



THE UNITED CHURCH OF CANADA

CANADIAN MEMORIAL CHURCH
& CENTRE FOR PEACE

Preached by Rev. Bruce Sanguin

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Second Sunday after Epiphany

“The Peace That Passes All Understanding”

When I first came to Canadian Memorial, almost 14 years ago now, I thought that peace was a no-brainer for this congregation. After all, this sanctuary was built as a memorial to those who gave their lives in WW1, and in order to be a part of creating the conditions that would render war obsolete – a noble mission, a torch worth carrying. So, when we came to name the new centre, I was part of a contingency that promoted calling it The Centre for Peace.

I don't for a second regret this decision. It is filled day after day with groups of people, some part of this community, but most from other organizations who are working for peace in one way or another. We used to call them “renters”. Today we call them mission partners, in recognition that their slice of the peace pie is critical to the realization of peace. We have yoga groups, a group called Hakomi – dedicated to cultivating loving presence. We have meditation groups, a Tai Chi group, an artist's Federation, a pre-natal group, Healing Touch groups, the David Suzuki Foundation occasionally holds meetings at the Center for Peace. And of course, our own Peace and Justice team who are sponsoring this Peace Sunday. The list is long.

So, no, I don't regret the decision. But the decision to name it the Centre for Peace was not without controversy. Some of you may remember. Many people associated peacemaking with peaceniks, wearing bandanas and flowing skirts and speaking out against pretty much anything associated with the “establishment”. Others worried that an explicit focus on peace might implicitly dishonour the veterans and nursing sisters for whom the sanctuary was built. I was flabbergasted at the level of resistance. I should not have been. The truth is peace means a great many things to different people. When we say the word “peace” we might assume that everybody immediately is thinking about the same thing. We'd be wrong in that assumption.

What John's gospel calls the “peace that passes all understanding” is far more complex and nuanced than I ever imagined 14 years ago. This morning I want to apply an integral lens to this business of peacemaking. By “integral” I mean a map of reality that American philosopher, Ken Wilber developed, to help us be as inclusive as possible of all perspectives as possible. Another way of saying this is that we don't want to exclude, through unconscious assumptions, any perspective on peace. Typically, we

have a vague sense that peace is about the absence of war or conflict. The other association that is broadly shared is that peace has something to do with an inner calm. But beyond these two, it gets very fuzzy. Ironically, the unconscious assumptions we carry around inside of us about what peace means are the cause of cultural conflict between groups who share a common goal of working for peace.

Remember the four quadrants or four fundamental perspectives of the integral map? They are the interior of the individual, (the realm of inner peace and evolutionary growth of the individual); the exterior of the individual (the realm of our behavior, and how we actually practice peace); interior of the collective (the realm of shared meanings and the quality of our relationships); and the exterior of the collective (the social and political systems which can be just or unjust). Don't worry about memorizing these realms or perspectives. Just let them go for now, because I'm going to talk about each of them in a little more depth.

This latter perspective, the social and political systems we are embedded in, is captured in the popular saying, "without justice there is no peace". Last Sunday many congregations celebrated Martin Luther King Sunday. (We were planning on it, and then felt we needed to remember Haiti). For him, peace was the pursuit of racial, economic, and educational justice. There could be no lasting peace without equal opportunity for blacks. Peace involved

changing the social, economic, and political systems in such a way that Isaiah's vision would apply to blacks: "They shall no longer be called Forsaken, but rather My Delight Is In Them". This is what peace means for the majority of United Church people – certainly for clergy, because we were taught this in seminary. We've been steeped in this perspective. Without this systemic dimension, "peace" is trivialized because it ignores the suffering caused by systemic inequalities.

Elizabeth Ward helped us in Bible study with a systemic take on peace in Haiti. She noted that the farm subsidies in the U.S. and the Western developed nations mean that farmers in Haiti can't receive a living wage for their crops. So, they move into already over-crowded cities to find work. Where do they live? In overcrowded houses and cities that aren't built to withstand earthquakes, even though they live in an earthquake zone. When you start connecting farm subsidies in the developed nations with rural migration to overcrowded cities to live in houses that are under built because the people are poor and invisible – you are looking at peace from the perspective of making our social systems just – no peace without justice.

In the realm of the interior of the collective – or the "we" space – peace is about the quality of my relationships. Only 50 years ago, it's unlikely that this would have been included in any definition of peace. The idea of developing "relationship skills" didn't exist. If I start my day

having had an argument with Ann, my wife, I feel crappy all day. I have no peace. Peacemaking, in this sense, is all about the arduous work of communicating clearly and compassionately, listening deeply, speaking authentically, all for the sake of deepening my intimacy with another. It is about building a culture of shared meaning, principles, and norms. This is the work of developing skills to be in authentic community. Just like at CMUC we build a field of energy born of our collective engagement with each other that is tangible.

Relational integrity is a key dimension of peacemaking. It's often at this level that well-intended communities who gather together to serve humanity – faith groups, activists, NGO's, environmentalists, disintegrate. We try to change the social and political system without a commitment to relational integrity at our peril. Without this relational perspective, “peace” is not sustainable because it lacks the bond of human love.

And then there is the perspective that emerges from the inside of my individual self. Here we talk about achieving inner peace, so that our actions may be more effective. An anxious mind dissipates and diffuses our capacity to act. So, we may learn meditation or contemplation, we may learn the Buddhist practice of mindfulness – learning to notice our thoughts and actions without judgment. Inner peace requires many things – capacity to manage our brain

activity, self-acceptance, and living with deep purpose in life.

But cultivating a calm mind isn't what peacemaking is exclusively about in this quadrant. It's also about being in right relationship with a blessed *unrest* – the impulse to evolve as an expression of an evolving universe. Here peace is actually a holy turbulence, as you allow as many perspectives and worldviews to shape your consciousness as possible. There is the work of integrating these into a coherent whole – or rather trusting your Big Self as it weaves a tapestry of unity from these multiple perspectives. As we do this work our capacity for compassion and empathy for perspectives other than our own increases – which is the work of peace.

Here, peacemaking involves cultivating a rhythm that moves between these two poles of practices: one is the resting in Being and the other pole consists of practices that help us to consciously cooperate with becoming. It is from the interior of this personal worldspace or perspective that Gandhi's famous saying arises: You must be the change you want to see in the world.

Then there is looking at peacemaking from the perspective of the exterior of the individual – our practice of peace or to use the cliché, walking the talk. Peace-making requires practice. The first thing we do when somebody starts talking about peace is examine their behavior – does she exhibit inner peace, is he working in his own evolution, is he relationally

authentic and empathic, has she done her psychological work, is she talking about her love of the planet and driving a hummer, does he talk about justice but remain silent in the face of injustice?

This is a very brief summary of four dimensions or perspectives on peace. I just want to make a few comments before continuing. First, the work of peacemaking is broad. It truly is a lifework and a lifetime worth of work. Second, we may well spend our lives focused in one of these perspectives – and that’s OK, but just be aware that if your peace work is the cultivation inner peace don’t make the mistake of reducing all peace work to inner peace. Similarly, you may be an activist, but be aware that this is your piece of the peace pie, and don’t trash those who are practicing inner peace. We’re all tempted to reduce reality down to our own preferred perspective and then get critical of other choices. No single human being, except perhaps for a Jesus or a Buddha, will ever master all of these perspectives in a lifetime.

Ok, so we’ve begun to explore the complexity of this peace that passes all understanding. There is another layer of complexity that is critical to understand, notwithstanding what I just said! 😊 Namely – and you won’t be surprised to hear me say this – peace is an evolving target. How we interpret peace is also determined by our worldview – or stage of consciousness – through which we see the world. Worldviews, you’ll remember, are shared assumptions and

values about reality that are often unconscious. We hold these worldviews and see reality through them, even if we don’t know we do. Let me give a brief run-through of these worldviews and how each might interpret peace.

