



Sunday, September 1, 2019

What does it mean to commit to peace?

Observing A Season of Peace

Rev. Ginna Bairby

1 Timothy 4:7b–8

Train yourself in godliness, for while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

Reflection: Today we begin the Season of Peace. Over the next five weeks, we will journey together through the Scriptures and through our own faith journeys to hear where and how Christ is calling us deeper into the work of holistic peacemaking.

For nearly 40 years, the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program has called churches to practice the things that make for peace and has helped us seek a just, holistic peace that is more than just the absence of violence. The money raised by the Peace and Global Witness Offering makes this work possible. This year, as we journey through the Season of Peace, we will reflect on four specific areas of peacemaking:

- Poverty – How does addressing the root causes of poverty further prospects for peace?
- Racism – What does it mean to make peace by disrupting the structural violence of racism?
- Violence – How are Christian peacemakers called to respond to explicit violence?
- Refugees and Migrants – How can the church support people who have been displaced by violence and are subject to more violence on their journey?

The author of 1 Timothy likens the journey of faith to a physical training regimen. I invite you to join Presbyterians around the world this month as we “train ourselves for godliness” and strengthen our capacity for peacemaking.

Action: As you begin your walk through the Season of Peace, what are you hoping to learn? To gain? To let go of? Today, identify one goal for these next five weeks — one change you’d like to see in your own social and spiritual practice.

Prayer: Gracious God, you came to this earth in flesh and blood as the Prince of Peace. Come again today. Train my heart for godliness, my hands for service, my voice for advocacy, my feet for obedience. Walk with me and with your church through this Season of Peace. Amen.



Rev. Bairby is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Taos, NM. She has worked in the PC(USA)’s Compassion, Peace and Justice ministries and served as a Young Adult Volunteer in Peru 2009-2010. She holds an MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary.



Monday, September 2, 2019

What does it mean to commit to peace?

Peacemaking through interfaith community

Rev. Eric Markman

Psalm 145:9

The Lord is good to all, and God's compassion is over all that God has made.

Reflection: I serve a multicultural church that has strong relationships with our neighboring Jewish temple and mosque. Three years ago, we worked together to create a large organic garden for our town. Over 50 young people from the mosque, temple and church joined together to prepare the garden beds. We all took turns planting, watering, weeding, and eventually harvesting over 700 pounds of vegetables for our food pantry.

This project has forged deep interfaith relationships. During the bomb threats to Jewish institutions last year, a temple leader called to ask if they could, if need be, shelter in our building. Of course we said yes, and we gave them a key in case of emergency. When the Tree of Life Synagogue was so heinously attacked in Pittsburgh, our session wrote a letter offering to stand outside the temple during their hours of worship. After church, our whole congregation — West African, Chinese, Brazilian, European and India — walked together to deliver the letter as they finished Sunday school. More recently, the temple and our church stood in support of the mosque after the vicious attack in New Zealand, and the mosque and the temple stood with us after the horrible attack in Sri Lanka.

These bonds are built on love and respect. Simply put, we see God in one another.

Action: Isaiah 2:4 says that on the Lord's mountain, nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. Who is to build that mountain but us? Take an inventory of the religious communities in your area. Do you know one another, or do you live parallel lives? Reach out today to someone from a tradition different from your own. To love one another, we have to know one another first.

Prayer: God, create in us new hearts. Help us see the value of every human being. Help us take chances and see beyond borders and religious groups. Teach us to love and respect all people, to welcome strangers and stand together in this broken world. May we live the joy of your Son's love into being in this world. In Christ's name, Amen.



Rev. Markman is pastor of Hartford Presbyterian Church in Natick, MA. He deeply enjoys the ministry and is married to Rev. Cindy Kohlmann.



Tuesday, September 3, 2019

What does it mean to commit to peace?

Temptations to denial

Rev. Dr. Robert B. Woodruff

Mark 14:72

... Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And Peter broke down and wept.

Reflection: Denial serves as a barrier between a person and an unpalatable truth. And Peter, oft-depicted in the New Testament as a faithful “rock,” is forever etched in the Christian memory for over-confidently declaring he would never deny his master, then publicly denying him three times.

Peter’s denial is narrated in all four Gospels. It is an insightful lens through which to view our own bouts of denial. One way we become susceptible to denial is when we—ourselves, our churches, or our nation—turn a blind eye to those with the greatest need at home and abroad. When we do, we deny Jesus. Like Peter, the faithfulness to which we are called is predicated upon acknowledging difficult realities and not retreating from them.

The earthly fate of Jesus—and the potential social consequences of openly following him—seemed too much for Peter to shoulder. But Jesus did not ask Peter to be the savior. He simply asked Peter to love and follow him. Jesus asks no more and no less of us. Embracing God’s love moves us beyond denial to a place where we can confront hard truths, trusting in God’s power to change them.

Despite Peter’s denial of Christ in his darkest hour, God did not give up on Peter. Consequently, Peter did not give up on his faith. His tears were a first step at lowering his barriers to truth. He came to terms with his denial and faithfully followed the risen Christ unto death.

Action: Take a moment today to consider the world’s denial about the welfare of vulnerable populations at home and abroad. In what ways does that denial creep into your own heart and mind? Name that denial for what it is and reaffirm your commitment to the faith and love of Jesus.

Prayer: We believe in you, O Lord; help thou our unbelief. Open us to the wonderful possibilities of your love that transforms hearts and lives. Move us beyond barriers, that your love may abound. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Woodruff is pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque, NM. He holds a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry from Columbia Theological Seminary. He served as a Young Adult Volunteer in Guatemala in 2000.



Wednesday September 4, 2019

What does it mean to commit to peace?

The promise of equity

Ekama Eni

Psalm 96:10-11

Say among the nations “The Lord is sovereign! The world is firmly established; it shall never be moved. God will judge the peoples with equity.” Let the heavens be glad, and let the earth rejoice.

Reflection: Merriam-Webster defines equity as a) “justice according to natural law or right; b) “the money value of a property or of an interest in a property in excess of claims or liens against it;” or c) “a system of law originating in the English chancery and comprising a settled and formal body of legal and procedural rules and doctrines that supplement, aid, or override common and statute law and are designed to protect rights and enforce duties fixed by substantive law.”

When I think of what God’s reign on earth might look like, I think of the word equity. The psalmist speaks of a God who will come to judge the people in order to bring about equity. Equality alone is not enough. The Hebrew *meshar*—translated as equity in the NRSV translation above—can also be rendered as evenness and uprightness.

Even today, when God’s reign has not yet come in all its fullness, we can practice this holy equity. When we engage in actions and advocate for policies that ensure safe and secure homes for all of our siblings, when we seek to restore the voting rights of those who have been disenfranchised by incarceration, when we leave water in the desert for those on treacherous journeys to new life, we participate in an equity that comes from God.

The promise that God’s judgment brings about a correction in the universe gives me hope that tomorrow will be better than today. Let the heavens and earth and rejoice, indeed!

Action: Today, make sure you are registered to vote! Mark the days in your calendar for every single election for which you are eligible to vote — primaries and local elections included. If you are not eligible to vote, make sure the people you care about are registered.

Prayer: Heavenly Creator, be with us as we look to further equity in your world. We pray that you will continue to reveal yourself to us as we work toward the day when the entire earth will rejoice with you and we will hear the heavens resounding with praise. Amen.



Ekama Eni is a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York and is under care of Grace Presbytery. She served as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Scotland, working in a Church of Scotland Priority Area congregation. There, her call to ministry — and an affinity for being outdoors — were stirred. She is an immigrant, a proud Texan, and a lover of food and naps.



Thursday, September 5, 2019

What does it mean to commit to peace?

Taking a risk

Rev. Emily Brewer

Mark 15:12–21

“Crucify him!”

Reflection: There was a kid in my second-grade class named Paul whom other kids called “Paul Bunyan.” Maybe it sounds innocuous, but the intent was to ostracize him, and it worked. I never teased Paul, but I was scared that if I was nice to him or stood up to the bullies, their attention would be turned toward me.

I still think about Paul and how I did nothing while he was being teased. I always come back to the question: “What do I stand to lose by acting? What do I (or we) have to gain by taking a risk?”

This story of Jesus’ ‘trial’ from Mark has a lot to teach about violence, peacemaking and risk:

- Those in power will try to obfuscate their violence: Pilate pretends he is following the will of the crowd, but he is the only one with authority to condemn.
- Violence begets violence: The crowds are violent. Pilate orders violence. The soldiers are violent toward Jesus and then turn that violence outward toward a passerby, forcing Simon of Cyrene to participate in Jesus’ death by carrying the cross.
- It’s easy to go along with the crowd: When everyone’s yelling “Crucify!” it’s easy to join in. When it seems like everyone is saying one thing, look for the people who are silent and make common cause. How could this story have been different if that had happened?

Peace does not come about through passivity, and it certainly does not come from those in power. It comes by disrupting violence through active, courageous, and often risky nonviolence.

