

We Strive to Dwell Together in Peace

A sermon by
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The Humboldt Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
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Chalice Lighting – The theme for our service today is “Striving to Dwell Together in Peace.” These Chalice Lighting Words and inspired by the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

I refuse to accept the view that we human beings are so tragically bound to the starless midnight of greed, racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood will never become a reality...

I choose to believe instead that as we embody unarmed truth and unconditional love, unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.

PLEASE STAND NOW AS YOU ARE WILLING AND ABLE – AND JOIN TOGETHER AS WE RECOMMIT OURSELVES TO THE ASPIRATION OF THIS FELLOWSHIP:

May love be the spirit of this Fellowship.
May the quest for truth be its sacrament,
and service be its prayer

To dwell together in peace,
To seek knowledge in freedom,
And to help one another in fellowship.

This is our aspiration.

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows – Let’s take a moment to center. (Pause) – For what are you thankful? To whom do you send loving thoughts? For what does your heart yearn? – Now is the time in our service for the brief sharing of our joys, sorrows, thoughts and prayers. – This stone – is for all that still lies deep and quiet within us.

Silence – Let us now enter a time of Silence that will last for two minutes...and be followed by spoken reflection

Words of Reflection – “I Am Waiting” by Jim Scott

I am waiting in the silence; I am waiting for the dawn
 I am often found in reverence, though from many sources drawn.
 It is not mine to fight for justice, for it will not be won this day
 I am peace and I am waiting for the lost to find their way.

You'll not find me set in judgment of the vain or of the weak.
 But I rise to meet the weary with the solace that they seek.
 Still I have not fed the hungry, nor strewn wealth among the poor.
 I am peace, and bring but mystery and the patience to endure.

I cannot save the suffering from their anger and their pain
 Only open doors of insight, so the healing comes again.
 To the proud I am elusive, to the humble I am near.
 May the broken rise and look beyond the trappings of their fears.

I am found among the seasons, autumn's death and spring's rebirth,
 As relentless, their momentum, as the turning of the earth.
 All are welcome in my presence, for only love can conquer hate,
 I am peace and for the harvest, I have planted and will wait.

Offertory – Now is the time for each of us, as we are able, to dig deep into our financial spiritual and financial resources and to offer from those resources to the mission and message of this Fellowship. Let us each give generously and with joy.

Sermon

If every person in the world had a mind set on freedom, if every person in the world dreamed a sweet dream of peace, if every person of every nation, young and old, each generation, held a hand out in the name of love – there would be no more war.

Sisters and Brothers – you and I are the people that song is talking about. And the Aspiration of our congregation and of our hearts challenges us to respond. One great response you came up with years ago is your sponsorship of Humboldt Mediation Services. I am very impressed with our Social Action Committee and our whole congregation for recognizing the importance of the work Humboldt Mediation Services does.

But it's not enough to be impressed. You and I have to do something to truly be a force for peace in the world. We have to strive to make peace real.

One thing we can do is take the Humboldt Mediation Services training ourselves and then embody what we have learned in our daily lives. The Mediation Service offers our congregation one free training spot each time they do a workshop.

Another thing we can do is to remember and apply the ***Beyond War*** framework. Beyond War was a peace organization that has now joined forces with the National Peace Academy. It was started in 1984 and it operated independently until last year. Beyond War is based on three foundational ideas that I like because they are easy for me to remember.

The First: Is that war and all our other forms of violence against each other are obsolete. They no longer represent adaptive behavior in the face of everything that challenges us. – Getting angry and lashing out is just not helpful anymore.

The Second idea is that we are all in the process of living on this planet together.

And the Third idea is that our means of response to problems are the ends in the making.

I ran into this Beyond War framework several years ago in Fresno when I presided over a disaster in the Fresno UU congregation's relationship with Temple Beth Israel.

The way it went down was this. Our UU Social Justice Chair, who is a radical Jewish Guy himself, invited two radical Jewish sisters who had gone with the Free Gaza movement to break Israel's blockade on Gaza – to present their experience to the congregation and the wider Fresno community.

The sisters were passionate and accurate in their presentation. They showed videos they had taken – they gave eyewitness testimony of what they had seen and they proved that Israel is at times very harsh in its treatment of Palestinians and that often ordinary Palestinian people are horribly oppressed.

In the mail, the day after the sisters' presentation, I received the Annual Report from Amnesty International. It corroborated almost every point the sisters' made.

So accuracy was not the issue that caused the disaster between the UU Fresno and Temple Beth Israel.

The disaster was caused because

The sister's method was an emotional attack against Israel. (This is not to say that their outrage had no cause – it is just to say – that their outrage was an attack and that it was not helpful.)

