

A Culture of Peace-Guest Rev. Jeanne Baum  
Psalm 85:8-13, Luke 19: 41, 42  
Memorial Day Sunday Sermon

Following the death of my mother, my brother began the hard work of sorting through the attic, and there he found the letters which my father had written to my mother when he was a Seabee during WWII. He was one of those who landed on the volcanic ash island of Iwo Jima backing up the Marines. His letters home were highly censored and mostly filled with longing to come home, questions about me as I was just a toddler, and love expressed for my mom. However, I would like to share with you a few lines from letters sent to my mom shortly after the Island had been taken, written on March 2<sup>nd</sup> and March 4<sup>th</sup> 1945.

*Darling Wife,*

*Just a line to let you know that I am still getting along good,...the sea and air protection is a welcome sight. The good old flag is flying on Surabachi and things are a lot quieter than when we landed...I am still in one piece and very thankful to God to be so...I hope the world profits from so much pain and suffering. The censors have clamped down on me so I can't say much...*

And about six weeks later, a letter sent to my grandparents...

*"Yes Ma thanks a lot for taking care of my two sweethearts, I know that you have done your best for them. I feel proud and lucky to be a husband and father to them. It must have been the grace of God that saved me because I was on the beach for many days, in fact through all that heavy fire. It all seems like a bad dream and if anybody had told me what I was going through, I would have said my chances are zero. I must have a lot to come back to because he saved me."*

My mother said, that my dad came home not the same person that she had married. At that time we had no name for Post-Traumatic Stress Syndrome, but as his daughter I can tell you that he was not an easy person to live with and never talked to his family about what he had experienced. It was only when he was able to visit with his wartime buddies that he could talk about what had happened on Iwo.

As we listen to the news lately, it is as if we were once again at war. Radical Terrorist groups and individuals certainly have declared war on us, us being a wide array of nations. I would suggest that as we gather in remembrance throughout this weekend, we don't just honor those in uniform, but also those such as the innocent victims of 9/11 and most recently those killed and injured in Manchester, England. The day after that terrible bombing, I caught a newscast which focused on the reaction of the citizens of Manchester who rallied in remembrance of the victims, and it was one of the most diverse groups I have ever seen: diverse in religion...Christians, Moslems, and Jews, weeping together. Many different nationalities of origin, and skin color variations in that crowd of mourners. None blaming the other, simply sharing their sorrow, standing with grieving families.

All of us belong to one or more subcultures eg. Clergy. When we think of a subculture we think about such things as expected dress codes, what and where we celebrate, what are the rules, what are the catch phrases...the lingo. How do we behave in the company of someone else from that sub culture, what's Ok not OK for manners, how are decisions

made. These and dozens of other details define the culture of a particular workplace, school, family, social grouping, region, or nation. This morning let's explore what a culture of peace would look like...

For most of us the first thing that comes to mind is the end of war or the absence of fighting. But there is a word in the Bible that speaks far more about what peace is. That word is shalom and it includes a whole lot of things like wholeness, well-being, and harmony. Just before my first marriage broke up, anyone coming into our home would probably have said it was a peaceful place, meaning that no one was shouting at each other. It was only later that I realized that something had been missing, and I could label that "shalom." Shalom has to do with the state of relationships between people and groups. It is the intended order for creation and for human beings' relations to one another. Such peace, is both God's gift to us and what God wants for us. So when we talk about a culture of peace, it is shalom that we speak about.

There really is no shalom without justice. You can't have one without the other. When there is no justice we find that people turn to anger, violence, even chaos. This is true for us as individuals and as nations. The world doesn't have to be the way that it is now. Scripture tells us of a new order that God is bringing into being. There are some days when that is pretty hard to believe isn't it? The day when we walk out of the door and get into our cars and hit the expressway and the horns start to blow and so do the tempers.

Jesus was born into and lived in a world of many cultures and subcultures as we are...His world included the Roman political culture and the Jewish religious culture, and a class structure and guilds or groups of different types of professions and all these cultures shaped people's lives. However Jesus lived out of an awareness of another possibility for life. So let's take a moment and consider together things that Jesus said and did that nurtures a culture of peace. for eg.

I see Jesus praying for his beloved Jerusalem.

I see Jesus eating with those that others avoided.

I see Jesus, a Jewish man, talking to a Samaritan woman.

I hear Jesus saying blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth.

I see Jesus refusing to take violent action against those that arrested him.

I see Jesus saying forgive them at his crucifixion.

I see Jesus healing a leper.

I see Jesus teaching "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

I see Jesus teaching "Love your neighbor as yourself."

I see Jesus calming the storm.

I see Jesus stopping James and John from getting revenge on the people who did not welcome Him.

I see Jesus teaching us to pray - forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors..

Jesus actions and teachings help us to envision what a culture of peace looks like. As we seek to be shaped by Jesus teachings and what he did, we move a little bit closer to an alternative pattern for human community. We find that we begin to move toward a more inclusive community with tolerance and respect for diversity. We see others as equal in

their need and seek out partnerships with them. As we look around we become more and more aware of just how connected we all are, not just human beings but all of creation. Sometimes we even dare to step out and make a stand for a more just world. How might you see this happening now? How might we see God's Spirit at work in the world through others creating a culture of peace?

There was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart and all sorts of good things, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read the papers and get depressed. One day she decided to go shopping, and she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus because he looked just as she had always pictured him in her heart. She looked at him again and again and finally she got up her nerve and asked, "Excuse me, are you Jesus?" "I am." "Do you work here?" "No," Jesus said, "I own the store." "Oh what do you sell here?" "Oh just about anything!" "Anything" "Yeah anything that you want. What do you want?" She said, "I don't know." "Well," Jesus said, "feel free, walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is that you want, and then come back and we'll see what we can do for you." She did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger, or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air, careful use of resources. She wrote furiously. By the time that she got back to the counter, she had a long list. Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up at her and smiled. "No problem." And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid down some packets. She asked "What are these? Jesus answered, "Seed packets. This is a catalog store." She said, "You mean I don't get the finished product?" "No this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them grow and someone else reaps the benefits." "Oh" she said. And she left the store without buying anything."

As you may have guessed from my sharing of my father's letters, Memorial Day was important in my family as I was growing up. We all marched in the Parade, dad with other Veterans, mom with the Auxiliary and me with the Junior Auxiliary and my brother with the Cub Scouts. When the parade was over we would go home and plant our vegetable garden, a big one. Only now do I realize how symbolic that was, planting seeds.

If we want a culture of peace let us be willing to buy the seeds, plant them and nurture them. Amen!