Action: What’s a cause you care about? Who is leading the liberation movement around that issue? Show up to a meeting. If that’s not hard, show up to an action. Ask yourself what you have to give to the movement. If you feel resistance, ask yourself why. If you feel unsafe, talk about it with someone. If you feel uncomfortable, try to push yourself to do it anyway.

Prayer: God who moves across boundaries, move in our hearts and spur us to action. When we feel our hearts beat faster because we’re scared, help us wonder if that’s you calling us to take a risk. Give us community to sustain us and friends to nourish us on this journey. Help us to find joy in the struggle and to take risks for the sake of peace. Amen.



Rev. Brewer is executive director of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship. She was also a Young Adult Volunteer in Guatemala and Nashville, Tenn. (2009-2011). She lives in Brooklyn, New York, but will always consider East Tennessee home.



Friday, September 6, 2019

What does it mean to commit to peace?

Finding God in the pause

Susan Keil Smith

Psalm 40:1

I waited patiently for the Lord; God inclined to me and heard my cry.

Reflection: When I reflect on this Psalm, I recognize that patience and peacefulness are intertwined. The psalmist says, “I waited patiently for the Lord.” Do I? Can I? Practicing mindfulness reminds me that waiting for God’s time can be challenging, particularly in this fast-paced world. Yet, it is waiting that makes room for God’s spirit to move.

When I worked in early childhood education, I would often remind children (and adults) to “stop, take a breath, and relax” before responding. That practice takes practice, but oh how important it is. Behaviorally, a pause allows us to step away from strong emotions and regain perspective. Theologically, a pause invites God’s presence into the situation.

The psalmist continues, “Here I am.” I have come into the presence of God, and I have waited patiently. Here I am, God. Use me to bring peace to this situation. I cannot make the peace, but God can.

“May all who seek God rejoice and be glad.” The psalm ends, and I feel a sense of peace flow over my anxious moments. May it be so.

Action: Practicing mindfulness is a discipline. Today, give it a try. Take a breath. Feel the breath. Inhale the life-giving air; let go. Ask God to take charge.

Prayer: Holy and kind God, may I allow my life to capture your presence in each situation that I encounter this day. May I be a living vessel of God’s love with all I see, speak, and do. Amen.



Susan Keil Smith lives in Albuquerque, NM, and has been a member of First Presbyterian church for 43 years, coming from New York where she was at Marble Collegiate Church. She is an ordained elder and active deacon, working for justice and safe church awareness in addition to her commitment to Presbyterian Women and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.

Saturday, September 7, 2019

What does it mean to commit to peace?

Just peacemaking: painfully and patiently

Rev. Raafat L. Zaki

Mark 15:33–34

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o'clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

Reflection: Suffering and injustice are human realities from which some Christians falsely believe they are exempt as a benefit of their faith. At the center of the Gospel is the saving grace revealed on the cross and at the empty tomb. Jesus' last documented prayer before he died was: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" Jesus' crucifixion was an act of both religious persecution and political execution targeting an innocent man. Yet Jesus did not waver, even when he felt God had abandoned him.

As Christ's disciples, we are called to demonstrate Jesus' love and teachings practically and concretely in our daily lives. Like Jesus, we will suffer the consequences. We may encounter betrayal and opposition from within, from family, from society, and even from the church community. Still we serve faithfully, responding with love and patience.

God calls us to seek righteousness. This is a lifetime journey, and we are works in progress. We are called to be patient as we labor for the truth to be revealed. As Jesus told his disciples before heading to the cross, "*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!*" (John 16:33)

Action: Take time today to consider where you face opposition and negative consequences on your Christian journey. Identify three spiritual practices to help you build patience and overcome discouragement.

Prayer: Creator God, thank you for creating me in your holy image. Thank you for calling me to follow Jesus. Thank you for being present in my life. Thank you for your promise never to forsake me, even when I feel alone and forgotten. Thank you for forgiving my sins and for loving me unconditionally. Amen.



Rev. Zaki is a transformational leader in social witness and just-peacemaking. He is a teaching elder and has served in leadership positions with all four councils of the PC(USA). Currently he serves church and society as Synod of the Covenant Executive.



Sunday, September 8, 2019

Making peace by addressing root causes of poverty

Golden calves and American idols

Rev. Ginna Bairby

1 Kings 12:21–33

So the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold. He said to the people, “You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.”

Reflection: You’d think King Jeroboam would at least have read the book.

Today’s Scripture passage tells the story of how Israel divided into Northern and Southern kingdoms. Fearing that his subjects might defect to the South if they traveled to Jerusalem to worship, King Jeroboam of the North sets up two altars in his territory: one at Bethel and one at Dan.

And what did Jeroboam erect at these altars? Two golden calves. Clearly, he missed *that* lesson from the book of Exodus! Then again, some idols die hard.

Israel had its golden calves; America has its money. We want it, and we dedicate our lives to chasing after it. Money captivates the American imagination like nothing else. We bow down at the altar of neoliberal capitalism and the free market, and no one dares to ask questions.

But the golden calf did not bring the people of Israel out of Egypt, and neither can money save us — it never has, and it never will. Instead, our idolatrous pursuit of wealth traps many of our neighbors — and many of us! — in cycles of poverty. This week, we’ll talk openly about money. It’s time to expose the golden calf for what it really is.

Action: Have a frank conversation with a friend or family member today about money. Notice what feelings come up. Sit with any discomfort or embarrassment that the conversation brings.

Prayer: God of abundance, teach us to be satisfied with enough. Turn our hearts away from the golden calves and idols we set up and back toward you and our neighbors. Free us from our mindset of scarcity, and free us to practice radical generosity. Amen.



Rev. Bairby is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Taos, NM. She has worked in the PC(USA)’s Compassion Peace and Justice ministries and served as a Young Adult Volunteer in Peru 2009-2010. She holds an MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary.

Monday September 9, 2019

Making peace by addressing root causes of poverty

Integrity at home

Rev. Rachel Shepherd

Psalm 101:2

I will study the way that is blameless. When shall I attain it? I will walk with integrity of heart within my house.

Reflection: This psalm asks a perennial human question: “When shall I attain the way that is blameless? Also known as: How are we to live as children of God?” I know I’ve asked this question before; maybe you have, too. We see the brokenness in ourselves, our communities, and the world. We see God’s children in poverty, and we see the systems that keep them there. We see predatory lending, an unlivable minimum wage, gentrification, the school-to-prison pipeline, student loans, medical debt ... the list goes on. When shall we attain the way that is blameless? How long, O Lord? How do we study it? How do we live it?

The answer is right there. We don’t attain the blameless way by studying it. We attain the way that is blameless when we walk with integrity of heart in our own houses. It’s a counterintuitive truth — and an incomplete one. Too often, in our eagerness to make a big difference, we forget that small differences add up. None of us can single-handedly change the world, but we can all change our circles of influence, our houses. Those circles, when they overlap and combine, add up to the world. It’s not the whole answer to economic justice, but it’s a solid place to start. We are called to act with integrity to make ethical purchases that don’t put or keep people in poverty, to work for local laws that create and maintain abundance rather than scarcity, to look each other in the eye and see the face of God looking back. This is how we will find the way that is blameless.

Action: Today, look for one small change you can make in your own house that will contribute to a more economically just world. Who benefits from the coffee you purchase? The clothes you buy? The food you eat? Today, commit to make one change to walk with integrity within your house.

Prayer: Dear God, we are impatient. We want to know when we’ll get there! When will everyone have what they need? When will we find the secret that makes it all work? We know that you are impatient, too — impatient with us. Please give us the energy, intelligence, imagination and love to do your work in your name, embracing our own neediness and meeting people in theirs. Amen.



Rev. Shepherd is Associate Presbyterian for Discipleship in the Presbytery of the Peaks. She bakes occasionally, writes when possible, and always wonders what her dog is thinking.



Tuesday, September 10, 2019

Making peace by addressing root causes of poverty

Singing America

Rev. Miriam Foltz

Psalm 101:1

I will sing of loyalty and of justice; to you, O Lord, I will sing.

Reflection: As I left the grocery store, the mother and child asked me for Greyhound bus fare. With wrinkled clothes and wearied faces, they had barely a backpack between them, despite being hundreds of miles from home. I wrestled with all the implications, both on my bank account and the amount of truth in the details. As the grocery store employees ordered the woman to vacate the premises, she delivered a final plea, and I had to answer yes.

“I hear America singing,” wrote Walt Whitman, of industrial, productive America.

“I, too, sing America,” wrote Langston Hughes, of segregated Jim Crow America.

This mother before me sang of America — of tenuous employment and empty promises, limited education and broken families. This mother sang of poverty that I had not known personally, and regardless of the truth of her story, her story sang true.

It matters what songs we hear, especially as our society has grown increasingly siloed according to socio-economic status. How often do you interact with someone from a different class than you? When was the last time you shared a meal with someone who works a minimum-wage job?

