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### The Gift of New Life: Peace

Matthew 10:34-39

John 14:1, 27

We always prefer hearing about the kinder, gentler Jesus, so when we hear the words of Matthew 10:34, we cringe. We are told in that passage that Jesus has come not to bring peace, but a sword.

Jesus is preparing his disciples with this warning: to follow in the steps of Jesus will bring division because he calls us to face our illusions and delusions square in the face and then live like the children of God. Since Adam and Eve, humanity has always prized its own wisdom over the wisdom of God. Generation to generation, this has been one of our great illusions. From it we become deluded into believing that we are in control of this universe and masters of creation.

The sword of which Jesus speaks is not a dagger used to inflict physical pain or bodily injury, but rather, the sharp edge of separation that is bound to happen when we dedicate ourselves to honoring the principals of Divine peace and justice. Division comes as we leave behind the wisdom of the world, even wisdom held dear by loved ones, and embrace the practices and teachings of Jesus Christ. We will sense division from those who think us foolish or weak. That sharp edge will come as the disciples consciously choose the love of God over and above all other realities.

I do not think this passage means that we seek out division with our relatives and friends. However, choosing to follow in the path of Jesus, we may find loved ones who turn from us. Following Jesus is challenging, but it is also our ultimate hope and salvation.

Jesus is the Prince of Peace and he speaks to us in the Gospel of John and reminds us that his kingdom is not of this world. I remind you of these words in the fourteenth chapter of John verses 1 and 27.

Peace is a gift to us from our risen Lord. However, it is a gift we struggle to understand and consistently fail to live. Yet, this is our moment in time. This is our opportunity to live as the disciples of Christ. This is our corner of the world to become partners with Christ in ushering in a peace that is lasting and just.

These powerful words of the late Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. reinforce the imperative nature of our dedication to peace. In a world that continues to reach for violence in homes and in domestic relationships; in the streets of communities all over the world; in schools, in the workplace, in most every place, we hear these words underscoring the urgency of our choices.

“We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today.

We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now.

In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late.

Procrastination is still the thief of time...

We must move past indecision to action...Now let us begin.

Now let us re-dedicate ourselves to the long and bitter- and beautiful- struggle for a new world.

This is the calling of the children of God,

And our brothers and sisters wait eagerly for our response.

Shall we say the odds are too great?

Shall we tell them the struggle is too hard?

...Or will there be another message, of longing, of hope, of solidarity with their yearnings, of commitment to the cause, whatever the cost?

The choice is ours, and though we might prefer it otherwise we must choose in this crucial moment in human history.”

In this service of worship, we have explored the ponderings of several voices who speak to us concerning peace. Now, I invite us to think in very practical ways about living peacefully. In the Resurrection of Jesus we are given not only a model and vision for peace, but also the power to become peace full as individuals and as nations. But for peace to become a lasting reality, it will take a transformation of one heart, one life at a time beginning first and foremost with the disciples of Christ. For peace to become a lasting reality, we must live as peacemakers.

Peacemakers are called to live with humility and hope, to live heroically and to realize that living peacefully is hard work.

I am convinced that peace grows as we center ourselves in the love of God. Moving toward peaceful interactions in our daily living demands of us the development of humility. In a culture where we spend so much of our time defending our rights, we find it difficult to embrace humility. The writings of Stanley Hauerwas, scholar and theologian, speak of the community of faith, the body of Christ as, “a people so formed by the Spirit that our humility is but a reflection of our confidence in God’s sure work.” (Hauerwas Reader p.149). Humility grows as we focus not so much on our personal rights, but rather on God’s great plan: a kingdom of peace, a kingdom of justice, a kingdom of hope right here, right now. Our trust, our confidence, our living embedded in the love of God is the foundation for our relationship with the Divine. Humility moves us from centering our days on self to centering our daily living on discipleship. Developing humility is a matter of intentional engagement with the Holy Spirit. Humility is mandatory for peace.

