



THE SEVENTH SUNDAY OF EASTER
THE SUNDAY OF MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND

May 24, 2020

North Congregational Church
New Hartford, Connecticut

WORSHIP ON THE ELEVENTH TIME
THAT WE ARE NOT GATHERING IN OUR SANCTUARY
BECAUSE WE WISH TO HONOR THE GOVERNOR'S REQUEST FOR
PHYSICAL DISTANCING IN ORDER TO PREVENT THE SPREAD
OF THE CORONAVIRUS THAT IS TRAVELING AROUND THE GLOBE

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FOR YOUR MEDITATION

What is absurd and monstrous about war is that men who have no personal quarrel should be trained to murder one another in cold blood.

~Aldous Huxley (1894 – 1963) English writer and philosopher.

Distorted history boasts of bellicose glory . . . and seduces the souls of boys to seek mystical bliss in bloodshed and in battles.

~Alfred Adler (1870 – 1937) Austrian medical doctor and psychotherapist

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THE PEACE OF CHRIST

It is normally our custom when we gather to extend the Peace of Christ to one another. Even though we are physically apart at this time, may you know that peace.

PRAYER OF INVOCATION

We take time to worship on this Sabbath day because Christ has claimed us and has called to be his witnesses in the world.

We worship on this Sunday of Memorial Day weekend to especially remember those who have lost their lives in the midst of armed conflicts.

In our time of meditation let us reflect on their great sacrifice and the sorrow, destruction and chaos brought about by war.

May we open our hearts this day to the teachings of Christ, the Prince of Peace.

OPENING HYMN *For the Healing of the Nations* Tune: GCWM RHONDA
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WdYJeGHmCjM>

For the healing of the nations, Lord, we pray with one accord,
for a just and equal sharing of the things that earth affords.
To a life of love in action help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom, from despair your world release,
that, redeemed from war and hatred, all may come and go in peace.
Show us how through care and goodness fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living, let it from the earth be banned:
pride of status, race or schooling, dogmas that obscure your plan.
In our common quest for justice may we hallow brief life's span.

You, Creator God, have written your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service earth its destiny may find. -Words: Fred Kaan

SCRIPTURE. John 17: 6-19 (A PRAYER OF JESUS: The “Priestly Prayer”)

In our reading this morning from the gospel we hear a portion of the “High Priestly Prayer” of Jesus that occupies the entirety of the seventeenth chapter of John and concludes the final teaching of Jesus that extends from chapter 13 through 17.

Jesus is preparing to return to God and reminds his disciples of his earthly mission as well as his desires for them, who are to carry on in his name, in the form of a prayer.

6 "I have made your name known to those whom you gave me from the **world**. They were yours, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your **word**.

7 Now they know that everything you have given me is from you;

8 for the **words** that you gave to me I have given to them, and they have received them and know in truth that I came from you; and they have believed that you sent me.

9 I am asking on their behalf; I am not asking on behalf of the **world**, but on behalf of those whom you gave me, because they are yours.

10 All mine are yours, and yours are mine; and I have been glorified in them.

11 And now I am no longer in the **world**, but they are in the **world**, and I am coming to you. Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, **so that they may be one, as we are one**.

12 While I was with them, I protected them in your name that you have given me. I guarded them, and not one of them was lost except the one destined to be lost, so that the scripture might be fulfilled.

13 But now I am coming to you, and I speak these things in the **world** so that they may have my joy made complete in themselves.

14 I have given them your **word**, and the **world** has hated them because they do not belong to the **world**, just as I do not belong to the **world**.

15 I am not asking you to take them out of the **world**, but I ask you to protect them from the evil one.

16 They do not belong to the **world**, just as I do not belong to the **world**.

17 Sanctify them in the truth; your **word** is truth.

18 As you have sent me into the **world**, so I have sent them into the **world**.

19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth.

