

“Planting Peacemakers”

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, GA

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, August 31, 2014

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Holy Scriptures: Isaiah 32: 16-18 James 3: 18

“A harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.” -- James 3: 18

“Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.
My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.” – Isaiah 32: 16-18

I bring you greetings from the Church of the Living Hope in New York City.

Living Hope has a new pastor, who has recently arrived from England,
and it was so good to meet Rev. Chris Lawrence and his fine family.

I was richly blessed to represent you at my home church,
where the folks are friendly and faithful,
the ministry is grounded in grace and in the neighborhood,
and this Timothy is still called Jamie.

Allow me to share that I have been doubly-blessed and doubly-anointed
to have been both raised in and to serve significant Christ-centered congregations
that respect the roles and responsibilities of both pastor and parish.
Such soil is rich and fertile for ever-deepening relationships.

Here is a heartfelt thank you to our Elders and Deacons and Faith Community
who served so admirably and faithfully
while the Brewer-Calvert family was on vacation.

We are grateful for everyone for your support and leadership,
including our own Lynn Trapp, whose sermon two weeks ago
reminded the Church of Jesus Christ that we're commissioned
to be God's answer to the world's question:

From whence does our help come when we seek peace?

Christ's Church is to be the servant leader to the world,
showing the way, the way to peace.

We are also deeply appreciative of Barbara Sims-King and Pastor Paul Turner
for their pastoral guidance and hands on presence in crisis intervention.

Last Sunday Pastor Paul's sermon implored us, "To love me is to forgive me, everyday."

That could well be our mantra as Christians who live in community:

To love me is to forgive me, everyday.

This weekend our fair city is hosting the Decatur Book Festival.

Yesterday I moderated a panel for authors Jacinda Townsend & Laura McCall who have just published their first novels.

Both books are set in the 1960s,
both are about adolescent girls coming of age,
both address the impact of society duress and division,
and both speak to the power of a local community to unite.

This panelist noted that the authors' books make clear the connections between civil rights and civil abuses in the 60s and today. Where is the hope? Jacinda Townsend said, in effect, "The hope is that we accept each other.

We can build relationships of acceptance. I can accept you as you are, and you can accept me, and from that foundation we can start to build a better world."

Where is the hope?

The author of James said,

"A harvest of righteousness
is sown in peace
for those who make peace." -- James 3: 18

Now listen to the passage backwards.

"Those who make peace
Sow peace
And reap a harvest of righteousness."

A harvest of righteousness...

Hmmm...

Righteousness sometimes has such a troublesome meaning, one ripe with attitude.
We associate righteous people
with goodie two shoes, with holier than thou, with perfectionists.
We might point out a pompous individual and say, "That is one righteous dude!"

Yet when we examine the original meaning in the Hebrew,
our eyes and ears are opened,
and a harvest of righteousness is to be desired.

The Prophets spoke of God's will for *sedequah* and *mishpat*,
for righteousness and justice.

At the core of justice is mercy,
and the carrying out of mercy, the embracing of mercy
is the embodiment of righteousness.

The Prophets grasped that without one there could not be the other.
They were mindful of the unity and justice that God desires for all of creation.
All of creation is worthy and blessed to make every day holy.

Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea and Micah spoke up and out for *sedequah* and *mishpat*, for righteousness and justice.

A common refrain was that the Lord said,
“I despise your worship, your feasts, your sacrifices
when there is no justice at the gate.”

Two relevant Greek words that apply here are *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxis*.
Orthodoxy means right belief, right worship.
Orthopraxis means to do the right thing.

Our *orthopraxis* precedes our *orthodoxy*.
What good is it to believe rightly or worship rightly if we don't practice rightly?
God says through the Prophets and through our own faithfulness
and it reverberates in 1 Corinthians 13,
“Without love, without charity lived out in community
being practiced with respect and dignity for all of creation,
then our works and worship and attitudes
are merely empty gongs and clanging cymbals.”

The prophet Isaiah put it this way, proclaiming:
“Then justice will dwell in the wilderness,
and righteousness abide in the fruitful field.
And the effect of righteousness will be peace,
and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust for ever.
My people will abide in a peaceful habitation,
in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.” – Isaiah 32: 16-18

If you want peace,
then live out righteousness.

