



Path of Peace Daily Reflections A Season of Peace, 2018

Path of Peace Daily Reflections

Welcome to the 2018 Path of Peace daily reflections. This year's theme returns to a text that the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program has used for a number of years to guide its work. It is the concluding hope of the second letter to the Thessalonians: *"May the God of peace grant you peace at all times in all ways"* (2 Thessalonians 3:16). The reflections for the 36 days of this time we call *A Season of Peace* come from a diverse and varied set of voices within our church and illustrate the many times and ways that we are offered, engage in and even challenged by peace. The reflections are organized weekly as follows:

- Week 1 – September 2-8: Peace that Passes Understanding-Personal Testimonies
- Week 2 – September 9-15: Partners in Peace - Interfaith Work for Peace and Justice
- Week 3 – September 16-22: Go and See: Reflections from Travel Study Seminars
- Week 4 – September 23-29: The Church and Its Witness - Responding to Human Trafficking
- Week 5 – September 30-October 7: Peacemaking and Practice - Stories and Reflections on Building Bridges

Whether you subscribe to these reflections for daily delivery into your inbox or you print the entire collection as a devotional resource, it is our hope that you will be enriched, renewed and enlivened in your peacemaking and global witness.

Many thanks to Patrick Heery for serving as editor of the 2018 Path of Peace Reflections. Patrick assembled an outstanding set of writers. We thank them for their willingness to write and for their insightful contributions. They are: Patrick Heery, Mihee Kim-Kort, Tony Aja, Layton Williams, Abby King-Kaiser, Elizabeth (Dean) McDonald, Jeff Geary, Kirk Perucca, Kathy Mitchell, David McCarthy, Alan Jenkins, Cathy Chang, Marie Sol Sioco-Villalon, Joram H. Calimutan, Teresita Regidor Oton, Doug Dicks, Kurt Esslinger and Denise Anderson.

The peace of Christ be with you!

Carl E. Horton, Coordinator, Presbyterian Peacemaking Program



Sunday, September 2, 2018

Peace that passes understanding

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

Philippians 4:4–9

Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.

Reflection: When Paul writes to the Philippians, he does so facing his own death. He is in prison, and not long from now he may be killed. In his letter, Paul reflects on his life and ministry, on all the things that we devote so much energy to, all the squabbles and arguments, all the fears and worries, and he says that none of it matters except this one word: “Rejoice!”

To rejoice, when the world gives you no reason to do so, is to defy the powers of this world and assert unequivocally that “the Lord is near.” It is to laugh in the face of the enemy. It is to declare, as Paul asserts elsewhere, that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. It is to be gentle when the world expects harshness, to be honorable and just in a room that is anything but. It is to believe that there is something that cannot be taken from us: we are the children of God. To know this, to revel in this, is to receive a peace that passes understanding.

This week you’re going to hear about different kinds of peace that are so big, so complex, so counter-intuitive, that they transcend understanding. They are gifts. They are grace. They are Emmanuel: God among us.

Action: Pray to God today. Pray as if God were right in front of you, as if God were breaking into this world as we speak. What are you thankful for? What do you need help with? What places in your life and in this world cry out for peace?

Prayer: O God of peace, help us laugh more, rejoice louder, and sing more boldly. Let our joy defy—and remake—prison bars, and war, and bigotry, and all that would divide and wound your children. Let our joy combine with yours, and your Son’s, in remaking the world, till there is peace at last. Amen.



Rev. Patrick D. Heery is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Auburn, New York, and is the former editor of *Presbyterians Today* and *Unbound: An Interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice*.



Monday, September 3, 2018

Peace that passes understanding: not one of us

By Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort

Mark 9:38–50

John said to him, “Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us.”

Reflection: I love when people ask me about my kids. People ask, “How old are they now?” and “How are they getting along?” and invariably, “How are you still standing?” It’s a way to connect over something ordinary, human. It’s a way to feel that I am one of you.

In Mark, John has the opposite in mind. He says, this man was not following us. He’s not like us. He’s not one of us.

In an ABC “20/20” special, journalists showed children pictures of men of different races and then recorded their reactions. When shown a photo of a black man and a white man, the children interpreted the black man as mean and criminal and the white man as nice and likely to be a teacher. The photo of the white man was of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh; the black man pictured was Harvard University professor Roland Fryer.

It starts early—all the biases, assumptions, judgments—it’s in the air we breathe. “They’re not part of us. They’re not one of us. They’re not us.”

The gospel of Jesus, however, leads to a very different conclusion: not only is every person one of us, each is the living representation of Christ. Instead of saying, “Teacher, we saw *someone*,” John should have said, “Teacher, we saw *you*.” John should have seen Jesus in this stranger. And what about us? In the foreigner, the outsider, the minority, do we see God or just “someone”?

Action: I keep hearing that protest chant—after the anniversary of Michael Brown’s killing—“This is what theology looks like.” I see them standing huddled together, heads down, laying hands on each other like it’s an ordination, as they shout #blacklivesmatter and #nojusticenopeace, anointed with sweat, tears, blood, and Spirit. I see them set apart for a holy work in which liturgy is wailing and protest. What should theology look like today?

Prayer: O wonderful Christ, who became an outsider to save us, help us see you in every “someone” we encounter. And in loving them, help us become more like you. Amen.



Rev. Mihee Kim-Kort is a Presbyterian minister, agitator, speaker, writer, and slinger of hopeful stories about faith and church. Her writing and commentary can be found at *TIME.*, *BBC World Service*, *USA Today*, *Huffington Post*, *Christian Century*, *On Being*, *Sojourners*, and *Faith and Leadership*. She is a religious studies PhD student at Indiana University.



Tuesday, September 4, 2018

Peace that passes understanding: loving all of creation

By Rev. Dr. Antonio (Tony) Aja

Acts 2:1–13

**All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”
But others sneered and said, “They are filled with new wine.”**

Reflection: However we understand this miracle, we know it is a miracle of full inclusion. The Holy Spirit comes upon the crowd, and no matter where they come from, each one of them is able to hear the words of hope in their own language. However, there are still some in the crowd who doubt the power of God, make fun, and claim that those who speak other languages are “filled with new wine”—drunk, in other words.

The renowned church historian Justo González gives us a plausible explanation. He writes that perhaps these mockers could very well represent the privileged ones who expect to understand everything said because their language is the dominant language. They are at home, and so they expect everyone to speak their language and do things their way. They represent the “norm” to which everyone else has to adapt.¹

They think that their language—or way of thinking or acting—is better than everybody else’s.

Action: As descendants of those multilingual disciples in Jerusalem, it is our duty to make sure that church and society accept, affirm, and celebrate our differences—advocating for the rights of everyone, no matter who they are, what language they speak, or where they come from. Whom do you know who speaks a language other than English? Have you tried learning their language?

Prayer: God of the diverse creation, we give you thanks for the colors, the sizes, the forms you created. Give us the courage to accept everyone as they are, even if we are mocked by those who do not understand your indiscriminate love for all of your creation. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Antonio (Tony) Aja is a minister member of the Presbytery of Santa Fe and currently serves as pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is the current moderator for the Hispanic/Latinx National Presbyterian Caucus and an adjunct professor at McCormick Theological Seminary. A former refugee from Cuba, Tony has developed new ministries with refugees and immigrants in Florida and Kentucky.

¹ González, Justo, *Acts, The Gospel of the Spirit*, Orbis Books, 2001.



Wednesday, September 5, 2018

Peace that passes understanding: a community that shares

By Rev. Dr. Antonio (Tony) Aja

Acts 2:44–45

All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need.

Reflection: The thought of selling and distributing our possessions probably frightens us. We live in an individualistic society not that different from the Roman Empire. The first church in Jerusalem did something revolutionary for then and now. They practiced *koinonia*, which besides “fellowship” also conveys “partnership” in the Greek language. Scholars tell us that *koinonia* means that Christians are called to share their God-given resources with each other and especially with the poor. It means that Christians are called to make sure that justice prevails, not only within the church family, but also in society in general. Justice for all is the first requirement for people to live in peace.

Action: Being in *koinonia* or partnership means that we take care of each other; that we are only as strong as our weakest neighbor; that we must take responsibility for each other to make sure that no one goes hungry or homeless or is discriminated against. We are all interdependent. Consider sharing your time and resources with someone else today. Maybe you will help refugees, or volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, or support Living Waters for the World in bringing clean water to communities, or advocate on behalf of those who are marginalized.