Current reports show that 1 out of every 5 children in the U.S. lives in poverty. Expanding the qualifications to include low-income individuals, we see that almost 48% of Americans are singing this mother’s song.¹ Scripture is serious about economic justice; we must be serious too. We cannot remain silent in this era of increasing poverty.

Action: Our work to end poverty in America begins with listening to the songs of Americans all around us. Singing God’s justice requires us to talk frankly and honestly about money and economic privilege. I invite you to join me in self-analysis today using this tool: <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/06/are-you-in-the-american-middle-class/>

Prayer: God, you have given us the abundance of creation. We pray that everyone might have clean water at the turning of a tap. We pray that all might have safe shelter this night. We remember our neighbors who have experienced eviction this day. Open our hearts. Open our ears. O Lord, may we sing of your justice forever; may we seek it together this day. Amen.

¹ https://kairoscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Poverty-Fact-sheet-revised-6-14_cc.pdf



Rev. Foltz serves as pastor for New Castle Presbyterian Church in New Castle, DE. She loves reading, making music, and expanding her understanding of God and her neighbors through everyday conversations and international travel when possible.



Wednesday, September 11, 2019

Making peace by addressing root causes of poverty

Money matters

Rev. Rachel Shepherd

Luke 18:22

“There is still one thing lacking. Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

Reflection: Jesus is like that person who stops you on the way out of the office and says, “Do you have time for one more thing?” It’s never as quick and simple as they make it sound.

Whether selling all that you own and distributing the money to the poor counts as ‘one thing’ is questionable, but Jesus’ words remind us of the difference between simplicity and easiness. Most of Jesus’ commands are simple; none of them are easy. Love your neighbor. Pray for those who persecute you. Come, follow me. It’s only a series of ‘one thing’ after another. It’s just that each ‘one thing’ will take a lifetime or more to understand, much less to do.

In this case, it’s at least two things. 1) Sell all that you own, and 2) distribute the money to the poor. Jesus could have simplified it by telling us to give all that we own directly to the poor. I always wondered why he adds the extra step — getting the money for our goods and *then* giving the money away. But anyone who’s been poor knows why: money is the best way to help! It’s simple, versatile, efficient, and basically universal. It maintains the recipient’s dignity. She gets to decide how to use it, unlike the T-shirt which she might have a whole pile of, or the food which she might be allergic to, or the house that might not be right for her family.

Followers of Jesus are beginning to face the hard truth that our charity is often more about us than the people we help. Mission trips make us feel good. Giving old clothes to Goodwill frees up space in our closets. But what do my neighbors really need? We’ve all heard the stories of buildings being repainted just to give mission-trippers something to do. When we give money, we honor dignity and autonomy. Local economies can thrive on their own terms. A pair of shoes or an old coat is not going to get someone out of poverty. Money can, and it is just about the only thing that can. It’s still not easy, but it is that simple.

Action: Make a donation today to an organization that enables people to lift themselves out of poverty.

Prayer: Dear God, thank you for the bluntness and clarity of your Word. Give us strength to let go of those things we think we need. Give us eyes to see the truth of poverty and abundance everywhere we go. Amen.



Rev. Shepherd is associate presbyter for Discipleship in the Presbytery of the Peaks. She bakes occasionally, writes when possible, and always wonders what her dog is thinking.



Thursday, September 12, 2019

Making peace by addressing root causes of poverty

Confronting the law

Rev. Miriam Foltz

1 Timothy 1:8

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately.

Reflection: Timothy writes that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for those who stray from the path of righteousness. But what happens when laws themselves are corrupted by sin? The existence of a law does not make it inherently just.

The Civil Rights Movement combatted the immoral legality of racism, from public transportation to employment to education. Memphis sanitation workers organized a strike against their low wages and harsh working conditions. These were two of many *legal* methods city leaders used to undervalue the labor of black men. Half a century later, we are still called to address the prejudicial employment practices and economic poverty perpetuated by the law.

Scripture has a lot to say about how workers are treated. Deuteronomy 5:14 commands the Israelites to extend the Sabbath to the whole community — children, slaves, livestock, and foreigners.

James 5:1 and 5:4 condemns unjust employers: “Come now, you rich people, weep and wail for the miseries that are coming to you.... The wages of the laborers who mowed your fields, which you kept back by fraud, cry out and the cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord of hosts.”

Today, the laws of our nation favor corporations and people of great wealth. This is how Amazon could legally pay \$0 in federal income tax, despite \$11 billion in profits;² yet, a minimum-wage worker can’t afford a two-bedroom apartment anywhere in the U.S.³ Our call to seek peace and pursue it is a call to seek the welfare of our neighbors, particularly our neighbors working minimum wage jobs.

Action: The New Poor People’s Campaign is a coalition working at local and state levels to enact just economic policies, such as a \$15 minimum wage. Connect with your local chapter of the campaign here: <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/>.

Prayer: Jesus, you are the vine, and we are the branches. Root us to grow in your Spirit. Show us your way. Speak your truth. Send us to live our lives as you would will us to live. Transform our greed to gracious giving. Amen.

² <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/04/03/why-amazon-paid-no-federal-income-tax.html>

³ <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/06/26/minimum-wage-workers-cannot-afford-2-bedroom-rental-anywhere-in-the-us.html>



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Friday, September 13, 2019

Making peace by addressing root causes of poverty

Refuge for the poor

Rev. Rachel Shepherd

Psalm 14:6

You would confound the plans of the poor, but the LORD is their refuge.

Reflection: The Lord is the refuge of the poor. A shelter. A safe space.

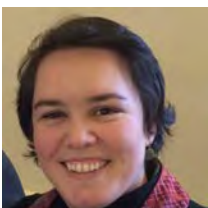
People with housing often take this safety for granted, but people who are homeless don't have refuge in the same way. Soup kitchens and homeless shelters seek to offer safety to people experiencing homelessness — and sometimes they do. But sometimes, residents are subject to violence, theft, harsh rules and regulations, proselytizing, or assumptions about their gender or sexuality. Ask someone why they sleep outside and you will likely hear a story about a bad experience at a shelter. A self-created space, no matter how temporary or exposed, often serves as a refuge more meaningfully than a shelter where strangers who have never known poverty set the tone and the rules.

The Lord is the refuge of the poor and always will be. But God doesn't have to be someone's *only* refuge. We can do a better job of creating physical space for people without homes. We can work with people experiencing homelessness to reimagine the spaces they share.

Let's admit that we sometimes confound the plans of the poor — when we make assumptions about their past, present, or future; when we don't trust them to have money or space of their own; when we cram them into shelters where they stand in line to enter and are rushed to get out. Instead, let's listen to the plans of the poor, let's believe what they say they need and want, and let's work together to create the refuge they envision.

Action: Take a look at the organizations addressing homelessness in your community. If you know a shelter or organization that works with homeless people and doesn't have any in their leadership structure, that's one simple place to start: put people on the board, at the table, in the room where it happens.

Prayer: Dear God, you are the refuge of the poor, yet so often we confound each other's plans. Help us trust each other and hear every voice at your table. Guide us in every decision we make. Amen.



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Saturday, September 14, 2019

Making peace by addressing root causes of poverty

Hearing good news

Rev. Miriam Foltz

Jeremiah 4:19

My anguish, my anguish! I writhe in pain! Oh, the walls of my heart! My heart is beating wildly; I cannot keep silent; for I hear the sound of the trumpet, the alarm of war.

Reflection: Jeremiah heard the trumpet; I hear cell phone news alerts. Of late, these alerts have been of the Jeremiah 4:19 nature. Even before I read the headline, I feel my pulse rate elevating and my apocalyptic warning bells going off. The news cycle does not make for peaceful contemplation. So it was a gift to see a recent New York Times headline: “Winning the War on Poverty.” Could it actually be happening here?! The secondary headline clarified: “The Canadians are doing it; we’re not.” Ah.

Between 2015 and 2017, the poverty rate in Canada decreased by 20%.⁴ How? A multi-faceted strategy of community conversations, a context-specific plan addressing localized issues, and ultimately a lot of collaborative activities based on geographic concentration of social services. Such a process involves trust and patience. Do we have the community trust and corporate patience to do the same?

How do we move from panic about poverty to recognizing that effective solutions require relational trust? How can we hear Christ’s words that “the poor will always be with you” not as an excuse to ignore poverty, but as an expression of our vocation: to walk alongside people who are poor?

Action: It will take a cultural shift for our nation to move from the ‘war on poverty’ mentality to community-based solutions that address root causes. Take some time today to consider the way your church interacts with people who are poor. Do your ministries focus on short-term relief or long-term stability? How might your community creatively adapt these ministries to address both?

Prayer: Holy God, Three-in-One, what are you up to today? The unknowns in our lives overwhelm us. We feel like we are only a couple of steps away from disaster. The trumpets sound all around us. Speak your quiet whisper to settle our hearts. Provide us with imagination and patience. May your kingdom come this day; we await the news alert to our phones. Amen.