MEDITATION

The Word and the World

The Rev. Marcia Lynn

Cox

Memorial Day is an American holiday, as we well know, observed on the last Monday of May. Many Americans observe Memorial Day by visiting cemeteries or memorials, holding family gatherings and participating in parades. Unofficially, it marks the beginning of the summer season. But more importantly and with solemnity, on this day we honor the men and women who died while serving in the U.S. military.

Originally known as Decoration Day, it originated in the years following the Civil War and became an official federal holiday in 1971. Memorial Day, as Decoration Day gradually came to be known, originally honored only those lost while fighting in the Civil War.

But during World War I the United States found itself embroiled in another major conflict, and the holiday evolved to commemorate American military personnel who died in all wars.

Memorial Day is not a Sunday on the liturgical calendar, but war and peace and mourning are matters for the church. And so, this Sunday of Memorial Day weekend, I hope that we can all pause for a moment, to mourn and to reflect.

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A man in his 80's who lived in the beautiful Tuscany region of Italy went to his local church for confession.

When the priest slid open the panel in the confessional, the man said, "Father ... during World War II, a beautiful woman knocked on my door and asked me to hide her from the enemy. So I took her in."

The priest replied, "What a wonderful thing to do, my son! You have no need to confess this."

"Well, Father," said the man, "there's more to it than that... She was so grateful that she looked after my every need: cleaning, cooking, washing my clothes, even working in the vineyard."

The priest answered by thinking out loud, "I can well understand how you might have grown accustomed to this kind of attention. On the other hand, perhaps you did take advantage of her. But if you are truly sorry for your actions, you are indeed forgiven."

"Thank you, Father. That's a great load off my mind," replied the man. "But I do have one more question ... "

"And what is that?" asked the priest.

"Should I tell her that the war is over?"

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"Should I tell her that the war is over." How happy we are when wars are over. I'm always struck by the films and photographs at the end of the second world war. In New York City, the celebration lasted for days. Even though governments have the ability to inspire or force their citizens into armed conflicts, we quickly come to realize, if not directly experience, the chaos and devastation they cause.

The first World War was “the war to end all wars.” Sadly, as we know, it was not. Just when we think that an armed conflict is over, another one comes our way.

All peace-loving people long for the day when wars will cease, but, if we look to history, the reality of such time seems out of our grasp in this world as we know it.

In our gospel lesson this morning, Jesus is preparing to leave the world he came to save.

He prays for the people closest to him...and the world he’s leaving behind.

As much as he loved his disciples, one senses discouragement and exasperation. His message of peace and love was...and is...so simple.

Yet it went...and continues to go... unheard.

“I have given the disciples, he prays, your **word**,” we read in verse 14, “and the **world** has hated them because they do not belong to the **world**, just as I do not belong to the **world**.”

The gospel of John, we believe, was written some 60 years after the death of Jesus, and it reflects the frustration and fear of the early Christians.

They had proclaimed and sought to live the gospel and but received a mixed response. Some people embraced their message, while far too many ridiculed and persecuted them.

So we hear statements like these in the book of John from Jesus:

If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. (John 15:18)

As he faces Pilate he says, "My kingdom is not of this world. (John 18:36)

Because the early Christians in the community of John saw the world as an alien place, they contrasted their earthly experience with the heavenly kingdom which was out of this world.

War, it has been said, is hell. And if we have a choice between making the earth a heaven or a hell, it’s puzzling, isn’t it, why we choose to create so much violence and suffering.

Now I’m not naive. Sometimes wars are necessary. When a country is faced armies forced to fight on behalf of pathological, power-or-land hungry leaders, and negotiation fails, it might need to take up arms as a last resort.

But one of the things that is distressing as we look back over most of the wars that have been fought is that yesterday's enemies are another day's political and economic partners.

That is true of our enemies in World War II, which was by most standards a just and noble cause for the Allies.

What is more frightening still is that today's allies might well, and do, become tomorrow's enemies.

In war, people who personally don't have much of anything against one another are forced by their governments to become enemies and in the end lie dead or wounded next to one another in the same battlefield.

"What is absurd and monstrous about war is that men who have no personal quarrel should be trained to murder one another in cold blood," wrote the novelist Aldous Huxley.

