

“Waging Peace”

Micah 6:1-5 Luke 6:27-36

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History was always one of my favorite subjects in school. I still love history. But you don't have to be an avid student of history to soon realize that human history seems to be one war after another. Sometimes it seems as if the history books contain little else. We human beings seem to very good at waging war and not very good at waging peace. Waging war demands huge expenditures of money and resources; love of country, family, and comrades in arms is required; sacrifice is inescapable and sometimes the ultimate sacrifice is unavoidable. Waging peace demands expenditures of money and resources; love of country, family, and comrades in the struggle is required; sacrifice is inescapable and the ultimate sacrifice is sometimes unavoidable, just ask Jesus, the one we know as the Prince of Peace or look to the example of some of his followers like Dr. Martin Luther King. No matter what your views are on whether any war can be just, one thing is clear, Jesus, the Prince of Peace, calls on his followers to wage peace in this world filled with war.

As I just pointed out ALL of human history has been filled with war, so it doesn't make much difference if we talk about the time of Micah 2,600 years ago, or the time of Jesus 2,000 years ago or our own time right now. In fact if anything Israel in the time of the prophets was under greater military threat than anything this country has ever experienced, except certain parts of the country during the Civil War. Israel was basically a doormat for one great empire after another throughout most of its history. It knew devastating wars, wars that destroyed its cities and towns, wars that

lead to the mass deportation of its citizens, wars that led to the total destruction of the Northern Kingdom and ten of the twelve tribes of Israel being lost to history.

Yes, the people of Israel knew the horrors of war intimately. Perhaps this is why we find such beautiful vision of peace, such as the one from Micah 4. The strongest advocates of peace are often those who have known the horrors of war. What soldier who has experienced the death and destruction of war has not dreamed of life lived in the arms of their families and friends, quietly going about their business, sitting in their back yard sipping a cool drink, watching the fireflies go by. Micah put it this way, **“Everyone will sit under his own vine and fig tree, and no one will make them afraid,...”** Micah 4:4

Micah’s vision of peace still resonates in the hearts and souls of people today. Most know the wonderful vision of “beating swords into plow shears and spears into pruning hooks.” It has become part of our language. On the United Nations grounds is a beautiful statue depicting this beautiful vision of peace. It shows a man transforming a sword into a plow. This man represents not just a single human being, but the whole human race coming to realize that the pursuit of peace is better than the pursuit of war. More than that it represents humanity transforming the societal forces that lead to war, not only those forces within the human heart but also the kind of principalities and powers that President Eisenhower, who certainly knew the horrors of war as a general and leader of the allied forces in WWII, warned us about when he spoke of the military industrial complex.

Just imagine how this world could be transformed if all the time, talent, creativity and energy that goes in war and preparation for the possibility of war were put to positive use! We could feed the starving. House the

homeless. Make sure every child got an education. We could redouble our efforts to cure cancer, AIDS, and every other disease that afflicts humankind. We could ensure that all have access to decent health care. We could increase our efforts tenfold to clean up pollution and create a sustainable economy. Given how much is spent worldwide on war and the preparation for war I don't think this is an exaggeration. What do you think?

Micah makes it clear that this glorious transformation will not come about just because human beings wise up. We've had plenty of time to wise up and it hasn't happened yet. So far we have just come up with better and more efficient ways to kill each other! We've come a long way from the clubs our primitive ancestors used to the nuclear weapons more and more nations desire and are building. To paraphrase Albert Einstein, Humanity has unlocked the wonder of the atom but it has not advanced much in the area of morality and spirituality.

So it is that Micah envisions a time when the people of the world will march to Jerusalem, not to lay siege to it or to conquer it but enter the temple of God **“so that God can teach us his ways and we can obey God's teachings. God's teachings will go out from Jerusalem,...”** (Micah 4:2b) Imagine the Middle East today. Now I know it will take an enormous imaginative leap, but close your eyes for a moment. What would the headlines be if Micah's vision came to pass? *(give people a chance to do this) (Might even ask for some headlines that they came up with)*

Do these imaginative headlines cause us to smile in anticipation of a world transformed or do they make us smile at the seeming impossibility of such a thing? From a human point of view they may indeed be impossible, but never underestimate the power or the desire of God to make peace real.

