

Today we mark the second Sunday of Advent as the Sunday of Peace. We are called to “prepare the way”, “to make ready” for the coming of “the prince of peace”. But peace is elusive in our world today. How can we prepare and make ready for the peace of Christ to come and be with us?

I find one of the most insightful reads on this subject I find to be Walter Wink’s book, *Engaging the Powers*. In great detail Wink describes the history of the powers of violence and how we are predisposed as a culture “to prepare for violence” rather than “to prepare for peace.” I found it to be fascinating how Wink describes the archeological evidence for a time *before* systems of domination were manifest in cultures and nations. Wink writes: *there is little evidence of warfare between 9000 and 4000 BCE, and not a great deal until around 3000, after which it proliferates dramatically.... Wars and raids were not unknown; but they were not constant and they did not dominate existence.*

*What is most startling is what archeologists have found missing. As Riane Eisler notes in The Chalice and the Blade, some cities existed for hundreds of years, undisturbed, un plundered, not razed to the ground, and unwalled, located in choice valleys rather than on fortifiable crags. Equally astonishing, there are no evidences in Neolithic paintings of ‘noble warriors,’ heroic conquerors, captives, or slaves, nor are there any indications of thrusting weapons, battle-axes, or swords. p.36-7*

In short, Wink makes the case that in human history there was a time, a 9000- year period, when *relatively tranquil communities existed, not to conquer, pillage, and loot, but to cultivate the earth and provide the material and spiritual means for a satisfying life. p.37*

No period of history, Wink states, is completely void of conflict, but this time frame was much more peaceful than strife-filled. So, he concludes that the possibility does exist for a larger measure of peace. This story of a “golden age” seems to be preserved in the folk memories of hundreds of societies. This golden age is often described in agricultural settings where people lived in virtual equality without amassed surplus goods owned by a few elites while the population in general lived in want and need. But by around 3000 BCE warfare flourished; there existed standing armies with new bronze weapons and horses upon which they were able to exert might over their enemy.

Yet, the human heart seems to yearn for those former days. It is the vision of the first garden; it is romanticized in the story of *Camelot*; and it is the peace, the shalom that we return to every year about this time. The “prince of peace” whom we await invites us to consider the possibilities for peace. Jesus preached non-violent resistance; he demanded that his disciples resist violence even on his behalf. In fact, he disappointed some of them who thought he was the messianic warrior. Jesus did not even resist death on the cross because he understood his whole life and death to be caught up in non-violent resistance against the powers of this world. He understood that his spirit could not be killed even by his dying.

Peacemaking is not easy especially in our world where so many factors become intertwined. But we can remember that there was a time and there was one, named Jesus, in whom a different vision of living was taught. When we are overwhelmed with images that encourage physical violence and promote it as being thrilling, it may be difficult for us to think about ways in which we might prepare the way and make ready for the kind of peace Jesus spoke of.

In process theology we speak of God's desire for the best possible good within the context we are given. This does not ignore the complexities of our world but neither does it give in to the status quo. It demands more from us.

This coming Friday is the 1st day of the Jewish holiday, Hanukkah. A few years ago I read to the children the story of *The Christmas Menorahs*. It is based on a true story that took place in Billings, Montana in 1993. (Billings is the town where the UCC Western Regional Youth Event will take place this coming summer.)

In 1993 the town experienced episodes of blatant prejudice and hate. The Jewish cemetery had been desecrated; the home of a Native American family had been covered with graffiti; hate mail had been distributed by skinheads in the dark of night. The climactic event came when a brick was thrown through young Isaac Schnitzer's bedroom window where his Hanukkah Menorah shown brightly. Luckily, Isaac was in another room instead of his bed where the brick landed.

The events that followed were very intentional actions by a town bent on eliminating racism and creating space for peace. Isaac's parents called on the police for protection and the television and newspaper for publicity of the event. They would not remain silent or intimidated. The police understood the seriousness of hate crimes and were determined that they not be tolerated.

Clergy of all faiths and churches in the town, including the 1st Congregational UCC, committed themselves to speak out against what had happened. They decided as a community they would mass produce menorahs; the Billings Gazette published a full page menorah; and they placed menorahs in windows all over town in order to show their support. No longer could the skinheads determine who was Jewish and who wasn't. Though some more windows were struck with rocks; the hate crimes were much less; the people took their town back; they fought violence with non-violence and created space for tolerance and peace.

Today we share Holy Communion. I believe this meal is a "symbol" of our commitment to peace and community building. Imagine Jesus sharing this Passover meal long ago, all the while knowing that his destiny as peacemaker would go by way of a cross. This act of communing with one another becomes an act of transcendence as it encourages our community to live as people preparing the way of peace. When we eat this morsel of bread, we do it together. It would be meaningless if done alone.

We eat praying for the day when all the world is fed and committing ourselves to work towards that end. When we drink this cup, we hear again the promise of liberation to the oppressed Hebrew slaves in Egypt long ago. Jesus celebrated this Passover feast of Jewish freedom. He re-envisioned freedom for his own community by sharing the cup of a new possibility, the cup of a new covenant. Jesus would soon leave his disciples, but his teachings and his message and his presence would remain with them, and they would remember him.

These are sacred symbols of how we wish ourselves and our world to be--a place of shalom where the fullness of life is in us and extends through us and out into the world. May peace be a little less elusive to us as we move through the advent of our waiting and our preparing for the promise of new and peaceful possibilities in God's realm and reign. AMEN