Prayer: Generous God, help us to understand that everything we have comes from you. Your child Jesus gave up everything for us, including his life. Give us strength to follow his example as well as the example of the first Christian community, so that we can all live in true *koinonia*. Amen.



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Thursday, September 6, 2018

Peace that passes understanding: sharing grace

By Rev. Layton E. Williams

Romans 2:1–11

Do you imagine, whoever you are, that when you judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself, you will escape the judgment of God?

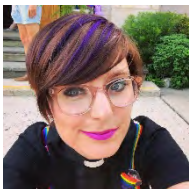
Reflection: In this season of peace, the Scriptures remind us of the dangers of judging others. “You mess up in the same way sometimes,” Romans tells us, “so do you just not want God’s mercy and kindness, or what? Don’t you realize that mercy is supposed to lead all of you to do better?”

I admit that in these days, I find it hard not to judge. I see the horrific things people do in the name of security, of self-righteousness, even in the name of my own God. I hear the awful words that people say to each other. More days than not, I have at least one moment when I want to give up on literally everyone. The idea that God offers grace, forgiveness, and even *patience* toward everyone has me feeling like Jonah when God spares the Ninevites. Or like the Pharisee who prayed, “Thank you, God, for not making me like them” (Luke 18:11). But then I have to remember: I *am* like them. I say and do awful things out of anger and fear too.

This passage reminds me (and us) that God has her own ways of bringing about justice through a framework of grace, even if I don’t understand it. And it reminds us that we benefit from that grace too whenever we mess up. Knowing this, let us seek to reflect God’s grace for this world that’s so hungry for it.

Action: What do you catch yourself judging people for? In what ways do you also mess up even as you call out others? What is one way that you can embody grace in the world on this day? Resolve to do at least one act of grace and love each day.

Prayer: Holy God, help us to encounter the world through a framework of your grace. Help us to be humble in the ways we fall short and patient with others when they fall short. Empower us to seek your justice and follow your call to abundant love. Amen.



Rev. Layton E. Williams is an ordained PC(USA) teaching elder and writer, and currently serves as the audience engagement editor for *Sojourners* in Washington, DC. She earned her M.Div. from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in Texas and previously served as pastoral resident at Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago before entering the world of advocacy journalism. She writes primarily at the intersection of faith, justice, politics, and culture with a particular emphasis on sexuality and gender.



Friday, September 7, 2018

Peace that passes understanding: a shared wound

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

John 20:19–28

Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

Reflection: In the summer of 2017, I stood before 80 men incarcerated in a maximum security prison in central New York, during a revival called *Alive in Christ Together*. I told them how my twin sons, Ezra and Leo, had died just a couple months earlier, born too little to survive. As I spoke, I looked out on the faces of men who knew this pain intimately. Some of them also had experienced stillbirths and miscarriages (the mortality rate for infants and mothers in the United States is appalling, but even more appalling is the racial disparity that renders black infants twice as likely to die as white infants). Others had lost children to gun violence, addiction, poverty, police brutality—or to the separation of incarceration. Almost all of them were themselves lost children, orphaned by economic and racial systems that had dehumanized and marginalized both them and their parents.

The men began to cry with me. We held each other, shaking and praying—for their children, for mine, for the hundreds of thousands cradled in cultural memory. They wrote the names of my sons on artwork and stoles, which they gave me like sacraments. They told me the stories of their children; they lifted up names previously confined to the silence of a prison cell.

A peace that passes understanding took hold that day. Across the differences of our lives, we found each other in a shared dream—that these names would not be forgotten, that fatherhood could not be lost, and that the hope of the resurrection would prevail, in this world and the next.

Action: Peace begins with a shared wound—like Jesus showing the holes in his side and saying, “Peace.” It begins with the recognition that vulnerability is strength, and that pain spoken is a demand for justice. Tell someone your pain today. See what it opens unto you and them.

Prayer: Wounded God, show us your heartbreak, and hear ours. Make of us a beloved community that hurts, hopes, and stands up together. Amen.



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Saturday, September 8, 2018

Peace that passes understanding: The Belhar Confession

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery, interviewing Rev. Allan Boesak

Matthew 5:43–48

“I tell you, love your enemies.”

Reflection: I remember a conversation I once had with the South African pastor and anti-apartheid activist Allan Boesak. He taught me about peace—the kind that demands truth. The following is what he told me about our newest confession: Belhar.

“In 1986, when I looked around the synod voting on the confession, there was hardly a congregation or family that didn’t have someone in jail. Remember that the white Dutch church had never said a word about apartheid. Its critique was aimed at us for protesting for the government. So why, with the blood on the street so fresh, would we talk about unity with these people? Why would we talk about reconciliation? Because we asked ourselves, What does obedience to Jesus Christ mean in this situation? Shall we allow the harshness and horror of apartheid—and even its claim on Jesus Christ—to dictate to the church how we understand God’s word?

“That is why we did not change a single word in Belhar, did not water it down or try to make people more comfortable with it. Loving our enemy wasn’t about some easy harmony, as if that were even possible. It was about a tough insistence on the demands of the gospel.

“And that is the power of Belhar . . . We were turning the spiritual condition of forgiveness into a political reality of conversion.

“We had to begin by changing the whole idea of justice. Justice couldn’t be retribution or a turning of the tables. Justice meant helping restore the humanity of those who had dehumanized themselves by dehumanizing us.”

Action: Whom in your life can you love today with a love so powerful that it reminds them of their own humanity? Love today in a way that demands and offers truth: the truth of who we are, and the truth of who we can become.

Prayer: O merciful Savior, convert our hearts. Help us love more boldly. And make our love the power that changes the world. Amen.



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Sunday, September 9, 2018

Partners in peace

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

1 Corinthians 13

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face.

Reflection: During my final year in college, I had the privilege of participating in community discussions that brought together people of many different faith backgrounds—Muslim, Jewish, Catholic, Unitarian, Quaker, Buddhist, Hindu, mainline Protestant, Evangelical. These talks were part of a university program called Difficult Dialogues, which invited divergent viewpoints on such topics as war, environmental justice, economics, sexuality, science, and reproductive choice.

In contrast to the rancor and the rehearsed soundbites that dominate our public discourse today, it was moving to witness so many different people delving deeply into ideas that matter, unafraid to disagree, unafraid to challenge, but equally committed to maintaining the dignity and humanity of their interlocutors. Far from dividing us, these conversations brought us closer. They led to shared meals in church basements, mosques, and community centers. Friendships were formed.

Something powerful happens when we eat together, serve together, learn and discuss together, worship together. If peace begins with vulnerability, it takes root in relationship.

This week you're going to read about efforts to build peace between us while witnessing to peace in the wider world.

Action: Talk with someone today who's different from you. Eat a meal together. Resist the labels and soundbites that quickly render us unable to see or hear the other. Talk about why you believe what you believe. You may not change the other's mind. But you will witness to the God of peace.

Prayer: O magnificent God, you created such a diverse world full of such diverse people. As your servant Paul once said, we see through a glass darkly. Help us find each other and, through each other, come to see you and your world a little more clearly. Let us work together for peace. Amen.



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Monday, September 10, 2018

Partners in peace: breaking the rules

By Rev. Abby King-Kaiser

Luke 6:6–11

**After looking around at all of them, Jesus said to him, “Stretch out your hand.”
He did so, and his hand was restored.**

Reflection: We begin this week walking with Jesus on the Sabbath. He teaches, and is watched by those who are the *real* teachers. He heals the man who needs it, despite the fact that he’s breaking the rules. He gets side-eyes, scoffs, and grumbles from the peanut gallery, who are now even more motivated to take down this guy who’s shaking up their world.

All of this makes me wonder: How often have I *not* participated in God’s peace or justice because I was afraid I would break the rules? How many times have I asked myself: What will people think if I strap on my infant and go to an Occupy event? What will people think if my four-year-old is holding my hand at a Black Lives Matter rally? Perhaps I should be wondering what they will think if I am not doing these things.