Several years ago, Public Television broadcast an independent film entitled "Wings of Defeat." It focused on the Japanese kamikaze pilots, the suicide bombers of the second world war.

The filmmaker, a daughter of Christian missionaries in Japan, included interviews with surviving kamikaze pilots, the recollections of American servicemen who survived kamikaze attacks, as well as rare Japanese military propaganda and training material.

Most moving and distressing to me was the look of doom and deep despair on the faces of these young Japanese pilots as they were about to go into battle.

Their faces alone shattered the myth of the propaganda about fanatical kamikaze to reveal a generation of young men forced to pay for an empire's pride with their lives.

(Shigeyoshi Hamazono (Shi-gey-o'-shi Ham-a-zo'-no), one of the the pilots who survived, reflected on the death of his colleagues. His words apply to all young people who ever lost their lives in war.

"To die in an instant, in their youth, not knowing the bitter or sweet of life. I just feel so sorry for them. They were all so talented and so alive."

Ironically, kamikaze pilots were named for a Japanese phrase meaning "divine wind."

The fact that wars are often waged in the name of religion must make God particularly certain that this world has not heard a word he has said.

Understanding and peace are indeed possible when we come to realize the innocence and goodwill of many people we once, in ignorance, identified as enemies.

You might remember a song written in 1985 entitled, "From A Distance." Here are some of the words:

From a distance the world looks blue and green,
and the snow-capped mountains white.

From a distance the ocean meets the stream,
and the eagle takes to flight.

From a distance we all have enough,
and no one is in need.

And there are no guns, no bombs, and no disease,
no hungry mouths to feed.

From a distance you look like my friend,
even though we are at war.

From a distance I just cannot comprehend
what all this fighting is for.

From a distance there is harmony,
and it echoes through the land.

And it's the hope of hopes, it's the love of loves,
it's the heart of every man.

God is watching us, God is watching us,
God is watching us from a distance.

I loved the imagery in these lyrics, but when I first heard them, I took issue with the theology that is expressed. God, to me, is more close than distant.

But I've come to realize that while God is close, God also takes a broad view of creation. Seeing us from far away allows God to include everyone and everything in his care.

Donald Williams, was an astronaut aboard the US spacecraft Atlantis (October 18-23, 1989). He wrote this about his flight:

"For those who have seen the earth from space, and for the hundreds and perhaps thousands more who will, the experience most certainly changes your perspective.

The things that we share in our world are far more valuable than those which divide us.”

On this Memorial Day weekend, along with our rest and recreation, we very much need to take time to mourn the loss of those who have given their lives for freedom, justice and peace.

And as we remember our country men and women in the military, and let us pledge to care for those who have returned wounded in body, mind or spirit.

But in addition, as people of faith, I’m wondering, hoping, that we can see the world from a distance, from God’s perspective.

Might we, on our American Memorial Day weekend, extend our remembrance and our honor to all innocent, peace loving residents of the planet who have been, or are being, harmed because of armed conflict. And might it also be fitting on this weekend that we consider the ways in which wars can be averted.

It has been observed that we have many institutions that teach us how to make war, but far fewer that teach peaceful conflict resolution.

So on this national holiday, it might be productive for us to be mindful of our attraction to physical brutality and our primitive, automatic instincts to respond to violence with violence.

We’ve yet to answer the question posed by one of the fathers of our country, Benjamin Franklin, who asked “When will mankind be convinced and agree to settle their difficulties by arbitration?”

In our reading from the book of John, as Jesus prepares to leave the world, he prays for protection for his disciples, as he sends them forth into a hostile world to live and spread the gospel.

In another prayer of Jesus, which we know by heart, we say the words, “Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

If we are to honor Christ’s call on our lives, we must never tire of working to insure that the joy, plenty and harmony known in the heavenly kingdom is reflected in this world.

It seems to me that the best ways to remember and honor those who lost their lives in war is to first, remember them but also to do what we can to create a world in which war is no longer necessary. Amen.