Some five or six hundred years passed between Micah's vision of peace and the time of Jesus. We know for a fact it never came to pass in intervening period. In fact things only got worse. In the time of Jesus Israel was an occupied country. The Romans exercised dominion with an iron hand. Zealots, early day terrorists, wandered the streets assassinating Jews who collaborated with Rome and killing and unwary soldiers they might come across. Forty years after Jesus' death and resurrection the Jews would revolt, win freedom for a brief time and then face utter defeat at the Romans hands. The temple would be destroyed for the final time and all Jews were banned from the city. Another revolt would come in 135 A.D. and it would be brutally repressed.

It is in this context that Jesus comes preaching and teaching, **“But I say to you who are listening, love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who are cruel to you.”** (Luke 6:27-28) What do you suppose the Zealots would have thought about this! What would the Romans have thought? What would the average person on the street have thought?

There are similarities and difference between Micah's and Jesus' visions for peace. Both begin and end with God. In Micah's vision of peace the word of the Lord goes out to all the world and people listen. Jesus, while he roots his vision in God does so in a different way. He points us to the very nature of God as a loving merciful God, who showers blessings not just on the deserving but also the undeserving. Furthermore, if we are to be children of God we are to act in the same way. **“...love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without hope of getting anything back. Then you will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High**

God, because he is kind even to people who are ungrateful and full of sin. Show mercy, just as your Father shows mercy.” (Luke 6:35-36)

Notice that Jesus doesn't pretend that every one will share this vision of peace. In fact he takes a very realistic view and assumes that not everyone, indeed maybe not even a majority of people will share this vision of peace. Jesus knows that not only do nations have enemies but we as individuals at the very minimum have people we don't like as well as others. Worse than that Jesus says that if we are to be children of God we must actually do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us and pray for those who do not wish us well. He even says we are to turn the other cheek if someone hits us! Talk about active, grassroots peacemaking on the most basic level!

Frederick Buechner, in his book *Wishful Thinking* says that some might see a contradiction in Jesus when it comes to peace. On the one hand in Matthew 10:24 Jesus says, **“Do not think that I have come to bring peace, but a sword.”** On the other hand, in John 14:27 Jesus tells his disciples, **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you.”** Which is it? A sword or Peace? When people are cruel to us, hate us, hit us, in every way demonstrate they are our enemies we would probably prefer the Jesus who says he came not to bring peace but a sword over the Jesus who says he came to bring peace, his peace. Yet is there a contradiction between these two statements by Jesus? Buechner says no. He says, **“The contradiction is resolved when you realize that for Jesus peace seems to have meant not the absence of struggle but the presence of love.”** (*Wishful Thinking*, p. 69)

Jesus seeks to form a community that engages in the struggle to love, to love all, even our enemies. Jesus realizes that he is asking a lot, that he is asking us to go above and beyond our ordinary day to day experience. He

says in Luke 6:31-32 **“Do to others what you would want them to do to you. If you love only the people who love you, what praise should you get? Even sinners love people who love them.”** Yes, Jesus wants those who follow him to go above and beyond the call to duty and love as God loves.

I will conclude with these words from a book I recently read, *Just Peace Making*. “A positive theology of peace is not simply reactive, but proactive. It takes initiatives. It creates peace. It sees peace not as something to be achieved merely by refraining from war, but by taking peacemaking initiatives. Peace like war must be waged. It must be waged courageously, persistently, creatively, with imagination, heart, and wisdom. Peacemaking is rooted in the heart of the biblical understanding of God’s grace, which does not merely refrain from punishing but take dramatic initiatives I coming to us, speaking in the burning bush (Exodus 3), pouring love into us in Jesus Christ while we were God’s enemies (Rom. 5:1-210.” (*Just Peacemaking, p. 18*

Realizing how much God loves us and the world may we be individually and as a community of faith seek to wage peace in God’s name. Amen.