Working in ministry primarily with people of another faith means that I often have to reconsider the boundaries imposed by our society, even our theology. I was the advisor to the Muslim Student Association for four years; I work at a Jesuit University; and my first adjunct teaching gig was on a team with three Jewish men.

Yet, in all those places, I have found not just rich learning, but also growth towards God. The 20 minutes of praying alongside our Muslim students each week were often my most peaceful. And I wonder if breaking the rules was a part of what brought me peace.

Action: Ask someone whose faith is different from your own what peace means to them. Ask: How does that grow out of your values? What does reconciliation look like?

Prayer: Lead me in your justice, O Lord, that I might worry less about the rules, and worry more about making your beloved community real. Amen.



Rev. Abby King-Kaiser is a teaching elder, a mother of two, and a campus minister at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio. She sees the world in pictures, which is most often translated via Instagram even though painting is more fun.



Tuesday, September 11, 2018

Partners in peace: confronting evil

By Rev. Abby King-Kaiser

Psalm 73

**When my soul was embittered, when I was pricked in heart,
I was stupid and ignorant; I was like a brute beast toward you.**

Reflection: During the summer of 2001, after graduating from high school, I went on a study-abroad trip for educators who teach about the Holocaust. Our leader was an elderly Christian man who had been arrested at 17 and spent about six months in an SS prison for being part of the Dutch resistance rescuing Jews. I remember most his insistence that we look inward, over and over again, at our own evil.

At the villa in Wannsee, where white, German, Christian men constructed the final genocidal solution for the Jewish communities of Europe, he made us look in the eye of those who attended the meeting. All along the way, he challenged us to see the good and evil in absolutely everyone, regardless of their "side."

This psalm calls me to that same inward gaze.

That fall, just three weeks into my first college semester, September 11 happened. Our campus ministry invited families of victims of 9/11 to campus to tell their stories. They told us about their opposition to the War on Terror and their search for peace, even after so much pain.

In seminary, I met a Sikh filmmaker almost my own age, who quit college to document the murderous violence her community experienced after 9/11, starting that same week, because of the fear of her fellow Americans. It was then that I came face to face with the fact that, as an American, I was not only a victim, but also a perpetrator, of terror.

Action: Find a way to memorialize the victims of hate-based violence that followed 9/11 in addition to the thousands of victims of the terror attacks. Write down their names and pray for their loved ones. If you don't know where to start, begin with Balbir Singh Sodhi, murdered in Mesa, Arizona, on September 15, 2001.

Prayer: God of mercy, accept our confession of all that we have done and not done. Turn our hearts inward to understand our own evil, that we might fully fight evil, terrorism, hate, and violence in all its forms. Amen.



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Wednesday, September 12, 2018

Partners in peace: mustard seeds

By Rev. Abby King-Kaiser

Matthew 17:14–21

Then the disciples came to Jesus privately and said, “Why could we not cast it out?”

Reflection: I know that I can be like the disciples, without even the small faith needed to heal, without even the mustard seed. And yet, in the small things, that is where I can see peace building.

When I was the advisor to the Muslim Students Association, I grew close to the officers. I spent a lot of time with them, helping them to motivate and move their small but diverse cohort on campus. It was the best job—getting to know students deeply, being challenged and stretched, and finding small ways I could be helpful. I enjoyed their presence and missed them when they were on breaks or graduated.

So I felt particularly ashamed, when at a small open house at the very end of the semester, I blurted “Have a merry Christmas!” to the president of the MSA as we said goodbye. I could actually imagine stuffing my foot in my mouth or crawling under a rock to hide from the embarrassment. I apologized, profusely, but couldn’t undo the awkwardness in that moment.

Almost four years later, when he was in the middle of law school and he could see the tide of Islamophobia rising around him, he called me for advice and comfort. It was a pastoral conversation like many I have had with students or young alums, even though we didn’t share the same faith. We did share a lot of other things in common, however, and from there, while acknowledging and working with our differences, something took root.

Maybe these are some of the mustard seeds I plant toward growing God’s peace. What are yours?

Action: Plant something, literally. Choose to use one less disposable item today. Make a small financial contribution to a peacebuilding initiative. Find a way to plant a new mustard seed that is a part of God’s larger action toward peace.

Prayer: Creating God, draw us into this work and show us the small action we might take. Root us in a faith that trusts your vision for peace. Amen.



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Thursday, September 13, 2018

Partners in peace: who is the real enemy?

By Rev. Abby King-Kaiser

Luke 6:27–38

“But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies.”

Reflection: I find this passage a perennial challenge. As an American of a certain age—my generation’s first presidential election was decided by the Supreme Court; I was eighteen when the Twin Towers fell; and I was in grad school when the bubble burst and the recession started—I have been told who my enemies are from an early age. As we grew, my generation found just as many enemies in places we thought we could trust—our electoral system, our economy, our banks, even the social media companies founded by those we went to college with.

My senior year of high school in the Cincinnati area was marked by unrest and curfews following the death of Timothy Thomas, unarmed in an alley, shot by police. His death came on the heels of many others, and I learned about my white privilege as I came to understand that my inherent trust of the police was a result of the racial category I was born into.

Who is the enemy then? In many ways, it is us. In this passage, I hear Christ calling us to look at the people whom we are told are the enemy. So very often, they are not, and the ones doing real damage look like friends and allies. If this is true, how might we go out of our way to build relationships across boundaries of race or religion or worldview?

Action: Get out your cell phone. Look at the last 10 people you texted and called. Consider their identities. Do you share race, culture, gender, religion, generation with the people on your list? Who is missing? Reflect on how you might seek out communities different from your own to expand your social circles. Could you worship somewhere different this week? Attend an interfaith event? Try a festival you wouldn’t have gone to otherwise?

Prayer: Compassionate God, draw us into your human family and remind us that we all belong to each other. Give us eyes to see those enemies that you call us to love. Amen.



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Friday, September 14, 2018

Partners in peace: humility

By Rev. Abby King-Kaiser

Philippians 2:5–11

And being found in human form, he humbled himself.

Reflection: When I was a student, my campus minister was working to support the very new Muslim Students Association on our large, public campus. As a result, I became friends with a young woman who wore a hijab. Our high school had had some religious diversity—I came from a very Catholic city that is also the birthplace of Reform Judaism. I had grown up next to a family who spoke Russian and put a menorah in their window when we got out the Christmas lights. But I had never known anyone Muslim, much less become friends.

At the time, I didn't yet know who I was spiritually. Marina, on the other hand, had *chosen* her hijab. She chose to pray five times a day, even if it was in a stairwell or corner of the library. I remember sitting on the floor of her dorm room, feeling scared to ask what her prayer life was like and why it mattered to her. Now, I can see that I learned so much from overcoming that fear and listening. The more I follow the humble Christ, the more I learn and grow from the people around me, and the more fully I can follow Jesus towards God's justice.

Action: Look over the long course of your life and work. When has setting aside your own needs, admitting that you were wrong, or otherwise practicing humility led you to greater understanding? Looking at what is around and ahead of you, how might this passage call you to follow Christ towards peace?

Prayer: Loving God, we are grateful for the way you love us without condition, at our most arrogant and at our most helpless. Cultivate the humility of Jesus in me, that I might be able to see you in the faces of those I encounter. Amen.



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Saturday, September 15, 2018

Partners in peace: shaped by those we love

By Rev. Abby King-Kaiser

John 19:25–27

**He said to his mother, “Woman, here is your son.”
Then he said to the disciple, “Here is your mother.”**

Reflection: At the cross, Jesus looks upon the disciple he loved and his grieving mother and makes them family. This is the moment when, as followers of Christ, we can no longer deny that our most loyal and intimate relationships are challenged to be re-ordered, to be given the grace and the space to look differently than the world expects.

In the last couple of years, I have been invited on a unique study-abroad partnership—a Jesuit university working with a Reformed rabbinical school to study religion and democracy in Israel. At the same time, I work with, learn from, and love a Muslim colleague whose family still carries refugee cards because they were forced out of their homes to make way for the state of Israel.

Standing at the Western Wall, I had a profound conversation with a Reformed rabbi who was born in Jerusalem, about what prayer means in that place. He told me that he didn’t need the wall to seek God. And yet, standing there, in the shadow of the golden dome, I also carried my friend and her family, who can’t travel to the parts of the same land generations called home.