The roots of righteousness are justice and love.

The source of justice and love is the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is set free in you and me by the grace of God.

The God of Grace and Glory sent the Son Jesus Christ
to show us the way to peace,
to empower us to sow peace,
and in turn and in time and in triumph
to reap a harvest of righteousness.

We are intentional in our hope to plant peacemakers.
Planting peacemakers is never by luck; it is a legacy born of planning and practice.

This reminds us of the young man who wrote a great big book called
“The Ten Commandments of Raising Children”
Then he got married and had a baby, and wrote a book called
“Ten Suggestions for Raising Children”
Then he had several more children and wrote a very small book called
“Ten Hints for Raising Children”

Comedian Erma Bombeck said, "I take a very practical view of raising children.
I put a sign in each of their rooms: 'Checkout Time is 18 Years'

"A harvest of righteousness
is sown in peace
for those who make peace." -- James 3: 18

Our congregation has a living legacy
of sowing and reaping peacemakers from all walks of life.

Children and youth and adults impacted by this congregation
have grown up and grown into city and civic and community servant leaders,
here and around the world.
Don't ever tell me that a family-sized church can't make a big splash.
Ripples of grace that started here have spread ever outward
from the corner of Ponce and Nelson Ferry Road
and circumvented the globe.

We have learned much over the years and miles.

We have learned that you can only sow what you are.

"Do as I say and not as I do" is not an acceptable teaching model.

Children and youth imitate, emulate, and demonstrate what you do.
Your orthopraxis has more impact than your orthodoxy.
So do the right thing.

We have learned that teachable moments abound.

Teachable moments will and do present themselves to you, so take advantage of them.
The Holy Spirit provides you with blessed opportunities
to teach peace, to seek out and practice alternatives to violence.

Two weeks ago when I was at the Church of the Living Hope
I was reminded of the story from the time my father George Calvert
encountered a 13 year old boy who had a full beard.
He told George that other kids teased him, called him Wolfman,
and that he was going to bop one soon.
George advised him to laugh with the group,
to go along with it, and then it would cease to be funny to them.
So he did, and they did.
Very soon what seemed so funny wasn't anymore.
Dignity restored; violent reprisals averted; peace reigned.
(At least until the next full moon...)

We have learned that adults have abdicated our responsibility to be present.

"I must defend my home!" said Macaulay Culkin.
The film "Home Alone" was a microcosm of the truth

that young people are now expected to figure life out on their own,
that if there is anything they need to learn
they can – and must – discern it by their lonesome.
Just because all sorts of information is available on the internet doesn't
give adults a pass when it comes to teaching and modeling righteous behavior.
Let's be present, visible, available.

We have learned that everyone can do something, whether great or small.

When we work and serve and play together,
there is no limit to God's harvest of righteousness.

One of my brothers, David, was doing an internship in Geneva
with the World Council of Churches
when he met a young Japanese Christian named Yushi Nomura.
Naturally, David told Yushi that when he came stateside he should visit us in NYC.
So Yushi did, and he stayed six months.
I was in just finishing high school when Yushi became a lifelong friend.
One day he walked in wearing a baseball cap because he liked its initials Y and N.
Someone asked him if he was a Yankees fan, and he said, "Who are the Yankees?"

Just before he left to go to Yale Divinity School
he told a story in church about a dream he had.

I dreamed I went to heaven and hell.
First I went to hell.
In hell there was a feast laid out on a long table,
overflowing with all the best foods.
Everyone was given chopsticks that were three feet long.
Every morsel of food fell off the end of the chopsticks before reaching their mouths.
So even though they were in the midst of plenty, they were eternally hungry.

Then I went to heaven.
In heaven there was a feast laid out on a long table,
overflowing with all the best foods.
Everyone was given chopsticks that were three feet long.

My goodness, I thought, heaven is just like hell!

Yet when I looked carefully I saw the difference.

In heaven, people feed their neighbors.

Let's feed each other.
Let's free each other.
Let's teach each other and the world that,
"Those who make peace
Sow peace
And reap a harvest of righteousness."

All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!