

Homily – Let There Be Peace on Earth

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This past Thursday was World Peace Day, an international holiday that is dedicated to the absence of war and violence. World Peace Day is a United Nations holiday, and I think this is a worthy holiday for our church, since part of the kingdom of God would be realized with the absence of war and violence.

For a moment let's daydream about world peace.

Peace in Palestine, Gaza and Israel.

Peace in Ukraine.

Peace in Nigeria and Southern Sudan.

Peace in Syria, and Afghanistan.

Let's daydream a little more and imagine safety from gun violence. Safety from domestic violence. Safety from vendetta and retribution. Safety from racism.

Throughout his time here on earth, Jesus had a lot to say about the kingdom of God on earth, and that kingdom would certainly include peace and the absence of war and violence. Today's Gospel reading is also about the kingdom of God on earth. Jesus shares a parable that helps us understand resentment that we hold in our minds. We can help to restore hope and peace in the world when we learn to let go of our resentments for things that have happened to us or to our loved ones.

We resent that someone else got the job we wanted.

We resent something that was said about us.

We resent that a loved one left us through divorce or even death.

We resent that thousands of people died on 9-11, or we resent the hundreds of thousands who died in the invasion of Iraq two years later.

Nelson Mandela is quoted in having said, "Resentment is like drinking poison and then hoping it will kill your enemies." Ann Landers also has a good quote about resentment. She said, "Hanging onto resentment is letting someone you despise live rent-free in your head."

Maybe you are like me. We often allow our resentments to cause ourselves a lot of pain. Maybe, just maybe, it is because we don't know how to let go of resentment.

In today's Gospel lesson Jesus shares a story about some workers who are full of resentment that those who only worked an hour were paid the same as those that worked all day. And to this the landowner responded, "*Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you*

and go; I choose to give to this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous?'

Now, the kingdom of God will have world peace. However, it will be built on a foundation of healthy conflict. And this will be enabled when we heal from trauma. It will be a world in which we forgive others, and ourselves; and it will be a world in which we let go of resentments for things that have been done to us or to our loved ones. God has grand, seemingly impossible, things in store for our world, but we must do our part.

Resentments come in so many different ways, but many have a significant common element. They are based on an event in the past, which we wish had never happened. And, actually it is more than a wish. Our resentment is actually a demand that the action in the past be erased or happen differently.

I demand that you had not taken that money from me two years ago.
I demand that you had not died twenty years ago.
I demand that the treasured inheritance went to me instead of to you.
I demand that those things were never written in the paper about me.

But, the past cannot be changed. As much as we demand it, the past is the past and time machines have not yet been invented. And, until we stop making a demand of the past, we will not be able to let go of resentment.

Here is some advice I heard from a counselor about letting go of resentment. I've shared this advice more than once before. First, acknowledge that the past is the past, and second, change the demand to a preference. Instead of demanding that the past be changed, shift your language and thinking to "I would have preferred that this had not happened." Let me repeat that, "I would have preferred that this had not happened."

When we start using this language and thinking it starts the process to begin letting go of resentment. Yes, some of our resentments are for things that are still occurring or recurring, but so many of them are for things that have happened in the past. "Ask yourself this: 'how does resentment help me have a better future?' If it does, keep resenting. If it doesn't, then try forgiving."

Part of the beauty is that "forgiveness is giving yourself back what you had before." But we often don't move to forgiveness because we feel a need to stay with the resentment.

Now, it can be very useful to understand our motivations for clinging to the resentment. Maybe it is for safety. "If I forgive them they will hurt me again." This is quite valid and it can be important to move to a place of safety before removing the protection that can be provided by resentment. Safety is important.

Or, maybe we hold onto resentment out of a sense of justice. "They need to be punished for what they did." Or, "If I forgive them, how will the world know they did a bad thing." Or, "If I forgive them it will be saying that what they did didn't matter."

These reasons make sense to us, don't they? They make sense but at the same time, these justice objections are hardly ever resolved in a satisfying way. A more satisfying approach is to forgive even if justice objections will not be met. After all, "forgiving someone won't make them nice; it will, however, make you nicer."

And, one thing we should remember is that forgiving does not necessarily mean reconciling. Forgiving and reconciling are two different things. "When we forgive evil we do not excuse it, we do not tolerate it, we do not smother it. We look the evil full in the face, call it what it is, let its horror shock and stun and enrage us, and only then do we forgive it."

That is part of the effectiveness of the Cross of Jesus. Two thousand years ago when our God became human for thirty-three years, he suffered injustice, horrible physical pain, and death. Yet, he met these things with grace, a level of grace that is beyond our understanding. And, today even when we don't see it, God continues to shower us with grace and unmerited love.

Let me share a Cherokee parable about this grace of Jesus that you may recognize. "A Cherokee elder was teaching his grandchildren about life. He said to them, 'A fight is going on inside me. It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One wolf represents fear, anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance self-pity, guilt, inferiority, jealousy, lies and resentment. The other wolf stands for joy, peace, love, hope, sharing, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, friendship, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and grace. This same fight is going on inside of you and every other person too.' The children thought about it for a minute and then one child asked his grandfather, 'Which wolf will win?' The wise one simply replied: 'The one I feed.'" We can either feed the wolf of resentment, even the resentment that another is given what they did not earn. Or we can feed the wolf of grace that latecomers get the same as we do.

Now, let me share another story that does not cause resentment even though the late comers still get the same as those who were there the entire time. One of the classes

one takes in seminary is about the details of our Episcopal liturgy and rituals. Some of the details of the class were quite practical like don't wear a watch when celebrating the Eucharist because it is distracting. I decided to ignore that teaching. Or, make sure to hold the sleeve up on your alb or robe so that you don't knock over the chalice of wine. I do that. And some of the details in the class were about why we do all the things we do during the Eucharist. The high point of the Eucharist is when I make the sign of the cross over the bread and the wine and say words that welcome the Holy Spirit into the bread and wine. However, all of the rituals and words in the Eucharist are really just preparation for us to eat the bread and drink the wine. We are helped into the right frame of mind by the rituals and words so that we can appropriately consume the elements.

And as we learned in class about of the reasons we do things to prepare ourselves for the Eucharist, the question was asked, "how late can you come into worship and still be prepared enough to properly consume the bread and wine." And the answer from the professor that day was this scenario. If the youth group returned to church on a bus after everyone had been served the bread and wine and even as the elements were being put away, you would stop and offer bread and wine to the youth as they dashed in at the last minute. There is no such thing as being too late to the table, and I don't think any of us would resent this act of hospitality for the latecomers.

Now, I know this is a silly little example, but imagine if we could have this same lack of resentment to the landowner's generosity to the latecomers to the vineyard that day. Imagine if we could let go of that easy to understand resentment and all of our other resentments as well. A world with less resentment is a world that will have more peace and it will be a sign of the coming of the kingdom of God.

World Peace Day and the kingdom of God will be a result of the wolf we feed. It will be based on healing from body trauma, forgiveness to relieve pain, and letting go of resentments that keep old hurts alive. Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with us.