I don’t know what to do with all that—I really don’t. I follow a Christ who calls me to constantly love more, to expand the circles I am in, to see us all as belonging to God, and yet as I do, there are tensions of human history, identity, and worldview that make it a very messy process.

Action: Provide hospitality to someone different from yourself. Maybe it is a dinner invitation, or a birthday card. Maybe you can bake something, or share the last tomatoes from your garden. Be shaped by the love you give and receive.

Prayer: God of peace, help us to build the partnerships that will make your vision for our communities real. Give us the courage we need to wade into the mess and the love we need to turn strangers into neighbors and neighbors into family. Amen.



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Sunday, September 16, 2018

Go and see

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

John 1:43–51

Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

Reflection: In a particularly delightful scene in Yann Martel’s book *Beatrice and Virgil*, Virgil attempts to explain to Beatrice what a pear is. Beatrice has never experienced a pear. After five pages of trying to help Beatrice understand, Virgil gives up with a shrug, saying, “A pear tastes like, it tastes like . . . I don’t know. I can’t put it into words. A pear tastes like itself.”

Imagine it: trying to explain a pear to someone who has never seen or tasted a pear.

Philip faced the same problem when trying to tell Nathanael about Jesus. What’s interesting is that Philip doesn’t get mad or walk away; he looks Nathanael in the eye and says, “Come and see for yourself.” So, Nathanael does. And it’s that direct encounter with Jesus that causes Nathanael to believe.

We’re not supposed to just tell people about the kin-dom of God; we’re supposed to invite them in. I could tell a man about a pear, but better, I think, to let him taste that pear for himself. So too with God. And peace. We do not teach. We invite.

Peace is not only about vulnerability and relationship; it is about daring to come and see the truth of a people—their struggle, their dreams, their blessedness. This week you’re going to hear from travel study participants through the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program; they’re going to tell you where they went and what they saw.

Action: Instead of trying to convince someone of the merits of faith or justice, why not invite them instead to serve alongside you at a soup kitchen, or worship with you in a prison, or visit an immigrant detention center? Today, go and see for yourself the people whose lives cry out for peace, and bring a friend.

Prayer: O Christ, find us yet again in the dark of our doubts, fears, and ignorance. Take us by the hand and say again, “Come and see.” Reveal yourself in the faces of those we see, and lead us to truth. Amen.



Rev. Patrick D. Heery is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Auburn, New York, and is the former editor of *Presbyterians Today* and *Unbound: An Interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice*.



Monday, September 17, 2018

Go and see: a better peace for our children

By Rev. Dean McDonald

Proverbs 22:1–21

Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.

Reflection: Disciples in the FJKM (Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar), a sister church of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), are ministering every day to children who are abused, malnourished, disabled, or simply in search of a better future. On our study trip with the Peacemaking Program last fall, we visited schools that board these young ones who have been rescued from the streets, or who have chosen to move out of their homes in order to get a good education in a safe and faith-filled environment. No matter their background or condition, these children are surrounded by love, taught about Jesus, and trained for a much more hopeful future.

Action: Consider what is most influential in the lives of the children you know. Is your church community providing nurture in the “right way” as the New Revised Standard Version puts it? Or, as Eugene Peterson translates, are they being pointed in the right direction so they won’t be lost? It takes hard work and dedication to ensure children are receiving what they truly need for a meaningful life of faith. Possible ideas for action include scholarships; tutoring programs; a vacation Bible school or after-school program matching two congregations of different backgrounds; parent training classes open to the community; a Sunday school equipped to include students with special needs; or distributing school supplies where needed.

Prayer: O God, our hearts break to know of impoverished children who go hungry, whose bodies are trafficked, and who are without access to healthcare, good education, or spiritually strong influences. Have mercy on them. May the many ministries of the FJKM continue to work toward ending the punitive cycles of poverty, and uplifting the lives of the children in Madagascar. May our own churches reach out with compassion and guidance to the young in need. In the name of the One who loved the little ones, Amen.



Rev. Dean McDonald is a Presbyterian pastor who has served churches in Philadelphia and Washington, DC. She was director of Cathedral College and worship leader at Washington National Cathedral, taught at National Cathedral High School, and was chaplain at National Presbyterian School. As a marriage and family therapist, she has taught pastoral care in several seminaries. Dean traveled with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to Madagascar in November 2017.



Tuesday, September 18, 2018

Go and see: the risk of peace

By Rev. Jeffrey A. Geary
Proverbs 25:25

Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a far country.

Reflection: Two hours outside Guatemala City, in the central highlands just north of the rural community of San José del Golfo, I encountered the words *La tierra no se vende*, "The land is not for sale." The phrase was scrawled above an image of the Bishop Juan José Gerardi Conedera, the great defender of human rights and indigenous communities in Guatemala. The bishop's image was one of many decorating a simple wooden platform erected beside a rutted dirt road outside the entrance to the El Tambor Gold Mine. The mine is operated by the US engineering firm Kappes Cassiday & Associates, with headquarters in Nevada.

Each Sunday a priest offers mass from this platform to the hundreds of poor women and men who have blockaded the mine's entrance 24 hours a day for the last six and a half years. They have done so to protect their land, water, air, and lives. As a result of the blockade, they have faced harassment from police and military, criminalization and arrest (on what were later proven to be false charges), slander, contempt, and attempts to buy them off with bribes.

Beside the image of Bishop Gerardi were also written the words he spoke just before he was viciously murdered in 1998, two days after releasing Guatemala's first human rights report: "The construction of the kingdom of God entails risks, and only those who have the strength to confront those risks can be its builders."

Action: Examine your and the PC(USA) Board of Pensions' investments to ensure you are not funding such extractive practices abroad. If you discover investments you believe unfaithful, urge the General Assembly to direct Mission Responsibility Through Investment to research and engage Presbyterian holdings, with a view toward divestment. For more information [see the Guatemalan Human Rights Commission post on El Tambor Mine](#).

Prayer: God who hears and answers the cry of the poor, the people of San José del Golfo have risked much. Give our church the courage and commitment to change corporate practices that harm our sisters and brothers in Christ and destroy your good creation. Amen.



Rev. Jeffrey Geary is the senior pastor at White Plains Presbyterian Church in White Plains, New York. A GreenFaith fellow, Jeff has traveled with Presbyterian Peacemaking delegations to Guatemala and Costa Rica and to the Middle East.



Wednesday, September 19, 2018

Go and see: the power of love

By Rev. Kirk P. Perucca

John 3:13–17

**“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son,
so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”**

Reflection: It’s a beautiful and powerful statement of God’s love for this world—that God sent his only Son, for us. We respond to God’s love by serving as committed stewards of God’s world. Nowhere is more unique and beautiful than Madagascar; yet it is a land that has seen its tropical forests diminished by over 90 percent since humans first arrived on the island.

When the opportunity came up, through the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, to visit Madagascar, it was a chance to see a distant land and to learn about the environmental crisis gripping the country. The trip would expose me to how Presbyterian mission promotes peacemaking and environmental justice in the island nation. I love that Presbyterian mission reflects God’s love of this world and that that love is demonstrated through mission coworkers working as partners with local denominations.

In Madagascar the partner denomination is the FJKM, the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar. I’m so grateful that the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) respects the leadership and mission of partner churches. The FJKM has 6 million members, with 60 percent of the members under the age of 24. Our mission coworkers Dan and Elizabeth Turk work with the FJKM to reforest the nation. They do this by providing newly ordained pastors with 10 seedlings for their new congregations. Currently, according to the Center for Applied Biodiversity Science at Conservation International, if the rate of forest reduction remains at its current level, all of Madagascar’s forests will be lost within 40 years. The FJKM and the Turks are working every day to reverse this projection.

Action: Pray for the people of Madagascar as national elections approach and continue to support the work of Presbyterian co-workers in their ministry.

Prayer: Gracious God, we are grateful for those who serve as colleagues in distant lands and care for your creation. May we celebrate their service as we journey in gratitude. In the name of Christ we pray. Amen.



Rev. Kirk P. Perucca serves as pastor of Covenant Presbyterian Church, a multi-racial congregation with expanding ministries including Covenant Community Health and Wellness Center. He is president of Project Equality, a community program of Kirk Perucca Associates, Inc. He is a graduate of Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Kirk participated in the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program’s travel study seminar to Madagascar in August 2017.