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/04/opinion/canada-poverty-record.html>



Rev. Foltz serves as pastor for New Castle Presbyterian Church in New Castle, DE. She loves reading, making music, and expanding her understanding of God and her neighbors through everyday conversations and international travel when possible.



Sunday, September 15, 2019

Making peace by disrupting systematic racism

Reflecting the glory of God

Rev. Ginna Bairby

Psalm 19:1

The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims God's handiwork.

Reflection: Racism is perhaps the most pernicious form of violence in our world today.

Sometimes the violence of racism is explicit. A white police officer shoots an unarmed black teenager. A Latina girl is bullied in her elementary school by classmates telling her to "Go back where you came from."

But often, the systemic violence of racism is implicit and hard for a (white) observer to see. It's in the redlining that prohibited people of color from living in certain neighborhoods. It's in the microaggressions: the black woman who repeatedly asks her white co-workers not to touch her hair, or the Asian-American man who is asked, "But where are you from *really*?" It's in the devaluing comments from white people who insist, "But I don't see color!"

God sees color. God paints in color. God delights in the vast diversity of humans God has created.

The heavens declare the glory of God; all of creation bears witness to God's handiwork. How much more then does humanity reflect God's glory — we who are created in God's own image? Diversity is an expression of God's own self. Racism, explicit or implicit, is violence against the very image of God and the Body of Christ.

Action: Today, look into every face you see — in person, in a picture, on the news, etc. Each time you see a new face, silently say to yourself, "That is what God looks like." Marvel in the beauty and diversity of God's image.

Prayer: God of all creation, I long to see your face. Not just in the stars, trees, and mountains, but in the faces of my sisters, brothers, and siblings. Thank you for painting this world in color. Holy Spirit, empower us all to marvel at your reflection and interrupt the sin of racism. Amen.



Rev. Bairby is Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Taos, NM. She has worked in the PC(USA)'s Compassion, Peace and Justice ministries and served as a Young Adult Volunteer in Peru 2009-2010. She holds an MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary.



Monday, September 16, 2019

Making peace by disrupting systematic racism

The problem of power

Rev. Jessica Vazquez Torres

Matthew 4:1 (CEB)

Then the Spirit led Jesus up into the wilderness so that the devil might tempt him.

Reflection: Power. We struggle with how to use it responsibly. When asked about power, many people respond with a paraphrase of Lord Acton's words: "Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely."⁵ In the wilderness, it is *power* that the devil entices Jesus to use for his own gain. Jesus resists temptation by reminding the devil that power belongs only to God.

History is littered with evidence of our nation's misuses of power. Think of the numerous exercises of military and diplomatic power that might be deployed to pursue a 'peace' that advances US economic and political agendas.

But it's not just our government. We, too, get wrapped up in the power games of the United States. We buy into the invitation to think of our safety, security, and needs at the expense of everyone else's. We fail to question policies or laws that target our 'enemies' because we are locked in an 'us versus them' mentality. Just as the devil whispered to Jesus, politicians, preachers, and other influencers sell us selfish and 'redemptive' notions of war.

How are Christians living in the most powerful nation in the world to respond? Perhaps, like Jesus, we are invited not to reject power but to remember that power belongs to God. God gives us power not to advance our own interests, but to seek a world in which all of creation is free. The question is: Will we resist the devil?

Action: Resist the devil the one shrouded in policies that normalize war and instigate nativist self-protection. Call your federal and state legislators today. Tell them to stop feeding the military and law enforcement machinery that targets brown, black, immigrant, and LGBTQ bodies.

Prayer: God of all power, we confess that we misuse and waste the power you have given us. Strengthen us to resist the whisperings of the devil's temptation to selfishness. Remind us that power belongs to you, for the sole purpose of ushering in a world where all thrive. Amen.

⁵ <https://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/absolute-power-corrupts-absolutely.html>



Rev. Vazquez Torres works in antiracism, anti-oppression, and cultural competency. A 1.5-Generation ESL Queer Latina of Puerto Rican descent, she holds a BA in Criminal Justice, an MDiv from Christian Theological Seminary, and an MTS from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. When not on a plane, she attempts to become a bread baker, cultivates community with her spouse, Laura, and sings songs badly with full abandon.



Tuesday, September 17, 2019

Making peace by disrupting systematic racism

Intellectual bigotry and racism

Joseph Jadway Marasigan

1 Corinthians 1:30 (NIV)

It is because of God that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.

Reflection: In his letter to the Corinthians, the Apostle Paul warns his readers about the limitations of human wisdom. He lists some examples of people known for their intellectual prowess: “Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law?” Paul admonishes early believers’ overbearing — and sometimes ruthless — desire to ‘get it all right.’

Heavy-handed and dogmatic clinging to what we believe to be “right” or “true” leads us to the kind of intellectual bigotry that makes racism so insidious. Racial and cultural insularity paves the slippery slope to prejudice and even supremacy, where we stop regarding certain ideas and beliefs as *different* from our own and start to see them as *inferior*.

Paul says that God has made foolish the purveyors of human wisdom. God regularly makes foolish the wisdom of this world. God’s wisdom is not about ‘getting it right.’ On the contrary, it calls us to listen and understand before we seek to be understood.

Christian wisdom can be found in the many ironies and paradoxes that God reveals to us in Scripture and in one another. Ultimately, God’s own nature is a paradox, for our righteous God loves sinners — loves us so much that God sent us his only Son.

Action: Let’s try a thought experiment: For a moment today, try holding your values, beliefs, language, and even your religion as a contingency — a product of time and chance. Radically doubt the vocabularies that justify your daily actions. Talk to someone from a different cultural background about their vocabularies and values. Suspend your own judgment about whose values are ‘closer to reality’ or ‘better,’ and listen for a whisper of the wisdom of God.

Prayer: Heavenly God, we pray for peace in our lives — at school, at work, and in churches around the world. Turn our intolerance into love and acceptance. Look with compassion on the entire human race. Take away the arrogance and hatred which have made us indifferent to the needs of humankind. Break down the walls that separate us and reunite us in your bond of love. Amen.



Joseph Jadway 'JJ' Marasigan is a member of First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills, NY, and currently serves as a delegate to the New York City Presbytery. He is a member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Activist Council. He writes primarily on the areas of social justice, agrarian reform, and human rights.



Wednesday, September 18, 2019

Making peace by disrupting systematic racism

The problem with purity

Rev. Jessica Vazquez Torres

Psalm 15:1-3 (CEB)

Who can live in your tent, Lord? Who can dwell on your holy mountain? The person who ... does no damage with their talk, does no harm to a friend, doesn't insult a neighbor.

Reflection: For a country purporting to be a melting pot, the United States is deeply invested in the invented notion of 'purity.' From the 'One Drop Rule' used to decide who is black to the blood quantum policy used to determine who counts as Native American, the question of who is good enough, pure enough, and white enough to join our experiment continues today.

Our nation claims to welcome all, but full welcome is primarily reserved for those who are white, straight, Christian, able-bodied, healthy, educated, and believers in the projects of whiteness and capitalism. Those who colonized our nation centuries ago invested in the mythology that declares the United States a 'City on a Hill,' a new Jerusalem for God's new chosen people. Yet we conveniently forget God's commands. We ignore the psalmist's call to a social fabric founded on truth and a commitment to do no harm. Our government engages in practices that normalize violence and punish the poor, while bending over backwards for the wealthy. We internalize the twisted logic central to white dominance, confusing integrity with purity and responsibility with perfection.

If only the blameless could enter God's holy place, none of us would qualify. Instead, we are called to live with integrity, taking responsibility for the ways we treat our siblings and creation.

Action: Pick up your phone and call your representatives (are they on speed-dial yet?). Demand an end to policies that detain and incarcerate children, whether in detention centers or jails. Push for the dismantling of a prison industrial complex so racially biased that it disproportionately destroys the lives of people of color. Call for an immigration policy that treats immigrants not as criminals but as beloved children of God.

Prayer: Who can live in your tent, Lord? Who can dwell on your holy mountain? God, dismantle our desire to accept only those like us. Guard against the ways our love for those like us causes us to stumble into maintaining exclusionary communal practices that harm our siblings. Remind us of your call to live with integrity and your assurance that you will keep us grounded on the journey. Amen.



Rev. Vazquez Torres works in antiracism, anti-oppression and cultural competency. A 1.5-Generation ESL Queer Latina of Puerto Rican descent, s holds a BA in Criminal Justice, an MDiv from Christian Theological Seminary, and an MTS from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. When not on a plane, she attempts to become a bread baker, cultivates community with her spouse, Laura, and sings songs badly with full abandon.



Thursday, September 19, 2019

Making peace by disrupting systematic racism

Blessing vs. privilege

Susan Keil Smith

Matthew 5:3– and 5:5

“Blessed are the poor in spirit ... blessed are the meek ...”