The disaster was caused because

The sisters' viewpoint was "us" against "them." It was not us against all violence including Palestinian violence. It was "us" against "them:

And...The disaster was caused because

The sisters' means of approach stirred up more emotional attack and more emotional violence rather than less.

It was a very painful situation. We Fresno UUs were at odds with our longest term ally in Social Justice. We were at odds with a congregation we had cradled in the 1890s when Jews first came to Fresno. We were at odds with a congregation that had cradled us in 1953 when the Unitarian Fellowship was reborn. We were at odds with a congregation that had marched with us for Civil Rights, for the United Farm Workers, for A Woman's Right to Choose and for Marriage Equality for Gays and Lesbians.

Furthermore – Temple Beth Israel was at odds with itself. About one third of their members were right with the Free Gaza folks. They were very upset with what was being done in Israel/Palestine in the name of security.

There was visible pain and anguish all around.

So a couple of weeks later, we UUs and Temple Beth Israel had a listening session. Before the session, we UUs engaged in several workshops where we practiced just listening and working to understand what another person was saying and feeling.

When the listening session came, we just listened as a panel of TBIs members talked about how hard it is for them being Jewish in the world.

And there they were: sons and daughters of Holocaust survivors and sons and daughters of centuries of oppression. There they were survivors of discrimination and people with significant, generational Post Traumatic Stress. There they were - heirs of a 60 year old Utopian dream of a country that has brought as much pain and grief into the world for them as it has hope.

That listening session between the Fresno UU Congregation and Temple Beth Israel produced some healing at the time and here has been some healing since. But in the moment – that session was very painful. It was made up of long-time friends, emotionally naked and raw together, revealing their deep wounds and fears. Revealing how they had felt betrayed and misunderstood and vilified and turned into the "other" by ones they had let into their hearts.

The sound in the room was the sound of quiet and of mutual weeping – And the tears were tears of grief, tears of anger, tears of outrage, tears of wonder at how wide and far, as human beings, we stray from the path of peace.

The conversation continued for quite some time and several of the people from Temple Beth Israel said – *You know, **Israel** gets singled out as a violent, capitalistic, greedy aggressor all the time – but Israel a pipsqueak of a country in comparison to the United States of America – of which we all are a part. To quote the old scripture about Saul and David – Israel may have killed its thousands – but the United States of America – the country we all share - has killed tens of thousands and is practicing oppression in occupied territories all over the world. Maybe instead of vilifying one another we can pray for one another because we are all caught in an inescapable web of Violence and Fear. Maybe we can begin to acknowledge that and focus on starting world peace right here.*

WE – we are all in this together.

OUR VIOLENCE – our violence is just no long useful in the world.

OUR MEANS OF RESPONSE TO CONFLICT – That's all we have sisters and brothers. We live with our means. **And if** – in the face of conflict – we center ourselves in our own best spirit – if we state our needs clearly and then listen with open hearts to the needs of others – and if we then work together for responses that meet as many needs as possible....

Then maybe we can create a world of centered, thoughtful, caring people who work together for the common good of humanity and the planet.

To center ourselves and find our best spirits, to support one another, to listen to multiple needs and create healthy responses – you and I have to commit ourselves to the work of peace. The Beyond War commitments are these:

I will work to resolve conflict. I will neither fight nor run away.

I will not use violence.

I will not preoccupy myself with an enemy.

I will maintain an attitude of good will.

I will take initiative and respond to conflict within the Beyond War Principles even when others are confused or lost in fight or flight reflexes.

And I will work together with others to build a world beyond war.

I truly believe, sisters and brothers, that one huge reason we gather in religious communities all around the world is to help us truly learn to embody these principles.

It takes a lot of courage to go out to the edge of our comfort zones and work to resolve in conflict in a positive, life-giving way. Often times, the conflict bursts open anew even as we work on it and in that case, it takes a lot of mindfulness to calm our hearts and engage one another in ways that name issues without attacking or blaming.

But for the sake of ongoing human evolution and for the sake of human survival and the wellbeing of the earth, I truly believe that is what we need to do. We need to strive to dwell together in peace.

So may our striving together here in Humboldt County go well.

May our hearts be in a holy place and the world we create then be blessed with love and amazing grace.

Discussion???

Closing Hymn #1008 - When Your Heart is In a Holy Place

Extinguishing the Chalice

Closing Words

Closing Song

Closing Words: Adapted from Chief Red Cloud

I am a poor and naked human being but I do not want riches. I just want to work with my people so we train our children about how to live right in the world. Riches will do my people no good. We cannot take riches with us to the other world. We do not need riches. We need peace and we need love.

Now with commitment to walking with path of peace and love...

May we go in peace

Closing Song: Go from here in peace – Go with love...