Thursday, September 20, 2018

Go and see: the courage of indigenous communities

By Kathy Mitchell

Galatians 6:2

Bear one another's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Reflection: How do we begin to carry each other's burdens? It is in our own faith journey that we encounter many different paths, some easy, some difficult; in doing so, we may find ourselves at a crossroads or perhaps even retracing our steps puzzling over where we stepped off the path.

Recently, my own faith journey led me to the steep mountainsides of Guatemala and the breathtaking terrain of Costa Rica. It was in the stories of indigenous communities that I heard their cry for their beloved land and their courage to protect it. Over and over again, I heard them say: "Thank you for coming; thank you for listening to my story." One in particular, Sara, I asked, "What would help you here in La Puya?" I was taken aback by her response when she replied, "A psychologist," as she began to tell her story of struggle, shame, and resilience in the fight to protect her homeland. It was an incredible blessing for me to meet the courageous people of Central America and to realize that, although we may be worlds apart, we have so much in common as well. It is in their voice I again say, "Thank you for listening to my story."

Action: Amid the difficulties, inconveniences, and rare quiet pauses of life, let us take a moment to be in awe of the beauty that surrounds us and remember those who stand firm against the injustices in our world.

Prayer: God of love, grace, and mercy, help us in our daily tasks to listen and to help carry the burdens of others. May we bear witness to each other in our struggles and sorrows and share in the triumph as brothers and sisters in Christ, for you alone are our Redeemer and our Strength Everlasting. Amen.



Kathy Mitchell is an elder and the treasurer at Chinle Trinity Presbyterian Church in Chinle, Navajo Nation, Arizona. She is a graduate from Northern Arizona University in school counseling and works at the local public school serving her community. Kathy was a participant in the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program's travel study seminary to Guatemala and Costa Rica in August 2017.



Friday, September 21, 2018

Go and see: the holistic ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar

By Rev. Dr. David B. McCarthy

Psalm 139

O Lord, you have searched me and known me.

Reflection: The psalmist assures us that everywhere we go, the spirit of God is with us, to guide us and protect us in all aspects of our lives. From the ends of the earth, through the darkest nights, God seeks us and finds us. From the loftiest heights to the lowest abyss, in all of life's circumstances, God's loving care surrounds us. That was true for the Israelites in exile, for Paul and Silas during their mission trips in Greece, and for Jesus' disciples in Jerusalem. And it is true for the people of Madagascar, who are deeply aware of God's involvement in all aspects of their lives.

The FJKM, the Church of Jesus in Madagascar and partner to the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), shares this holistic understanding of God's sovereign love. With more than 6,700 congregations, the FJKM also has extensive social service programs. It helps educate more than 189,899 students in approximately 581 primary, middle, or high schools, in addition to several universities and seminaries. The FJKM also supports orphanages, chaplaincies, and an extensive network of medical clinics and programs in community health, nutrition, environmental management, and water and sanitation.

Recently, the FJKM has attempted to bring about peace and reconciliation among rival political parties in the face of growing civil unrest in advance of national elections that many fear are rigged. The FJKM is celebrating its jubilee (50th) anniversary throughout this year, culminating in an October dedicatory celebration for a new classroom and residential building at its seminary in Ivato.

Action: Read Psalm 139. When have you tried to avoid the presence of God? Where have you been surprised to see God at work in the world?

Prayer: Gracious and ever-present God, open our eyes to see your spirit behind and before us, surrounding us and upholding us in all aspects of life, that we might live in peace with all your children throughout the world, through Jesus Christ. Amen.



Rev. Dr. David B. McCarthy is the pastor of Second Presbyterian Church in Hastings, Nebraska. David earned his M.Div. from Harvard University and Ph.D. in Religion from Duke University. Before coming to Hastings in 2001, he served churches in New York and North Carolina and taught at Harvard and Duke University. He has written more than 30 book chapters and articles. David traveled with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program to Madagascar in November 2017.



Saturday, September 22, 2018

Go and see: an idol of silver

By Rev. Alan Jenkins

Acts 17:16–34

“Since we are God’s offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals.”

Reflection: The Bible’s teaching on idolatry seems a simple, antiquated one from which I naively thought we had all graduated. It was on a Peacemaking travel study seminar in Guatemala, however, that I learned we still have a problem with the precious idols of the metallic sort. Exposing my naiveté was a group of Xinka indigenous women, who reside on fertile, forested land replete with springs and creeks, located just an hour or two east of Guatemala City. And for more than a decade, they have been practicing non-violent resistance against the US mining company Tahoe Resources, Inc.

First posing as an agricultural company wanting to plant fruit trees as they bought up ancestral land, their eventual operation exploited what is believed to be the third largest silver mine in the world. Their use of carcinogenic chemicals and copious amounts of water harms local crops, water supplies, animals, and public health. The day we met with the women, they shared their spiritual connection to the land and their dependence upon its biological diversity. Leaves, fruit, pine straw, and differently colored candles representing the four cardinal directions were carefully laid out on an altar as they shared their connection to God’s creation and their commitment to defend the garden of life. I left inspired and in awe.

Action: Consider what threats exist to God’s creation in your own region. Examine your and the PC(USA) Board of Pensions’ investments to ensure you are not funding such extractive practices abroad. Also, consider what spiritual practices from our own tradition continuously connect us to God’s life-giving creation and commit us to defend it when threatened.

Prayer: Creator God, root us in your rich creation and lead us in your way, finer than gold and sweet as silver. Forgive us our practice of idolatry. Grant us courage to open our eyes to your interconnected web of mutuality, where (in)justice to one is (in)justice to all. Amen.



Rev. Alan Jenkins serves as a hospice chaplain in Atlanta and a parish associate of Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in the Presbytery of Greater Atlanta. He participated in the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program’s travel study seminary to Guatemala in August 2017.



Sunday, September 23, 2018

The church and its witness

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

Genesis 37:18–28

“Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites.”

Reflection: Long ago, Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery. It’s a story still being lived out today, as 21 million people live and work in conditions of forced labor, many of them victims of human trafficking. The causes are intricate and global. But if there’s one thing to remember, it’s that we are a part of this story.

Each of us is caught in an economic web that demands cheap goods, objectifies bodies, and relies on the widening gap between the rich and the poor. We have looked the other way when it meant convenience and affordability. We have turned our backs on refugees, who have then fallen into the hands of traffickers. We have allowed millions of children to grow up in poverty and violence. Christian households and churches have taught the subordinate status of women, while children are kicked out of their homes for coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, and then made vulnerable to trafficking.

We, like Joseph’s brothers, sell the people we are supposed to love. We sell the people whose dreams do not match our own or whose dreams dare to ask more from the world than it has allotted.

Joseph dreamed a dream once, and it cost him his freedom. It doesn’t have to again. We have the power to be a part of a new story. This week, you’re going to read about efforts to identify and stop human trafficking in the Philippines. If peace is founded in vulnerability, relationship, and experience, then it is also built on witness. Peace is speaking out. It is telling others what we have heard and seen.

Action: Pray for and financially support all PC(USA) mission co-workers as they join global partners in education, prevention, and repatriation for victims of human trafficking. Consider using your congregation’s retained portion of the Peace & Global Witness Offering to do so. Visit presbyterianmission.org/mission-connections to learn more.

Prayer: O God who found and rescued Joseph, help us as we seek to put an end to modern-day slavery. Be with those who have lost their freedom. Give them comfort and justice. Amen.



Rev. Patrick D. Heery is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Auburn, New York, and is the former editor of *Presbyterians Today* and *Unbound: An Interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice*.



Monday, September 24, 2018

The church and its witness: protecting migrant workers

By Rev. Cathy Chang

Esther 4:4–17

“Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”

Reflection: In my Filipino colleagues I see the courage and determination of Queen Esther as they advocate for the lives of their people. The systematic extermination proposed by Haman threatened several generations of Esther’s people. While she didn’t know their names, she knew that she was responsible for their lives. She knew that she needed to act and to risk her own life.