Reflection: The Beatitudes have always been challenging for me. Perhaps it’s meant to be that way. Reading the Beatitudes against the backdrop of racism, the lesson they teach seems to be aimed directly at those of us who, more often than not, are the perpetrators of racism.

Take “Blessed are the poor in spirit.” Because I am white — and because I have inherited all the privilege and implicit bias that comes with whiteness — it is especially important for me to carry a spirit of love for all of God’s children. Are those who perpetuate racism and exclusion poor in spirit? Or are those who are victimized poor in spirit? Operating from a place of prejudice certainly seems to reveal a poverty of the spirit. And yet, maybe Jesus is saying that with growth, change and hard work on our own implicit racism, we too can be blessed.

Or how about “Blessed are the meek.” As I have confronted the racism in my own life, gentleness, kindness, and humility have been my guiding values. My journey of awareness began in my early 20s, when I worked in the library at a majority-black school. I became good friends with a fellow librarian; he was my first friend with a skin color different from my own. We worked together to seek the best for our students during the racially charged late 1960s. I simply couldn’t understand why others chose to judge, fear, or discriminate. This relationship was the beginning of my personal awareness of racism.

Since that time, I have learned more and more about the institutional privilege that I as a white person take for granted. Every day, I pray to God for the humility and awareness to interrupt racism when I see it. Maybe Jesus is talking about this kind of humble posture when he says, “Blessed are the meek.”

Action: Next time you are wandering around a department store ‘just looking,’ take note of how employees and other customers respond to you. How does that compare to the way people of other racial identities are being treated? If you are white and you see an injustice, are you willing to speak up?

Prayer: Holy God of all, help me to continually lift up *all* of your children and seek justice and kindness in this challenging world. Amen.



Susan Keil Smith lives in Albuquerque, NM, and has been a member of First Presbyterian church for 43 years, coming from New York where she was at Marble Collegiate Church. She is an ordained elder and active deacon, working for justice and safe church awareness in addition to her commitment to Presbyterian Women and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.



Friday, September 20, 2019

Making peace by disrupting systematic racism

Honoring God's temples

Rev. Jessica Vazquez Torres

1 Corinthians 3:16 (CEB)

Don't you know that you are God's temple and God's Spirit lives in you? If someone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person, because God's temple is holy, which is what you are.

Reflection: It is abhorrent that we live in a nation where people still have to assert that “Black Lives Matter,” “Indigenous People are not Mascots,” “Human Beings are not Illegal,” “Trans Lives Matter,” and “Women Have Agency Over their Bodies.” Our systemic and willful resistance to recognize these truths results in policies that dehumanize people of color — and other vulnerable populations — in ways that impact life expectancy, health outcomes, and safety.

Even more abhorrent is the fact that so many *Christians* still struggle to name these truths. Churches worry, “What would people say if ...” we affirmed the inherent worth, dignity and holiness of people of color, women, and people who are Queer, Trans, and undocumented. Despite the warnings of the Belhar Confession, churches are quick to declare allegiance to powers and principalities other than God. In this case, our churches pledge allegiance to ‘what people think’ and ‘cultural values’ — a thinly-veiled moniker for racism, misogyny, and homo-and-transphobia.

Like the powerful and influential church of Corinth, we become invested in the twisted values and prejudices promoted by the culture around us. Rather than carrying God's liberating mission into the world, we deepen the chasms that threaten that very mission. While we fight over internal concerns, those made siblings to us by God are perishing! Sometimes this is a result of our actions, practices, and policies; other times, it's a result of our silences, passivity, and apathy. What will it take for us to learn from Corinth? What will it take for us to remember that when Paul writes “*You* are God's temple,” that “you” includes every being in God's creation?

Action: Courageously push your faith community to work for the integrity of God's *whole* body by loudly and unapologetically proclaiming the truths listed above. Show up for one another. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, witness to the reality that we belong to Christ and each other.

Prayer: God, forgive us for the ways we feed the divisions that threaten your body. Remind us that we belong to Christ and each other, regardless of what tricksters among us declare. Amen.



Rev. Vazquez Torres works in antiracism, anti-oppression, and cultural competency. A 1.5-Generation ESL Queer Latina of Puerto Rican descent, she holds a BA in Criminal Justice, an MDiv from Christian Theological Seminary, and an MTS from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University. When not on a plane, Jessica attempts to become a bread baker, cultivates community with her spouse, Laura, and sings songs badly with full abandon.



Saturday, September 21, 2019

Rev. Raafat L. Zaki

Making peace by disrupting systematic racism

Honoring God is loving and serving all

1 Corinthians 4:1–2

Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God’s mysteries. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

Reflection: Faithfulness is measured not only by our commitment to God, but also by our service to one another. Love and service are intertwined concepts: We serve whom we love, and we love whom we serve. With the unconditional blessings of life and sacrificial love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, our love and service to one another are in fact love and service to God, in whose image all humanity is created.

As a necessary corollary, dehumanization and discrimination against any human being are offenses against God the creator. Just as Genesis calls us stewards of God’s creation, the Apostle Paul writes that we have been entrusted as stewards of the gospel and God’s mysteries. When we buy into and perpetuate systems built on racism and xenophobia, we show ourselves to be untrustworthy stewards and betray the gospel of Jesus Christ.

False religiosity and pride mislead us to compromise or distort our stewardship. They cause us to ostracize, harm, control, or manipulate others. Sometimes we assume racial, ethnic, or cultural superiority. These are the times when Christ calls us to repent. The Holy Spirit is ever reminding us that no one has exclusive rights to God’s mysteries or promises. No one person, race, culture, or ethnicity could ever claim a monopoly on God’s blessings.

Action: Take some time today for self-examination. How does your racial identity affect the way you treat others? In what ways do you intentionally or unintentionally perpetuate racist systems or buy into false homogenizing concepts like whiteness? Allow yourself to confess, repent, and ask for the Spirit’s help to live as a faithful steward and servant.

Prayer: Holy God — Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer of all creation — forgive us when we fear the unknown and meet strangers with hate. Forgive our sinful pride and prejudices, forgive our racism and xenophobia. We humbly repent and turn back to you. Help us, Creator God, to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Help us to love our enemies, to befriend the stranger, and to show hospitality to the outcast. Amen.



Rev. Zaki is a transformational leader in social witness and just-peacemaking. He is a Teaching Elder and has served in leadership positions with all four councils of the PC(USA). Currently he serves church and society as Synod of the Covenant Executive.



Sunday, September 22, 2019

Making peace by ending violence

Repenting, one step at a time

Rev. Ginna Bairby

Luke 3:10-11

The crowds asked John, “What then should we do?” In reply he said to them, “Whoever has two coats must share with the one who has none; and whoever has food must do likewise.”

Reflection: John the Baptist preaches that salvation is coming, and he calls on the crowds to repent. But repentance is such a broad concept, and there’s so much that requires repentance. The crowds ask for more specific instructions: “What then should we *do*?”

It’s easy to be overwhelmed by the sheer amount of violence in our world. From imperialism to genocide, from racism to Islamophobia, from domestic violence at home to acts of terror in the street, it is *too much* for the world that God so loves. We can say in theory that we repent of this violence, but where would we even start? What then should we *do*?

John’s instructions meet his listeners right where they are. Do you have an extra coat or food? Share it. Are you in the tax-collecting business? Stop exploiting the poor. Soldiers? Stop abusing your power and threatening those under your care.

The same is true for us: The process of repentance begins where we stand today. We will not heal all the tragedies of the world or extricate ourselves from the violence and injustices in which we are complicit with one single action. But a small, practical act of repentance in our daily lives may be the most important place to start.

Action: Take some time today to consider your daily habits. Where is your lifestyle complicit in violence? Where do you have power to make a small and practical change? Maybe you can commit to buying fair-trade coffee or avoiding products made with conflict minerals. Maybe you’ll decide not to listen to music by artists who have been convicted of sexual violence. There’s no wrong place to start to repent.

Prayer: God of the prodigal, we humbly repent of the ways our lives contribute to the violence of this world. Help us to turn back to you. Empowered by your grace, help us to make a change. Amen.



Rev. Bairby is Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Taos, NM. She has worked in the PC(USA)’s Compassion, Peace and Justice ministries and served as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Peru 2009-2010. She holds an MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary.



Monday, September 23, 2019

Making peace by ending violence

Confronting corporate violence

Rev. Eric Markman

Psalm 145:14

The Lord upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.

Reflection: It was my first month as a Peace Corps volunteer in a small village in Sierra Leone. Night came quickly near the equator; with no electricity, darkness prevailed. Asleep in bed, I was suddenly awakened by a woman wailing in agony. Going outside, I found her surrounded by other villagers, holding a baby in her arms. It took only a minute to understand what was going on. The baby, hardly two months old, was dying. The moon bathed the scene in an eerie silver light as the mother wailed. Occasionally handing the baby to someone else, she would fall to the ground and writhe in pain. It was a truly terrible night, one that I will never forget.