MUSICAL REFLECTION

From A Distance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tlWrcejjd3g>

PRAYER

Disarm our hearts, God of Peace;

Help us renounce the fear that takes the form of weapons.

Help us choose the fierce love that moves your human family to dialogue and mutual care for the common good.

Our children are fragile, as is our earth. Give us the wisdom to cherish these gifts by voicing our support for a world free of violence.

Help us to embrace Your wisdom and your will as you challenge us to choose life, not weapons of destruction.

Holy God, God of all the ages, lead us from death to life, to the stockpiling of hope, and of possibilities, and of love rather than the stockpiling of weapons.

We pray to remember our call from Christ to be makers of peace and to become the children of God.

We pray for the healing of the earth and of its peoples. Help us to imagine that another world is possible and guide our actions towards the peace you envision, the peace you have already given us.

(Adapted: The Rev. Loey Powell, United Church of Christ)

We are mindful of those engaged in and in the midst of armed conflict, especially where their have been casualties this year, in Afghanistan, Cameroon, Chad, the Congo, Egypt, India, Iran, Libya, Kashmir, Maghreb Africa, Mexico, Niger, Nigeria, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, South Sudan, Syria, Turkey, Uganda, Ukraine, Yemen. And those citizens of our nation who have died in the military both at home overseas, as well as innocent civilians everywhere.

God, lift the hearts of those for whom this holiday is not just diversion, but painful memory and continued deprivation. Bless those whose dear ones have died needlessly, wastefully [as it seems] in accident or misadventure. We remember with compassion those who have died serving their countries in the futility of combat.

(The Rev. Dick Kozelka, retired pastor of First Congregational Church of Minneapolis, Minnesota)

We ask you to forgive the pride and the sins of this country as well as the words and actions of our leaders who lack empathy and encourage hatred and division among our citizens and with peoples of other nations. Bring us to a state of repentance and restore our respect for one another, especially in these difficult times.

As we honor those who have died in the nation's service this Memorial Day, we pray for peace for all peoples and nations of the world.

We pray for this beautiful blue planet and your precious creation. Inspire us to tread lightly and gently, for we know that there is enough for everyone if we use its resources wisely and equitably.

We are mindful, healing God, of all people who are suffering from diseases of the body, the mind and the spirit, especially.....

For those who are preparing for medical procedures....

For those who care for the sick and the dying....

For those people facing death

For all who have passed into care and for family and friends who mourn their loss.....

In our own lives, we bring to you now our joys and concerns....

All these things we offer, using the words of the prayer that Jesus taught us,

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

In the name of the One who came so that we might have life, and have it abundantly, we pray. Amen.

OFFERING

Although we are not gathering in the sanctuary for worship on Sundays for the time being, the church continues to have expenses. So it would be most appreciated if pledges and offerings could be mailed to the church at P.O. Box 307, New Hartford, CT 06057. Thank you for your generosity.

CLOSING HYMN

This Is My Song

Tune: FINLANDIA

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M-zsFOa-lQ4>

This is my song, O God of all the nations,
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.

This is my home, the country where my heart is,
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine.
But other hearts in other lands are beating,
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country's skies are bluer than the ocean,
And sunlight beams on clover leaf and pine.
But other lands have sunlight too, and clover,
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.
O hear my song, thou God of all the nations,
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

-Words: Lloyd Stone

OUR COMMON COMMISSION

Let us now forth into the world in peace.
Being of good courage.
Holding fast to that which is good.
Rendering to no one evil for evil.
Strengthening the fainthearted.
Supporting the weak.
Helping the afflicted.
Honoring all persons.
Loving and serving the Lord,
And rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

BENEDICTION

May we go forth this day as instruments of God's peace.
where there is hatred, may we sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
where there is sadness, joy.

May we not so much seek to be consoled as to console,
to be understood as to understand,
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive,
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.
Amen. (Prayer of St. Francis, adapted as a Benediction)

POSTLUDE.

Lord, Make Me An Instrument of Thy Peace

Mary McDonald

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZABZroCGXTU>