going to do more to promote peace than are governments. Indeed, I think the people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of the way and let them have it.*" That is our hope this Advent, that people across the world will rally together, take control of our own destiny and tell the

governments to lay off. It is indeed encouraging to learn from several sources that the same fear of nuclear weapons and yearning for peace is occurring among the people, the common people, people like us, in the Soviet Union. We, the people, are the hope and have the power.

There is much that can be done. Malvina Reynolds, in her song "We Hate to See Them Go" suggests that if the men of power fought the wars rather than the young men, other methods of solving conflict might soon be found. She wrote,

*The bankers and the diplomats are going in the army,
It seemed too bad to keep them from the wars they love to plan,
We're all of us contented that they'll fight a dandy war,
They don't need propaganda, they know what they're fighting for.
And we'll keep the laddies here to keep the lassies warm.
Oh, (she says), we hate to see them go,
The gentlemen of distinction in the Army.*

Erma Bombeck, that other modern prophet, wrote that a way to prevent war is to require that no young man can enlist or be drafted until he cleans up his room. She also suggested that the Pentagon might be put under the control of the Post Office. That might not prevent war, but it would certainly show it down!

We have grounds for hope. It is Advent, and we wait for the coming of the Lord in full splendor this Christmas. We wait for peace, actively wait for peace. Let me suggest four ways (and, of course, you have many acts to add to this list) of how to wait actively for peace this Advent.

First, pray for peace. There is power in prayer. When we add our energy, our spirit, to those who also pray, and consolidate with God's spirit, miracles can happen. Prayer, like waiting, in the true sense includes action. To pray for the hungry without sharing is the worst form of prayer. To pray for good health, and then eat junk, drink rot, ignore the doctor's advice, is a waste of God's time and yours. To pray for an enemy, one who has hurt you or let you down, and continue in your own bitterness, is counter-productive to the prayer. Pray for the enemy in your heart, with your hand outstretched. Pray for peace by spreading love. Let us join with the multitudes across this world who are sick of war, fearful of modern warfare methods, and pray for peace.

Secondly, participate in peacemaking actions. Let's get involved in groups and movements that promote the abolition of nuclear weapons. Join the Peace Advocates of our church, organized just last week, with the next meeting this Tuesday evening. Write letters. You are invited to sign a letter written by Glenn Fuller and the Peace Advocates to the President. You may read it and sign it on the Patio this morning. Let's promote the Peace Academy legislation, that Congress establish a Peace Academy to study seriously other means of solving problems and handling conflict, than war. We have a Defence Department, now let's have a Peace Department.

Thirdly, witness to the love of God, the good news of the gospel that people may be converted (that is, changed) from war and violence to Jesus Christ. Albert Einstein once said that the atomic age has changed everything but our way of thinking. The changing of minds, changing of hearts, is the unique business of the church. We are the only institution that is armed both with the goal of changing human behavior, motivations, attitudes and values of persons, and with the means of changing that behavior, through repentance, accepting the salvation of Christ, and getting a good dousing by the Holy Spirit. Converting people, changing people, is our unique role. Don't apologize. Don't be hesitant. We've got the news and the method. Sometimes conversion is a sudden process. Sometimes it is gradual, but it is always a growing process. Seek to open hearts to the love of God, encourage persons to turn from their old ways to Jesus Christ, and to let

the Holy Spirit cleanse and renew. That is peacemaking: converting people, changing people and ultimately nations.

Fourthly, wait actively for peace by repudiating war as a viable method. Let us join the ranks of those who are repelled by war, who abhor the war mentality, and who reject completely the insane notion that nuclear war is winnable, containable or rational. Let this revulsion swell across the world, into the Kremlin, into the Pentagon, into the White House.

I'd like to sing a song, for music conveys images, projects dreams as talking fails to do. This is an anti-war song, probably not written as anti-war, but the stark realism is sobering. It was written in the 60's, not the 1960's, but the 1860's, a song from the Civil War. 120 years ago, they sat around the campfire on the old camp ground at the end of a day's battle. Can you see them? One starts singing this song, others join in.

We're tenting tonight on the old camp ground.
Give us a song to cheer Our weary hearts, a song of home,
And friends we love so dear.

Chorus:

Many are the hearts that are weary tonight,
Wishing for the war to cease;
Many are the hearts looking for the right to see the dawn of peace.
Tenting tonight, Tenting tonight, Tenting on the old camp ground.

We are tired of war on the old camp ground,
Thinking of days gone by, Of the loved ones at home that gave us the hand,
And the tear that said "Goodbye".

Chorus:

Many are the hearts that are weary tonight,
Wishing for the war to cease;
Many are the hearts looking for the right to see the dawn of peace.
Tenting tonight, Tenting tonight, Tenting on the old camp ground.

We've been fighting today on the old camp ground.
Many are lying near;
Some are dead and some are dying.
Many are in tears.

Chorus:

Many are the hearts that are weary tonight,
Wishing for the war to cease;
Many are the hearts looking for the right to see the dawn of peace.
Dying tonight, Dying tonight, Dying on the old camp ground.

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