After the funeral, I learned that the dispensary in the neighboring town was giving out free baby formula from Nestle to expectant mothers. The rainy season had started, and our village well was contaminated by runoff. Unbeknownst to the mother, mixing the formula with the village water gave her child diarrhea, which dehydrated her and led to her death.

Violence comes in many forms. In this case, it came from a large western company giving free samples of baby formula, causing mothers to lose their own milk. After the first free samples, mothers became dependent on the formula and had to purchase the rest. Nestle increased its profits, but this mother and her child paid the price.

Action: It can be difficult to keep up with what is happening in the world. Serving those immediately around us is certainly part of our Christian calling. But what happens in the broader world is just as important. Take a moment today to go to pcusa.org/worldmission or pcusa.org/internationalpeacemakers and read about the experiences of our mission partners around the world.

Prayer: Creator God, your Son calls women and men of every age to follow him. Create in us hearts that seek the path that Jesus sets before us. Fill our sails with the wind of the Holy Spirit, that we may be strong to seek justice and end violence in all its forms. Help us remember the love that Jesus has for all. May it ever fill us! Amen.



Rev. Markman is pastor of Hartford Presbyterian Church in Natick, MA. He deeply enjoys the ministry and is married to Rev. Cindy Kohlmann.



Tuesday, September 24, 2019

Making peace by ending violence

A time to pause

Michelle Muñiz

Psalm 54:2-3

Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For the insolent have risen against me, the ruthless seek my life; they do not set God before them. *Selah*

Reflection: I've had the privilege to witness and admire the work of a variety of ministries and movements advocating for peace, justice, and equity. Like many who are invested in this type of work, I know that the journey of advocacy — while full of empowerment and boldness — is also filled with regular discouragement. One day we take a great step forward; the next morning feels like two steps back. Often our efforts feel so small compared to the enormity of the powers that be. Trusting God's purposes is the faithful thing to do, but it's difficult when we see such meager results.

We know how it feels to cry out, and we know that after a pause, things feel better. The *selah*, or *pause*, in Psalm 54:3 is often overlooked, but it may be the key to the psalm — what makes it possible for the psalmist to trust and praise God in vv. 4-7.

The same is true for our advocacy. A pause gives us time to reflect and take a deep breath. Despite what our fast-paced culture teaches us, stopping our work for a moment is not counter-productive. Sometimes the break needs to be longer, and sometimes the break has to wait. However, that pause may be just what we need to breathe in the hope to continue.

Action: When we're caught up in the busyness of life, taking a pause can seem like a huge luxury. Today, intentionally identify a time to pause, take a deep breath, and look out a window. It doesn't matter when or how we make this space. What matters is that we create an intentional time to hear where God is calling us next.

Prayer: God, let us hear your voice in the midst of fear and frustration. Let us identify more *selah* in our daily and busy lives. We truly want to affirm our trust in you. Amen.



Michelle Muñiz serves as the Disaster Recovery Coordinator for the Presbytery of San Juan (Presbiterio de San Juan) in Puerto Rico. While providing support to their 15 congregations as they recover from hurricanes Irma and María, she also coordinates projects for volunteers serving in the San Juan area through the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA).



Wednesday, September 25, 2019

Making peace by ending violence

When we are the wicked

Rev. Eric Markman

Psalm 147:6

The Lord lifts up the downtrodden, he casts the wicked to the ground.

Reflection: What happens when we might be the wicked?

In November 2018, I participated in a Peacemaking Travel Study Seminar to Korea, hosted by loving and hospitable church partners. The Korean peninsula has been a pawn in the hands of powerful nations for centuries. Occupied by Russia, China, Japan, and now a launching point for the U.S. Navy, there has hardly been a time that Koreans have been able to fully make political decisions for themselves.

We visited Jeju Island, where we learned about the April 3 uprising: a seven-year period (1947–1954) of human rights violations, mass killings, and atrocities committed by the Korean national police force and military. All this took place, uninterrupted, under the watchful eye of the U.S. military.

We also visited No Gun Ri, the site of a horrific massacre at the beginning of the Korean war. Believing the civilians to be communists, the U.S. military killed 250-300 people, mostly women and children, as they sought shelter under a railroad bridge.

We met with a survivor who was a young boy at the time of the massacre. Tears ran down our cheeks as he told us his story. We slowly came to understand that behind the breath-taking beauty of the Korean landscape and the friendliness and welcome of the Korean people, there is a history of heartbreak and outside political manipulation. Most sobering of all, we had to admit that we who live in the United States are complicit in that history.

Action: Following the path of Jesus involves meeting and learning from strangers. That may mean traveling to another country or another part of town. We may meet them in a local soup kitchen or the basement of a church that welcomes refugees. Today, ask a stranger to tell you about their life, their sorrows, their joys. Once you have sat down and listened to their story, you won't be strangers anymore.

Prayer: O Lamb of God, the one who leaves the ninety-nine to seek the one, give us the strength to venture outside our comfort zones to meet those we do not know. Open our ears that we might listen to their stories. And as we hear those stories, strengthen us that we might enter with them in the struggle to end violence in our world. Amen.



Rev. Markman is pastor of Hartford Presbyterian Church in Natick, MA. He deeply enjoys the ministry and is married to Rev. Cindy Kohlmann.



Thursday, September 26, 2019

Making peace by ending violence

The hope of a promised land

Michelle Muñiz

Psalm 143:8

Let me hear of your steadfast love in the morning, for in you I put my trust. Teach me the way I should go, for to you I lift up my soul.

Reflection: I recently read an article that told the stories of families attempting to cross the US-Mexico border. The author suggested that pursuit of the ‘American Dream’ was beginning to look more like the ‘American Nightmare.’ As I read Psalm 143, it occurs to me that this prayer for deliverance could easily be found on the lips of a person crossing the U.S. border and reflecting fearfully on whether this journey is worth the danger.

Once, during a difficult time in my own life, I confided in a friend that sometimes I would wake up and just yell at God. My friend wisely reminded me that my anger and lament are prayers, too. There is something so refreshing and relatable about the psalms of lament and other passages of Scripture that communicate the authors’ frustration and exhaustion. Can we give ourselves permission to be honest in our prayers, even when we struggle? How do we continue to seek God’s presence and guidance when what we are experiencing is God’s silence? What might it look like to lift up to God the full extent of our grief and anger concerning what is happening at our nation’s southern border?

Action: As you reflect on the violence along the U.S. border, take time today to identify and learn about the work of organizations addressing immigration issues in your own community. Commit to donate a little of your time or money to this work.

Prayer: God, today we lift up those walking with no clear path forward — people seeking refuge, a new home, and safety. We pray for people who come with their families and those traveling by themselves. We pray for those who know you as *Dios*, and those who doubt their fate. Let us be the community you have called to welcome the stranger. Let us be your church. Amen



Michelle Muñiz serves as the Disaster Recovery Coordinator for the Presbytery of San Juan (Presbiterio de San Juan) in Puerto Rico. While providing support to their 15 congregations as they recover from hurricanes Irma and María, she also coordinates projects for volunteers serving in the San Juan area through the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA).



Friday, September 27, 2019

Making peace by ending violence

Forgiveness as letting go

Susan Keil Smith

Matthew 6:14-15 (CEB)

“If you forgive others their sins, God will also forgive you. But if you don’t forgive others, neither will God forgive your sins.”

Reflection: Jesus gives us a template for how to pray. As we repeat the all-too-familiar prayer that he taught us, a journey through the words reveals different meanings at different times in our lives.

Being reminded that God’s will be done is a tough call when a person is the victim of violence. I find myself asking, “What *is* God’s will in a situation where one person violates another?” How can I reconcile the will of the Holy One against the hurt and pain of another? Perhaps a better question is, “How can I allow God’s love to penetrate the hurt and walk with the victim, through the pain, to find the kingdom of God on earth?”

This challenge goes with me to the latter part of the prayer, “And do not bring us to the time of trial, but rescue us from the evil one.” Jesus goes on to say, “For if you forgive others their sins, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.” Wait...I thought I was forgiven by grace! Does my salvation really depend on forgiving those who do me harm?

Surely salvation comes through grace, but when I cannot forgive, the violence seems to take up root within me. An act of violence forges a connection between the perpetrator and the victim, like a string tied to each person’s wrist. To forgive is to cut that string and set both parties free from the pain of the past. Forgiveness in the face of violence is probably one of the biggest tests of our faith. How do we respond?

Action: Can I take one step towards forgiving someone for an act of violence that has touched my life? Today, I will name the pain I’m holding and offer it to God, trusting God to hold it in a grace-filled place as I begin to let it go.

Prayer: O God of all, help me to allow space to recognize that you hold me in your arms, especially when I struggle with acts of violence that have hurt so many. Amen.