From the moment they begin preparing to go overseas, the lives of Filipina domestic workers are always at risk. At her first job, Mary Jane Veloso worked as a domestic helper for an employer who attempted to sexually assault her. On the way to her next job, she carried drugs in a bag prepared by her recruiter. She was sentenced to death for drug trafficking in Indonesia. Like Mary Jane, Jennifer Dalquez faced similar advances from her first employer. One day when protecting herself during an impending assault, she fatally wounded her second employer. Soon after she was sentenced to death in the United Arab Emirates.

Laws in host countries do not protect migrant workers, often resulting in death or execution. Thankfully Jennifer appealed her sentence and is no longer on death row, but Mary Jane is still on death row after 8 years in prison.

Action: Lobby for stronger protections of migrant workers, such as in the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, which is moving towards adoption by member states of the United Nations this December. The migration of overseas Filipina workers like Mary Jane Veloso and Jennifer Dalquez needs to include protections that uphold their dignity and safety. Without these protections, they become human trafficking victims.

Prayer: Lord God, you have created us in your image. Today we remember Jennifer Dalquez and other unnamed migrant workers who face life-threatening conditions from their employers. We also remember Mary Jane Veloso and other unnamed migrant workers who are on death row. Move legal authorities to provide protection and seek justice for these migrant workers. Amen.



Rev. Cathy Chang is regional facilitator for Addressing Migration and Human Trafficking with Presbyterian World Mission. She is based in the Philippines and works throughout southeast Asia. Previously she served as associate pastor at the Bertha E.R. Strosacker Memorial Presbyterian Church in Midland, Michigan, and Lilly pastoral resident at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.



Tuesday, September 25, 2018

The church and its witness: answering the call for help

By Rev. Marie Sol Sioco-Villalon

Psalm 28:1–9

To you, O Lord, I call; my rock, do not refuse to hear me.

Reflection: In the course of my serving victims of human trafficking, I receive many phone calls and Facebook messages from Filipino migrants asking to be repatriated. I will never forget, in particular, three women who had been trafficked in Malaysia. For a number of months, they repeatedly begged to be rescued from their sex traffickers, who had forced them to work without salaries and food, until they were able to escape through the help of church women. I remember a single mother whom we helped recover her seven-month-old baby girl, sold by the father for \$100. I remember two young women who cried for immediate help because they were being made to work for 19 hours daily without salary. After four months of struggle and prayers, the Lord rescued them back to the Philippines.

Every time that I listened to their cries, I could not help but be reminded of the words of David in Psalm 28. It is as if the calls for help from Filipino migrants were anticipated by David as he prays for God to graciously hear and answer him in his distress and affliction. I discern their faith in their search for help as clearly as David's faith in times of trouble: the Lord is his rock; God is the place where he can hide and be safe.

And when at last these migrants return home, I see that the joy in their hearts is not so different from what David felt when God answered his prayers.

Action: If you think you have encountered a victim of human trafficking, call the National Human Trafficking Resource Center, 888-373-7888, open 24 hours a day/seven days a week. In cases of emergency, call 911.

Prayer: O God, deliver all trafficked persons from modern-day slavery. Help us hear their cries with your ears, and see their pain with your eyes. Help us answer with the hands of Christ. Amen.



Rev. Marie Sol Sioco-Villalon is a clergy member of the United Methodist Church in the Philippines, serving as program coordinator and national-in-mission for Victims of Human Trafficking, Overseas Filipino Workers, and their Families.



Wednesday, September 26, 2018

The church and its witness: life in exile

By Rev. Cathy Chang

Psalm 137:1–6

By the rivers of Babylon — there we sat down and there we wept when we remembered Zion.

Reflection: This psalm evokes the pain and loss from the Babylonian exile. Jerusalem, once the center of the people’s faith in God, was now destroyed. In the same way, I wonder how the faith of our overseas Filipino workers is challenged or even lost, when they work in countries where their faith is no longer the main part of their lives. Some might enjoy rare days off for worship and fellowship; others might not even enjoy those extra blessings. In this new work setting, their faith does not find the same full expression as when they were with their own faith communities in the Philippines. Like the Babylonian captors who desired to listen to songs of mirth, perhaps their foreign employers seek only the satisfaction of workers through smiles and “Yes, Sir” or “Yes, Ma’am.” Yet these songs of mirth belie the mixture of emotions beneath the surface.

I imagine that exile also includes the experiences of family members who are left behind in the Philippines. Without the presence of a family member or loved one, these remaining families and friends might also mourn a time when they once enjoyed more joyful expressions of worship, together in the Philippines.

While the pain and loss of separation for both workers and their families seem too much to bear, most still somehow manage to remember God’s faithfulness. In this memory is their hope for life amid exile.

Action: The faith of Filipino migrant workers is often what sustains them to continue working and providing for their families. Consider: What are your values about work and family? What does your faith teach you about work and family?

Prayer: Lord God, the loss and longing of the exiled Babylonian community resonate with the experiences of overseas Filipino workers separated from their families. These same workers desire and seek out spiritual resources to sustain them. Sensitize our faith communities to provide pastoral care and comfort. Amen.



Rev. Cathy Chang is regional facilitator for Addressing Migration and Human Trafficking with Presbyterian World Mission. She is based in the Philippines and works throughout southeast Asia. Previously she served as associate pastor at the Bertha E.R. Strosacker Memorial Presbyterian Church in Midland, Michigan, and Lilly pastoral resident at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.



Thursday, September 27, 2018

The church and its witness: in times of exile

By Rev. Joram H. Calimutan

Esther 7:1–10 and Luke 4:18–19

“He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.”

Reflection: Queen Esther's story narrates the oppression, vulnerability, and total disregard experienced by the Jewish people during their exile. They've been toyed with and sold by their captors. Now they face the threat of annihilation because of their principled stand for faith, human rights, and dignity.

As an oppressed minority, Esther hid her identity, forced to please her captors even at the extent of using her body for mere survival. Now Esther wittingly uses her status to advance her people's struggle and to save their lives.

Her story is remarkably similar to the situation faced by many of the 258 million migrants all over the world. Millions of migrants, including refugees and uprooted peoples, are in exile in highly developed countries. Their urgent need to survive forces them to be separated from their families and commodified in the international market. They suffer from oppression and are vulnerable to all forms of abuse, exploitation, slavery, and human trafficking.

Yet, amidst their miserable condition, these people find empowerment and strength in studying the realities of forced migration, in organizing themselves, and mobilizing a broad number of people in advancing the struggle for justice, human rights, and decent jobs.

Action: The realities of forced migration, war, and poverty that have deprived millions of the chance to live abundantly are challenging churches and ecumenical organizations to journey with migrants, refugees, and uprooted people. Jesus' declaration of his mission and ministry in the Gospel of Luke is a fitting paradigm of proclaiming God's message of liberation and solidarity. Take time to learn more about human trafficking: presbyterianmission.org/human-trafficking.

Prayer: O God of life and history, be with us as we journey with migrants, refugees, and uprooted people in their struggle for life, justice, and dignity. May we faithfully proclaim your message of liberation, and may we find the courage to stand in solidarity with them so that these sisters and brothers of ours may find hope, strength, and empowerment. Amen.



Rev. Joram H. Calimutan is currently the program coordinator of the Faith Partnership and Solidarity program of the Asia Pacific Mission for Migrants based in Hong Kong. He previously served as a church pastor in the Philippines and chair of Justice, Peace, and Integrity of the Creation Committee of the Southern Tagalog Regional Ecumenical and Advocacy Movement.



Friday, September 28, 2018

The church and its witness: remembering God's redemption

By Rev. Cathy Chang

Deuteronomy 5: 1–6, 12–15, 21

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery.

Reflection: The first time I preached about human trafficking and modern-day slavery, I struggled to find relevant Scriptures. Eventually I focused on God's call on Moses to confront Pharaoh and demand freedom for the enslaved people of Israel.

Almost four and a half years later, at a recent Philippine consultation with migrants, I rediscovered Moses. Just as God was calling the Israelites to remember both their former status as slaves and God's redemption, God is inviting us today to remember and move forward. During my introductory reflections at this consultation, I said, "Forced migration and the labor export policy are enslaving our people. This slavery is holding captive the very people whom you love, your family members, your friends . . . This slavery prevents people from working here, living here, growing up here, and growing old here in the Philippines . . . From the financial debts incurred by the extensive network of recruiters and lending agencies . . . to the banks and other creditors benefiting . . . to the emotional guilt of not being available for their families . . . to the dirty, dangerous, demeaning, working conditions, all these conditions amount to slavery."

