

**‘Peace Making: Living Non-Violently in a Violent World’
Sermon given by the Reverend James Robinson,
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This sermon is about peace making. How do we create peace in a world filled with conflict?

Peace making is not the denial of conflict. It is not naïve or romantic. It is not like an ostrich putting its head in the sand. On the contrary, peace making begins by recognizing that our world is filled with conflict. In evolution, our animal and human ancestors that killed most successfully survived and passed on their genes. We humans are born with aggression. So we cannot eliminate aggression, but we can choose how to channel it. We cannot eliminate conflict, but we can choose how to respond to it. We can learn to use conflict and aggression to deepen human dignity and a sense of the Sacred. That would be real peace making.

As the song goes: “Let peace begin with me.” There may be a few saints in the audience today, but most of us are in a deep struggle: will we love our self or hate our self? We are plagued by self criticisms: “I’m too fat, I’m too thin, my hair looks awful, I don’t earn enough money, I’m not as good as my sibling, I’m stupid, I’m boring, I’m lazy” – each one has our own unique litany of these internal voices. We are plagued by regrets: “I was a bad parent, I wasted my best years, I can never forgive myself.” We are plagued by worries about the future: “What will happen, how will it all turn out, what can I really count on?” Sometimes these internal conflicts are quiet and other times they are noisy.

Instead of collapsing or constricting under the weight of these voices, internal peace making is a positive affirmation: “I know I’m not perfect, but I love myself. God loves me, I love me, I deserve to be here.” Peace making means forgiving our self, because when we hang onto regrets it is a heavy burden. Peace

making means softening our self criticism - less comparing our self to others. Peace making means softening our worry about the future. One day at a time. Peace making begins with our self. We cannot end all internal conflict, but we can soften it by loving our self instead of being harshly critical.

Let us make peace with our self, and let us make peace with each other. We will consider this from two angles: peace within our families, and peace between groups in society. Being a peace maker within our family (both nuclear and extended) is not “peace at any price.” Peace making is not about being martyr giving up our genuine needs and wants. Peace making is honest about the joy and the pain in our family.

Peace making means opening up communication. Family member are encouraged to listen to one another without judgment, shame, or blame. If we need help to do this, we find a good mediator or counselor. Peace making means working towards genuine forgiveness. If another family member refuses to change or dialogue with us, indeed is even abusive to us, then peace making means, setting appropriate boundaries and getting the help we need to heal our self, so we do not carry the burden of resentment. Peace making in family life is hard work. But nothing is more important the quality of love in our primary relationships.

Let us make peace within our self, within our families, and with other groups in society. In order to do this, we need the courage to examine our own prejudices. We all carry prejudice. We are all pre judging other people – seeing them as a stereotype rather than as a full human being. Peace making means seeing the human being and not the stereotype.

For the past year, my London chapel has had a project, called Building Bridges, with the aim of making connections between chapel members and Muslims living in London. We have had,

almost monthly, a Muslim-Unitarian gathering of some kind. In the past few months an impasse has arisen. Members of the chapel, in particular some women in the chapel, have been frustrated with what they see as the oppression of Islamic women, with no opportunity to speak openly about the issue. A member of the Chapel, organized a gathering recently of women (an equal representation of Islamic women and Chapel women) to have an open sharing. From the reports I've received, it was a time of respectful and healing discussion.

This is peace making: reaching past our differences and stereotypes to listen to one another, to understand each other, to appreciate one another, and thus to grow closer in genuine friendship. What most people want is really rather simple: to be listened to, understood, and appreciated. If we give that to one another, most of the misunderstandings between us can be resolved.

In this regard, Jesus gives us the ultimate challenge, to extend this understanding to our enemy. He said: "Love your enemy, bless them that curse you." When Dr. Martin Luther King led demonstrations to end racial segregation in the United States, he would often hand to his followers a card outlining a non-violent philosophy. The central message was this: non-violence begins by seeing your opponent as a human being and a child of God. Protesters did not have to love or approve of being mauled by police dogs or knocked over by a fire hose, but were called to love the person holding the fire hose or unleashing the dog. This is the power of non-violent peace making: opposing the action but loving the person. Because: if we hold hatred or resentment toward another human being, it is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. We forgive (not the action but the person), not because we are a saint or a martyr, but because we do not want to carry the burden of resentment one day longer.

Let us be non-violent peace makers, with our self, with each other, and with the world. We need to make peace with the earth. We humans are violently destroying the earth. Polluted air, polluted soil, polluted water, species dying off daily – What we are doing to the earth is like domestic violence. It is like beating up a family member and thinking its OK. Well, it's not. I can hear the earth asking in exasperation: "What is the soul of the human being: greedy domination or loving kindness?"

Peace making means changing how we live on the earth. We have only one home: earth. The earth gives us everything we need for life, and all it asks from us is a little respect. Which means: lowering our carbon footprint. Changing how we live. Consuming less and being happier with a simpler life. It means thanking the earth every single day that we have breath.