Susan Keil Smith lives in Albuquerque, NM, and has been a member of First Presbyterian church for 43 years, coming from New York where she was at Marble Collegiate Church. She is an ordained elder and active deacon, working for justice and safe church awareness in addition to her commitment to Presbyterian Women and Presbyterian Disaster Assistance.



Saturday, September 28, 2019

Making peace by ending violence

Joy in the midst of sorrow

Michelle Muñiz

Psalm 149:3 (CEB)

Let them praise God's name with dance; let them sing God's praise with drum and lyre!

Reflection: On a recent Travel Study Seminar hosted by the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, I visited Gangjeong Village on Jeju Island, South Korea. We joined our hosts at a protest against a controversial naval military base that brought internal displacement and environmental degradation to this small coastal community.

Before the protest, several activists gave us background on their work and the cause. We gathered in a small chapel with community leaders and walked together to the military base. We chanted, waved flags, and carried signs decrying injustice and unwanted foreign involvement. I reflected on the similarities between the situation in Jeju and the fight in Vieques, an island of Puerto Rico that dealt with a military base used for bomb testing over 10 years ago.

However, what really struck me about the protest was what happened afterward. We walked back to the street where the march had started, and our activist hosts gathered us and began to teach us choreography. Before we knew it, our whole group of marchers was dancing in the street!

Even as we denounced injustice and spoke truth to power, we took some time for fellowship and celebration. We were together in protest and together in joy. The celebration reminded me of the truth that joy is possible in the midst of challenge, discomfort, and vulnerability. The protest and dance were not separate activities; they were manifestations of the same Holy Spirit among us.

Action: To what communities working for justice and peace do you belong? Do these communities practice celebration and thanksgiving alongside the difficult work of seeking justice? Today, think of one new way you can incorporate praise and joy into your work of advocacy and service.

Prayer: 하나님, we give you thanks for the advocacy work in our world. We ask your blessing on all people who stand up for what they believe — lifting up the community and speaking truth to the powers that be. Help us bear witness to your presence in the midst of sorrow and injustice. Grant us your joy. Amen



Michelle Muñiz serves as the Disaster Recovery Coordinator for the Presbytery of San Juan (Presbiterio de San Juan) in Puerto Rico. While providing support to their 15 congregations as they recover from hurricanes Irma and María, she also coordinates projects for volunteers serving in the San Juan area through the Presbyterian Disaster Assistance (PDA).



Sunday September 29, 2019

Making peace by supporting refugees and migrants

Because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt

Rev. Ginna Bairby

Psalm 66:12

We went through fire and through water; yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.

Reflection: God spends so much time in the Hebrew Scriptures reminding the people of Israel where they came from. We hear the refrain, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the Land of Egypt.” It is important to God that the people never forget where they came from.

We would do well to remember where we came from, too. Every person in the United States who is not a Native American comes from a family of immigrants. Whether first generation or tenth generation, the majority of people living in our nation are people who have journeyed from one place to another.

The Bible is a complex and contradictory document. Rarely does it speak with one voice on an issue. But when it comes to immigrants and foreigners, Scripture is consistent and clear:

“When immigrants live in your land with you, you must not cheat them. Any immigrant who lives with you must be treated as if they were one of your citizens. You must love them as yourself, because you were immigrants in the land of Egypt.” (Lev 19:33-34, CEB)

God wants the Hebrew people to remember who they are and where they came from. Their ancestors were strangers in the land of Egypt; therefore, they are called to welcome the stranger in their own land.

We too are called to welcome the migrants and refugees in our midst. Perhaps it’s time we began to remember where we came from.

Action: Spend some time today exploring your family history. How did you get to where you are today? Did your ancestors move from another state? Another country? Where have you seen God walking with you on the journey? Where do we see God walking with migrants and refugees?

Prayer: Wandering God, thank you for reminding us where we have come from. Sojourner God, be with all people who journey today. Holy Spirit, inspire your church to hospitality. Amen.



Rev. Bairby is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Taos, NM. She has worked in the PC(USA)'s Compassion, Peace and Justice ministries and served as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Peru 2009-2010. She holds an MDiv from Union Presbyterian Seminary.

Monday, September 30, 2019

Making peace by supporting refugees and migrants

Finding God's presence in a strange new land

Ekama Eni

Psalm 9:1

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

Reflection: For most of history, we humans have demonstrated a tendency to 'other' people who leave the places that they come from and settle in a new land. The laws and practices of this country in particular have helped to maintain adverse realities for those who come to the U.S. Immigrants, refugees, and other displaced peoples spend exorbitant amounts of money — sometimes their entire life's worth — just for the chance to come to America and start anew. Yet often, they arrive in our country and are met with suspicion and scrutiny, no social safety net, and long waits and legal barriers before they can work.

When we find ourselves in strange new places where we may feel unwanted, unwelcome, or out of place, God loves and cares for us still. Sometimes that's difficult to believe. But the psalmist reminds us that God is there, even and especially in times of trouble.

Action: What is your favorite or most significant childhood memory? Ask someone what theirs is. Marvel at how different (or similar!) they might be. How have these memories shaped each of you into the people you are today?

Prayer: Lord, we pray for and with those whom we perceive to be different from us. We pray for those who do not live in the places where they were born; we pray for those who do. We pray for those whose homes have been destroyed by natural disasters or human negligence; we pray for those whose homes are safe and secure. Help us grow into greater love and care for all people. Amen.



Ekama Eni is a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York and is under care of Grace Presbytery. She served as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Scotland, working in a Church of Scotland Priority Area congregation. There, her call to ministry — and an affinity for being outdoors — were stirred. She is an immigrant, a proud Texan, and a lover of food and naps.



Tuesday, October 1, 2019

Making peace by supporting refugees and migrants

Witness to God's love for all people

Joseph Jadway Marasigan

Matthew 7:1–2 NIV

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”

Reflection: As the world shrinks into a small global village, we are seeing significantly increased mobility of people as they seek better lives and opportunities in new countries. Their reasons for leaving are varying and complex: economic necessity, war, and persecution among them.

Catholic Cardinal Luis Tagle recalls his encounter with a young refugee from Syria who presented himself at the Greek border in Macedonia. Volunteers from Caritas Internationalis assisted the young refugee. “Where are your parents?” they asked him. He responded that they were still in Syria, but that they told him he must go. It was a heartbreaking moment for the volunteers who assisted the young boy. Will he ever see his parents again? Will they survive the catastrophe brought upon their lives by politics, most of which is beyond their knowledge and out of their control? Then came the boy’s turn to ask questions: “Are you also a Muslim? Why do you help me?” They told him: “No, we are Christians. Jesus teaches us to love people from all faith backgrounds.”

America is a nation of immigrants, but we have always been conflicted about this. We see our commitment to welcome foreigners and immigrants starkly juxtaposed with the government’s prerogative to preserve security and sovereignty. As Christians, we are called to love our neighbors. This chapter from Matthew’s Gospel challenges us to demonstrate compassion for those who come knocking on our doors. Deuteronomy commands us: “*Give the members of your community a fair hearing, and judge rightly between one person and another, whether citizen or resident alien.*” (1:16)

Action: Take a minute today to call your representatives in Congress. Tell them that, as a person of faith, you oppose the forcible detention and separation of families. Ask them to support policies that protect and unite immigrant and refugee families.

Prayer: Loving God, help us recognize that no one is a stranger in your eyes. Grant us the courage to be bearers of hope and peace for those who come knocking on our doors. Cleanse us from our biases and remove the callouses from our eyes, that we may see you in the faces of those seeking refuge in our land. Amen.



Joseph Jadway 'JJ' Marasigan is a member of First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills, NY, and currently serves as a delegate to the New York City Presbytery. He is a member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Activist Council. He writes primarily on the areas of social justice, agrarian reform, and human rights.



Wednesday, October 2, 2019

Making peace by supporting refugees and migrants

Narrow gates

Rev. Raafat L. Zaki

Matthew 7:13

“Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Reflection: God calls us into intentional, selfless, and sometimes sacrificial giving and communal participation. Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., called it the Beloved Community; the Apostle Paul called it the Body of Christ. Jesus warns his disciples that we enter this community through a narrow gate and that the path of discipleship is a hard road to walk. Following in Jesus’ footsteps requires self-denial and solidarity. Entering through the narrow gate often entails forgoing wealth, privilege, and even earned societal benefits for the sake of the common good.

In the context of the global refugee crisis, we can’t talk about narrow gates without acknowledging that the ports of entry for migrants and asylum-seekers are getting narrower by the minute. Increasingly often, they are finding gates closed and doors slammed in their faces. But the Beloved Community knows no borders. It is inclusive, generous, and egalitarian by design.

As Christians living in the United States, it’s worth taking a look at our history. What role have we as a nation played in creating this crisis of refugees and displaced people? Acknowledging the sins of our past, how do we now respond with love to people whose lives have been forever impacted by our unjust trade, inhumane market conditions, war and regime change, and other corrupt political and business practices? Such injustices are legislated by our government and funded with our taxes.