From a warrior worldview peace is peace through victory. I watched the film Alexander a few weeks ago. Alexander the Great conquered one nation after the other, and brought a kind of peace. Then Rome came along and did the same thing – Pax Romana, the peace of Rome – peace through victory. Even today, when nations are at war, peace will be interpreted as victory over the enemy.

From a traditional worldview peace is peace through moral order and a shared purpose derived from an external authority, like priests, or Scripture, or the state. Peace is a society based upon biblical principles, family values, and everybody knowing their proper place in the divine order. Peace is knowing that a good life will be rewarded in heaven, and a bad life will likewise punished. The army and the police force are foundational institutions in defending good order.

From a modernist/achiever worldview peace is peace through the proper application of reason, and thereby gaining freedom from superstition and myth. Adherence to arbitrary external authorities, like the church and the aristocracy, are the cause of great injustice and inequity, keeping the masses from realizing true

freedom and democratic participation. So, ironically, the Great Revolutions are considered to have served the cause of peace.

From the achievist worldview, capitalism is believed to have the potential to help even the poorest participate in an economic system that can lift the poor up and give them dignity. It is the peace that comes from knowing that there is a way out of victimhood, and that way out is individual initiative. An army and a police force are required to defend both good order and our business interests.

From a postmodern/egalitarian worldview peace is peace through inclusion of the left-behinds. It is transformation of political and economic systems that privilege white males of Western European descent. Peace is justice – the fair distribution of wealth and opportunity. It is giving voice to the voiceless, and placing limits on greed and ambition. Here, for the first time really, the necessity of military force is called into question. They may be necessary, but from this worldview, it's a necessary evil. They are there to protect a way of life that this worldview is actually against. The defense of corporate interests is part of the problem, not the solution.

What happens is that, like with perspectives, each of these worldviews just assumes that it sees reality more clearly than the others. Each tends to be dismissive of the others. Conversations about peace will ironically evoke conflict. This is part of

the challenge of working for peace in the 21st century. We can't even agree on what it is, let alone how to get there.

An integral worldview sees the dignities and disasters of each of these worldviews. We *do* need a solid moral foundation and religious traditions, but family and religion comes in many sizes and shapes and when it reflects the values of an unjust order, both institutions must be encouraged to evolve. We *do* need our entrepreneurs and risk-takers to create wealth and jobs, but let's not be naïve about how ambition can morph into greed and end up plundering the planet and perpetuating injustice. We *do* need to change the system and help to give the voiceless a voice, but let's also realize that there is a place for individual initiative and responsibility. And when we have a conversation about peace, let's be sure to define our terms and share our assumptions, so that we can work together – peaceably.

Jesus has a core metaphor that described his vision of peace - the Kin(g)dom of God. It includes all the dimensions, perspectives, and worldviews I have described, plus ones that have yet to coalesce into consciousness. But this much we do know – the Kin(g)dom of God is a realm, which manifests the essential unity of all creation, a unity that encompasses and celebrates wild diversity. The Kin(g)dom of God is a story we tell ourselves that helps us to know that we belong to the universe, and that we *are* the universe in human form – a narrative of radical kinship.

It is house of hospitality that is expansive enough to have a clean, safe room for every thing and everybody. It is dynamic, not static – a process as much as it is a realm. The Kin(g)dom of God is a movement of Spirit, the way the Divine reigns in the cosmos as the push and pull of the possible. Finally, as Jesus said, it is both within us and among us – always already present, waiting to be revealed as we open our hearts and minds, and yet waiting also to be realized – by communities like this one.

After the service we will be making our way over to Centre for Peace to unveil a peace flag. We would call this a peace march, and that would be fine. There is a great tradition of peace marches. We might also call it A Mindful Walk for Peace. As you make it, you might want to ask yourself “at this moment in my life, from my preferred perspective and worldview, what is the peace that I am walking for? What is the peace I am committed to revealing and realizing? What’s my piece of the peace puzzle?”