Action: Following Moses and the former slaves who fully live out God's redemption, we remember who we used to be—and that we shouldn't perpetuate these slavery conditions for others. What are the laws that we can advocate for? Download "[Statement of Concern: The Many Faces of Human Trafficking](#)" (see page seven) and choose at least one action item for today.

Prayer: God of the prophets, you spoke through Moses and you shaped laws that are the basis of social responsibility. When we hear you today, help us confess the ways that we perpetuate slavery-like conditions. Renew our social responsibility when we advocate for and enact laws that protect today's slaves.



Rev. Cathy Chang is regional facilitator for Addressing Migration and Human Trafficking with Presbyterian World Mission. She is based in the Philippines and works throughout southeast Asia. Previously she served as associate pastor at the Bertha E.R. Strosacker Memorial Presbyterian Church in Midland, Michigan, and Lilly pastoral resident at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church.



Saturday, September 29, 2018

The church and its witness: cultivating joy

By Rev. Teresita Regidor Oton

Psalm 100:1–5

Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth.

Reflection: In Dubai and Abu Dhabi, I have met secretaries, bookkeepers, receptionists, caregivers, and salespersons, all Filipino, all in situations of forced labor, all overworked and tired. Yet, I am struck every time by the defiant joy and faith that sustain these brothers and sisters in Christ. It is a faith that I believe we can learn from, and which should inspire our action in solidarity with these workers.

Gratefulness is good medicine. Have you noticed that in the first three commands of Psalm 100, God says: shout with joy, serve with gladness, and come with joyful songs? God speaks to a people who know great suffering and encourages them to foster sources of joy unbound by circumstance, namely, the Lord.

Gratefulness improves our witness for Christ. Our joy demands attention. It draws people to faith. And it highlights the contrast and injustice of our circumstances.

Gratefulness opens our relationship with God. The faith of Filipino migrant workers is what sustains them. How terrible are their experiences away from families and loved ones. Some of them become hopeless and desperate. But in spite of it all, they challenge the world by declaring, God is good! In making this proclamation, they come to know God in ways deeper than many of us ever do. They come to know the God who sits with them in the dark, who refuses to abandon them to slavery.

Action: Did you know there is a difference between happiness and joy? Happiness is based on your circumstances and what is happening around you, but the Bible tells us that joy comes from the Lord! We can be joyful even in the hard times when God fills us with love and peace. What are some ways you can express joy today?

Prayer: Lord, we pray that your love prevails. Give us the ability to forgive and to reach out with kindness and love to all. Through mourning and hard times, we pray you turn us toward light and life. Amen.



Rev. Teresita Regidor Oton is a mission co-worker with the United Church of Christ in the Philippines assigned in the United Arab Emirates, serving Dubai and Abu Dhabi. She served nine months with the Filipino Overseas Workers and is a former chaplain of Brokenshire College in the Philippines. She is a graduate of Presbyterian University and Theological Seminary in South Korea and of Silliman University Divinity School.



Sunday, September 30, 2018

Peacemaking and practice

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

John 4:4–30, 39–42

The woman said to him, “Sir, give me this water, so that I may never be thirsty.”

Reflection: Two thousand years ago, a scar ran across the land of Palestine, separating Judea from Samaria — two groups of people ideologically and ethnically opposed. Segregated.

Then, one day, a Jewish man — whom some reputed to be the Messiah — crossed that line. He sat down at a well, at midday, tired and thirsty. He asked a Samaritan woman to give him a drink. And when she registered her shock, Jesus — her supposed enemy — did something even more surprising. He talked to her as an equal. They talked about faith and theology, about the future of their two peoples.

It wasn't easy. Trust had to be earned. Over and over again, the conversation threatened to veer into sectarianism. But Jesus kept talking about that water. The kind of water that life — I mean, real living — isn't possible without. The kind of water that, when you drink it, you know you're somebody because you're loved and protected by the only Body that matters.

To this woman, for the first time in the Gospel of John, Jesus spoke the divine name, the name uttered to Moses in Egypt, the name that cried for a people's freedom. And when she heard this name, she dropped her jar and ran back to the city, where she told her people to come and see the Messiah.

This is the pathway to peace. People who *know* each other *care* about each other, and people who care about each other *stand up* for each other. If peace is vulnerability, relationship, experience, and witness, then it is ultimately not an idea but a practice. It is building bridges and crossing divides. This week, you are invited to reflect upon peacemaking in practice around the world.

Action: What line are you too afraid or angry to cross? Cross it today. Meet someone. Discuss how your two communities can work together for mutual peace and thriving.

Prayer: O Living Water, quench our thirst for hope and justice. Wash away all the scars that border and sever the body of Christ. Rain down peace. Amen.



Rev. Patrick D. Heery is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Auburn, New York, and is the former editor of *Presbyterians Today* and *Unbound: An Interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice*.



Monday, October 1, 2018

Peacemaking and practice: growing hope

By Doug Dicks

Psalm 9:9–10

The LORD is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble.

Reflection: The Nassar family of Bethlehem has been struggling for years to hold on to their family land. Located southwest of Bethlehem, this area of about 100 acres is situated on a fertile hilltop, and is today surrounded by Israeli settlements and construction. From the crest of the hill, one can see settlement expansion in most every direction. The family land was purchased back in 1916, by the grandfather of the current generation, and they have legal documents as proof; yet they are continuing to fight a legal battle in Israeli courts over ownership of the land once known as Daher's Vineyard. Daoud and his older brother, Daher, work the land, and over the years their plight has drawn international attention, so much so that today the land and the hilltop is known as the Tent of Nations. Visitors from all around the world come to hear Daoud speak. Many come to work the land and plant olive trees or grapevines, so that the land is continually worked. The land produces almonds, olives, grapes, figs, wheat, and other crops.

On the way up the hilltop, one encounters a stone with these words on it: "We refuse to be enemies." Daoud speaks about how his Christian faith has sustained both him and his family, and how the visitors who come to hear their story provide them with hope.

Despite the continued threats, and sometimes the destruction of trees and plants by Israeli settlers, they continue to plant and to work the land. Summer camps are held for children from Bethlehem and the surrounding areas. All this activity has also encouraged other land owners to come back and work their own land.

Action: What could you "plant" today in the world that would bear fruit for the next generation? What could you do to encourage someone today?

Prayer: God of creation, your son Jesus reminded us that the meek will inherit the earth. Let those who love the land live long upon it, and may their labors not be in vain. Help us to care for our creation. Amen.



Doug Dicks has returned to his spiritual home as Presbyterian World Mission associate for ecumenical partnerships in the Middle East. He is serving as facilitator for education for justice and peacemaking at the invitation of St. Andrew's Scots Memorial Church in Jerusalem. His work enables the larger PC(USA) community to advocate for peace and justice in Israel and Palestine.



Tuesday, October 2, 2018

Peacemaking and practice: living water

By Doug Dicks

Psalm 36:7–9

**They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.
For with you is the fountain of life; in your light we see light.**

Reflection: The Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem is a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting sustainable development in the occupied Palestinian territories and the self-reliance of the Palestinian people through greater control over their natural resources. Water is one of those resources. Recently, there has been considerable interest in the notion of harvesting rainwater. The idea is to renovate and recondition the ancient Roman cisterns that exist throughout the southern part of the West Bank, between Bethlehem and Hebron. Eighty-three such cisterns have been identified, and if cleaned, replastered, and outfitted, could be potential sources of water-holding catchments for farmers and those who raise livestock.

Of particular interest is the potential for these cisterns to contribute to the general water supply in the West Bank.

For Palestinians, both political and military restraints are the major cause of today's water shortages. And that lack of access to water is a major contributor to the conflict today. Palestinian water consumption is approximately 55 liters per person, per day, while the minimum recommendation from the World Health Organization is 100 liters per person, per day.

There is hope that these ancient cisterns might provide a new — yet old — solution to obtaining water in this semi-arid part of the world. The result would be another step along the peace process between Palestinians and Israelis.

Action: How much water do you consume on a daily basis? How might you conserve more water? What other resources might you be more sparing with?