Action: Take some time today to research U.S. foreign policy as it relates to the migrant and refugee crisis. If you’re looking for a place to start, try this article: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/qvnyzq/central-america-atrocities-caused-immigration-crisis. Explore local faith-based and non-profit organizations that address the root causes of migration.

Prayer: Just and forgiving God, we humbly confess our complicity in social and racial injustice and our complicity in cultures of violence and dehumanization. We repent of our nation’s dishonest and unjust exploitation of those who are poor and marginalized. We commit to examining our lifestyles and holding our government accountable. Help us to overcome fear, hatred, racism, xenophobia, false pride, and sanctimony. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.



Rev. Zaki is a transformational leader in social witness and just-peacemaking. He is a Teaching Elder and has served in leadership positions with all four councils of the PC(USA). Currently he serves church and society as Synod of the Covenant Executive.



Thursday, October 3, 2019

Making peace by supporting refugees and migrants

Hearers and doers

Rev. Dr. Robert B. Woodruff

Matthew 7:24

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock.”

Reflection: Our church was recently asked to be a long-term host site providing transitional housing for transgender women granted asylum or temporary release in the United States. My initial thought was: “We just might be able to do it.” Jesus’ pedagogy in today’s passage is succinct: We can’t just be hearers; we must also be doers. With conviction, Jesus exhorts that our actions must correspond to our words. When they do, we wisely build our faith on a stable foundation.

While our church possesses ideal space and hosting seemed the ‘Christian’ thing to do, the decision to welcome and support such vulnerable immigrants was not easily made. The chasm that often exists between words and practice was on my mind as our session considered the request. Our church is multicultural and bilingual, so many in the community have a heightened sociocultural awareness — but no one in our community has had to seek asylum, and no one openly identifies as transgender.

After three months of prayer and discussion, we committed to act on Jesus’ call to welcome the stranger. It has brought out the best in our congregation. As we get to know sisters from other parts of the world and serve them in God’s name, we have become less focused on the program’s impact on us and more focused on those whom we are called to serve. By doing and not just hearing Christ’s call, our congregation has gained a new sense of being planted on solid ground.

Action: Take time today to research the reality of a vulnerable population that has been in the news. Read their first-hand accounts and stories. Come up with one action step of how you can help: donate, volunteer, or pray.

Prayer: Loving God, help us to speak verbosely with our actions. Fill us with your Spirit and inspire us with your Word to engage others with love — that not our will, by thy will be done. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Woodruff is Pastor at Second Presbyterian Church in Albuquerque, NM. He holds a Master of Divinity from Princeton Theological Seminary and a Doctor of Ministry from Columbia Theological Seminary. He served as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Guatemala in 2000.

Friday, October 4, 2019

Making peace by supporting refugees and migrants

What makes a home?

Ekama Eni

Psalm 84:3

Even the sparrow finds a home, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, at your altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God.

Reflection: What is home? Where is home? For some folks, these questions have simple answers. A location, a place, an idea. But what happens when the places we conceive of as home change? What happens to home when the places we call home no longer offer us the benefits of safety and opportunity? Does that make these places any less our homes? Even for those of us who feel secure now, the realities of continuous wars, increasingly destructive climate emergencies, and sustained human desecration of land and resources mean change is coming for *all* of our homes.

As an immigrant, I often wrestle with the concept of home. Is it okay that there is more than one place that I conceive of as home? Is it okay that I sometimes conceive of no place as being fully home?

The short answer is, sure! All of these things are okay. We who live on a changing earth must understand that our idea of home will never be static. We will continue to wrestle with it. As we do, we can work to ensure that all people find a safe place or series of places they can call their home. May they know, and may we know, that wherever we go, God's love goes with us.

Action: Think of your favorite song (maybe it's a hymn) about the concept of home. Listen to it once, all the way through. What words are used to evoke this notion of home for you? What does that bring up for you? Why do you think that is? Listen to it again. This week, find a time to share your song with someone else, and ask what song reminds them of home.

Prayer: Everlasting God in whose home we dwell, we give you great thanks for the places that we call home, the places that are dear to us and to you. Guide us as we continue to be shepherds of your earth, so that all of your people might experience the feelings of home with which you have so richly blessed us. Amen.



Ekama Eni is a student at Union Theological Seminary in New York and is under care of Grace Presbytery. She served as a Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) in Scotland, working in a Church of Scotland Priority Area congregation. There, her call to ministry — and an affinity for being outdoors — were stirred. She is an immigrant, a proud Texan, and a lover of food and naps.



Saturday, October 5, 2019

Making peace by supporting refugees and migrants

A preferential option for the poor

Joseph Jadway Marasigan

Matthew 8:20 (NIV)

Jesus replied, “Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”

Reflection: The passage above tells readers that Jesus was virtually a homeless person. He stayed in the homes of those who would take him in. The scribe who said he wanted to follow Jesus wherever he went couldn't even fathom the lifestyle Jesus led. Scribes were among the more affluent citizens at that time, whereas Jesus literally had nowhere to lay his head. Another passage in Matthew's Gospel paints the contrast even more sharply: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the reign of God.” (Matthew 19:24)

This is also the reason why the church maintains what has been called a “preferential option for the poor” that includes the homeless, the displaced, and the immigrants. The testimony of our faith is best expressed by our fellowship and unity with the poor and the needy. As members of the Body of Christ, we see Jesus' face illuminated in the light of the grief and suffering of our brothers, sisters, and siblings.

Jesus famously described this preferential option for the poor in this way: “I was hungry and you fed me; I was naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.” Our Lord promises us that inasmuch as we show love and compassion for the least of God's children, we do this unto God.

Action: As we consider our global refugee crisis, it's easy to become overwhelmed by the sheer amount of human suffering and forget that each migrant comes with an individual life and story. Today, take some time to study the map at <https://humaneborders.org/migrant-death-mapping/>. Learn the names of three migrants who have lost their lives in the journey. Pray for them and their families by name.

Prayer: Mothering and Fathering God, you came to give honor to the least — those forgotten, condemned, and misjudged. Give us ears to listen to their cries. Give us the voice to speak out in love and acceptance. Bestow upon us the grace to be your hands in this world: clothing, feeding, and sheltering all who are in need. Amen.



Joseph Jadway 'JJ' Marasigan is a member of First Presbyterian Church of Forest Hills, NY and currently serves as a delegate to the New York City Presbytery. He is a member of the Presbyterian Peace Fellowship Activist Council. He writes primarily on the areas of social justice, agrarian reform, and human rights.



Sunday, October 6, 2019

Partaking in peace in worship and at table this World Communion Sunday and through the Peace & Global Witness Offering

Giving and receiving our portion

Rev. Dr. Alonzo Johnson

Lamentations 3:24

“The Lord is my portion,” says my soul, “therefore I will hope in God.”

Reflection: Today’s text from Lamentations comes from a dark time in Israel’s history, one of sheer devastation as well as political, social, and spiritual upheaval. A great city has been leveled to the ground, with all the hopes, dreams, and possibilities therein.

The tone of this passage resonates with us today. Upheaval, deportation, separation, and divisions have become more painfully common in our time. We know what it means to be ‘bowed down’ in lament as our unity, relationships, and communal stability are being threatened.

On a recent mission trip to Puerto Rico, a group of farmers took us around to see the devastation wrought by Hurricane Maria. As we toured the farm, our hosts pointed to various clearings and talked wistfully about what used to be there. This once-vibrant land now held barren fields, scattered debris, and painful memories. Even at the mention of the words “Hurricane Maria,” the husband and wife looked into each other’s eyes and began to softly weep. The wife whispered, “We lost so much that we had built together.” As we walked along, the couple shared how support from their neighbors helped sustain them in their devastation. Their community provided strength in a time of lament, rebuilding, and hope.

The authors of Lamentations sing honestly about suffering, but they also sing songs of hope. God’s hope is often found in the love and support of the community of faith. We become one another’s portion — reflections of Christ’s presence in difficult times. Communion reminds us that Christ’s peace sustains us even when things fall apart. Portion is about provision; we are held firmly in God’s hand and given what we need to stay strong. Our portion is found in our relationships with Christ and with one another.

Action: This World Communion Sunday, make the bold and counterintuitive choice to hope. As you celebrate Communion, be ‘portion people’ by caring for others. One of the most profound ways we can do this is by giving generously to the Peace & Global Witness Offering.

Prayer: Loving and providing God, in times of desolation you have been our portion. Amid the world’s chaos, you have called us to hope by calling us to one another. May we feed others as we have been fed good portions of mercy and hope at your table. Amen.



Rev. Dr. Johnson is the Coordinator for the Presbyterian Committee of the Self-Development of People Program (SDOP). Rev. Johnson has experience in pastoral ministry, prison chaplaincy, urban congregational-based organizing, youth education, creative arts, peacemaking, anti-poverty, and social justice ministries.