We need to make peace with the earth and with other nations upon it. We need to tackle the question of war. In this regard, some leaders, like the Dalai Lama, argue that non-violence is the only viable choice. The Dalai Lama writes: "Today, we are so interdependent, that the concept of war has become outdated. When we face problems today, we have to arrive at solutions through dialogue. Hatred never helps. Therefore, we follow a policy of non-violence."

Yet skeptics argue that such an approach has not prevented China from taking Tibet and abusing its people. This side argues that war can be ethical. Most Christian, Jewish, and Islamic scholars agree that it is moral to kill in a war if the war is just. They describe a just war as follows:

- +one side is the obvious aggressor and must be stopped;
- +negotiations were earnestly attempted but failed;
- +innocent lives are being killed and injured and must be protected;

- +the force used to stop the aggression is appropriate to the threat;
- +the war is ended as quickly as possible.

In my view, the war in Iraq is not a just war. I support the British and American troops but I do not support the war. I respect the young men and women in the armed services, who are doing a terribly difficult assignment with as much dignity as could be hoped for. But the war itself has not been just from the beginning. It began by misleading statements or perhaps even some lying about “weapons of mass destruction”. Then the war commenced without understanding the cultural context. At the start of the invasion, all I could think of was Yugoslavia, and how once the authoritarian rule was over, ethnic civil war took over. That is what has happened in Iraq. The sending of 20,000 more American troops will only create more carnage. The essential point is this: more earnest diplomacy would have prevented this war in the first place. More earnest diplomacy can stop the war now. Yes, that means we need to include Iran, Syria, and other groups in the discussions toward peace.

I am not a pacifist. I recognize (for example) that the evil of Nazism or slavery in America had to be stopped. But when I read a list of the wars fought in the last hundred years, I can only find a few of them that I think were morally justified. The rest fit these words by the famous general and President Dwight Eisenhower: “War is the failure of diplomacy.” Peace making means focusing our best efforts, time, and resources into diplomacy, and having war be a very, very last resort.

Finally, peace making means creating a just society. The huge discrepancy between wealth and poverty, in Paris, London and around the world, is not acceptable. It is a form of violence. It is time to make poverty history. That dream is within the realm of human possibility, if we have the will to do it. Similarly, we must

over come all the violent “isms” in society: racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, etc. Peace making is the movement towards a just society in harmony with the earth.

My friends, each one of us is called to be a peace maker: with our self, each other, and the whole world. We can be peace makers in the small actions of daily life:

- +loving our self instead of criticizing our self;
- +reaching out to our family with caring communication;
- +moving past our stereotypes to make friends with people who are different than we are;
- +living more gently upon our mother earth;
- +and asking our leaders to put diplomacy first and make war a very last resort.

In world filled with conflict, may we peace makers. May we fulfill the words of Jesus: “Blessed are the peace makers, for they shall be called the children of God.” May we truly be children of the Sacred.

Amen

Meditation

Let us join in the spirit of meditation. I invite you to sit comfortably, with your eyes open or closed as you wish. After a time of quiet, I will invite you to join in a guided meditation, to imagine peace making in daily life.

Let us begin by making peace with our self.

I invite you to imagine that you are in a large room. In the room is a large round table with chairs around it. This table may be made larger or smaller as you wish. You sit down in one of the chairs.

Sitting in the other chairs are all the different parts of you. The parts you like and the parts you don't like. The public you and the private you. The feeling you and the thinking you. The critical you and the regretful you. The worried you. The successful you. Imagine all the parts of you sitting around one large table.

Imagine now that every part of you signs a peace agreement. The peace agreement reads simply "love". Every part of you will be loved and cared for.

Imagine now all the critical, regretful, resentful, and worried parts of you softening and relaxing. Even when you are weak and make mistakes you are loved. Imagine every part of you working together in the spirit of loving kindness.

Let us make peace with our self.

Now, according to your own faith, I invite you to bring God into the room, with all the parts of you sitting around the table.

Imagine this any way you want to. What would God say to you and all the parts of you?

Now imagine that the room, the table, all the parts of you, and God, are inside of you, in the center of your heart. You leave that room, and walk onto the streets of Paris. Imagine walking down the sidewalk and meeting someone you know who is very different from you. You may feel a bit awkward, unsure what to say or do. Imagine the two of you sitting down at a café, and really listening to one another...understanding each other better...appreciating each other. This is peace making in society.

Now let us be a peace maker in our own family. Ask your self: is there anyone in my family that I need to make peace with? Is there anyone I need to forgive? How would you reach out to this person? Would you need a mediator to help you communicate? And if they will not dialogue with you, how can you find healing for yourself? This is peace making in your family.

Finally, let us join in a moment of visionary hope. Imagine the whole human community at peace. Imagine nations and cultures living a peace with their differences. Imagine humanity treating the earth with reverence and respect. Imagine poverty has ended. Yes it is a dream, but let us dream a bit. See the beautiful planet earth filled with loving kindness.

This may not happen any time soon, but it is a vision we can keep turning towards. For it is better to light a candle of hope than to continually curse the darkness. Let us be peace makers, not romantically, but in the real conflicts of daily life. Let us keep faith that we shall overcome someday.

Amen