Prayer: God of nature and God of rain, pour out your Holy Spirit of love, grace, and mercy on all who thirst for your living water. Open the eyes of those of us who live with an abundance of resources, to become mindful of those who manage with so little. In Christ's precious name we pray, Amen.



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Wednesday, October 3, 2018

Peacemaking and practice: the risk in building bridges

By Rev. Kurt Esslinger

Acts 21:15–26

“What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come. So do what we tell you.”

Reflection: Communities, like the early church, that work on traversing boundaries must look for ways to navigate the anxiety of those who seek to maintain those borders. Paul’s friends gave him suggestions to calm the angry reaction in the community and to manage the risk. Rev. Moon Ik-hwan grew up north of the 1945 division that separated Koreans from each other, but ended up on the southern side during the Korean War. In 1989, inspired by his work of translating the Bible into Korean, he decided to travel into North Korea. There he preached at an Easter worship in Pyongyang about hope for reunification and famously embraced Chairman Kim Il-sung as a brother rather than an enemy. Rev. Moon was arrested when he returned to South Korea — just as Paul was eventually arrested for his efforts. Still his visit helped to inspire the work that continues today building bridges to end the conflict that led to the Korean War. Koreans now hope government dialogues this year will accomplish a peace treaty to end the state of war.

Action: What can you do to navigate the risks of building bridges across conflicts? In what ways are we hindering the Spirit’s work of building those bridges? Add your voice to our Korean Church partners’ campaign for a peace treaty in Korea: koreapeacetreaty.com.

Prayer: Holy Spirit, give us the strength to cross the boundaries of conflict and meet our supposed “enemies” as fellow humans and children of God. Amen.



Rev. Kurt Esslinger is a PC(USA) mission co-worker in South Korea and assigned to the National Council of Churches in Korea (NCCCK) to assist their Reconciliation and Unification Department. He has also been proposed as the new coordinator of the Ecumenical Forum for Korea (EFK).



Thursday, October 4, 2018

Peacemaking and practice: to save life or to destroy it?

By Hyeyoung Lee

Luke 6:9–10

Then Jesus said to them, “I ask you, is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the sabbath, to save life or to destroy it?”

Reflection: The reason we keep talking about peace is because the world we live in is not peaceful. The news we hear every day is filled with violence, war, and conflict. Sometimes it seems easier or more comfortable to remain in conflict because the process of achieving peace can be messy. Korea has been in a state of war for 65 years since the armistice was signed on July 27, 1953, which means the peninsula has remained in a tense state of armed truce ever since. In many ways, it is hard to imagine what peace and reconciliation would look like for the Korean peninsula since it’s been in conflict for so long. However, we in the church have witnessed many Koreans diligently talking about the peacemaking process, acting to build a peaceful relationship, and making efforts to end the war, hoping for unification. Even though the path to get there may be messy, it is the only way to save life and do good (Luke 6:9). Through this passage, Jesus is inviting us to practice saving lives and doing good on any given day, so that we can respond to his invitation as we stretch out our hand.

Action: Let us reflect on this question. When the invitation from Jesus comes to us on any given day, do we have the courage to respond to Jesus by stretching out our hand as the person with the withered hand did?

Prayer: God of peace, help us to light the candles of peace in our hearts every day. Sometimes it becomes a small light to peacefully soothe my mind. Sometimes it becomes a torch that strengthens passion and courage. Sometimes it becomes a candle that spreads a calming and gentle fragrance to others. Amen.



Hyeyoung Lee is a mission co-worker living in Korea with her husband, Kurt Esslinger, who also is a mission co-worker, and their five-year-old son. She mainly works as a coordinator for the Young Adult Volunteer program in Korea. Hyeyoung is a native Korean who received her M.Div. at McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago.



Friday, October 5, 2018

Peacemaking and practice: accepting change

By Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Mark 6:1–6

“Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?” And they took offense at him.

Reflection: And the people murmured: “That’s Mary and Joseph’s boy. Who’s he supposed to be?”

Jesus had a tricky relationship with his home. The old adage says, “Familiarity breeds contempt,” which can be true. But perhaps the true reason they were so hard on Jesus was because he was inviting them to change. He was calling for a radical shift in how people related to God and to each other. They may have thought, “If we were good enough for you growing up, why should we change now? Are you suddenly better than the rest of us?”

The text says that, because of their unbelief, Jesus could perform no miracles in their presence. What little he did was much less than what he was capable of doing.

When we deny the comfort and identity of “home” to others, we miss out on their gifts and on opportunities to use our own gifts. To deny our siblings is to deny ourselves.

True peace isn’t comfort; it’s not maintaining the status quo. You can’t have peace if some people — and their gifts, and their stories, and their visions — are left out. True peace means accepting the one who comes home to change us.

Action: Consider the ways we bristle at the changes that come with relationships with those who are both different from and familiar to us. What change do you need to let into your life today?

Prayer: Holy One, help us welcome the transformative power of relationship. Amen.



Rev. T. Denise Anderson is the pastor of Unity Presbyterian Church in Temple Hills, Maryland, and was the co-moderator of the 222nd General Assembly (2016) of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.).



Saturday, October 6, 2018

Peacemaking and practice: humanity reclaimed

By Rev. T. Denise Anderson

Hebrews 2:6–8a

But someone has testified somewhere, “What are human beings that you are mindful of them, or mortals, that you care for them?”

Reflection: Cockroaches. Parasites. Animals.

These are all words used to refer to populations throughout the world that have been targeted for genocide, internment, extermination, deportation, and ethnic cleansing. The first step in these atrocities is always to divorce human beings from their humanity, usually through the use of dehumanizing language. If people are no longer regarded as people — if we can shift the public imagination to see them as something else — then there is no evil too great to impose upon them.

The writer of Hebrews invokes Psalm 8, which poses a humbling question: “What are humans that [God is] mindful of them?” Whatever humanity is, it is something deeply loved by God, as the Creator has shown time and time again. After all, humanity is something for which God was willing to sacrifice God’s only Son! It is something that must be cherished, protected, and, as God does, remembered.

Action: Take note of the subtle ways you strip someone of their humanity — through evening news apathy or the names we hurl in a fit of road rage. Challenge those images and messages that disregard the humanity of all.

Prayer: God, help us to see the beauty of humanity as you do. Correct us when we fail to see and love our siblings as ourselves. Make us partners with all in the work you’ve charged your children to do on earth. Amen.



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Sunday, October 7, 2018

World Communion

By Rev. Patrick D. Heery

Hebrews 1:1–4, 2:5–12

**For this reason Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers and sisters, saying,
“I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters.”**

Reflection: What does it mean to receive Communion with the whole world on this day? Will we love each other better? Will we learn to appreciate, celebrate, and understand our differences, such that they are elevated as blessings, rather than denigrated (or erased) as losses?

Jesus on this day is not ashamed to call anyone his brother or sister. That includes our enemies; that includes people different from us; and that includes us. And maybe that last one is the hardest to believe sometimes. Perhaps what often restrains our peacemaking is that we’re not sure we’re worthy of it, capable of it. How can we offer the world peace when we feel nothing like peace within?

On this day, as we receive the sacrifice of Christ’s love, and as we draw this devotional to a close, I invite us to recognize our own need for transformation. And one of the first things we have to change is this whole idea that peace is something *we* make. Peace isn’t our job. It isn’t a strategy or a project. We do not bring peace to others, just as we do not bring God to others.

Peace, like Communion, is a gift. It is grace, already abundant, already here, just waiting for us to accept it. If peace truly consists of vulnerability, relationship, experience, witness, and practice, then it must be also—and first, and last—a gift.

Today we receive the gift of peace, and we offer it to others. It works in us, so that we may be at peace and become instruments, vessels, channels of that peace.

Action: Experience the gift of Christ’s peace as you celebrate the Sacrament of Communion today. Be a channel of that peace by giving generously to the Peace & Global Witness Offering. Consider those around the world whom you are not ashamed to call sisters and brothers.



Prayer: O God of peace, at all times and in all ways, you give us peace and invite us to share it with others. Accept our gifts of peace and help us be at peace, love mercy, walk humbly, and act justly. Amen.



Rev. Patrick D. Heery is the pastor of Westminster Presbyterian Church in Auburn, New York, and is the former editor of *Presbyterians Today* and *Unbound: An Interactive Journal of Christian Social Justice*.