Secondly, we are empowered as a people of hope. Once we embrace God’s vision for this world, we are flooded with hope, a tenacious, enduring hope. Even in the face of death and destruction in this city and in this world, we are the people called to offer an enduring hope that God is able and God is willing to lead us toward peace. We can find millions of cynics and naysayers, but our faith demands of us to share hope in every corner of the world where there is despair. Peace becomes reality as we become a people of humility sustained by eternal hope.

As peacemakers, we are called to live heroic lives. Heroism comes from reaching deep within and high above. Heroic lives are shaped by living to God’s greater good and dedicating ourselves to that good. There will be many who will call us foolish, or idealistic, but living heroically calls us to turn down the volume on those who would criticize us and lean into the community of God’s peaceful people and the power of God’s Holy Spirit. We are the leaders for peace and justice, in the name of Jesus Christ, we have the vision and the power to live in peace, but lack only the will to design our words and actions in peaceful ways. Living heroically means structuring out lives around not only the talk of peace, but also actions of peace. Living heroically is mandatory for peace.

Finally, peace comes down to just plain hard work. Counting to ten and maybe twenty or even a hundred before speaking may be a step toward peaceful living in our homes. Measuring our words with others to build rather than diminish will become our daily practice. Walking away from a verbal

fight our routine. Allowing love to over rule the need to be right is our commitment. We will be willing to stay at the table, to continue conversation even with those who anger and frustrate us. Celebrating and honoring that which unites us rather than that which unites us is our lifestyle. We will address the difficult realities of peace in our home, our community and our world because we believe that with God all things are possible and as the people of the Resurrection we practice peace as a way of life.

Step by step, day by day, encounter by encounter we can become God's peacemakers on this planet and we can teach peaceful ways to our children.

Yes, we may very well disturb others who have learned violence well, but we are not called to follow just anyone, we are called to follow in the footsteps of the Prince of Peace and by his grace we have not been left to our own energy and strength, but we have power that we have yet to embrace or employ, we have the power of the Holy Spirit of Almighty God who can and will love us through any circumstance, any threat, any danger.

I saw this article in the Oregonian this week. It is not about peace in the Middle East or Africa, but it does speak to the practices of peace in every day life. I am going to quote from what was printed in the newspaper.

"Gary Frederick thought he had seen everything in 40 years at Central Washington University. Last weekend, he learned he was wrong.

In the top of the second inning as his Wildcats played host to Western Oregon University in Ellensburg, Wash., something happened that spoke to the beauty of athletics. It came in the form of a home run that no one in attendance will forget.

"Never in my life had I seen anything like it," said Frederick, 70, in his 14th season as softball coach. "It was just unbelievable."

Central entered Saturday's doubleheader one game behind Western Oregon in the Great Northwest Athletic Conference race. At stake was a bid to the NCAA's Division II playoffs. Western won the first game 8-1, extending its winning streak to 10 games. Central desperately needed the second game to keep its postseason hopes alive.

Western Oregon's 5-foot-2-inch right fielder came up to bat with two runners on base in the second inning. At the plate, Tucholsky concentrated... She took strike one. And then the senior did something she had never done before -- even in batting practice. The career .153 hitter smashed the next pitch over the center field fence for an apparent three-run home run.

The exuberant former high school point guard sprinted to first. As she reached the bag, she looked up to watch the ball clear the fence and missed first base. Six feet past the bag, she stopped abruptly to return and touch it. But something gave in her right knee; she collapsed on the base path.

"I was in a lot of pain," she told The Oregonian on Tuesday. "Our first-base coach was telling me I had to crawl back to first base. 'I can't touch you,' she said, 'or you'll be out. I can't help you.' "

Tucholsky, to the horror of teammates and spectators, crawled through the dirt and the pain back to first.

Western coach Pam Knox rushed onto the field and talked to the umpires near the pitcher's mound. The umpires said Knox could place a substitute runner at first. Tucholsky would be credited with a single and two RBIs, but her home run would be erased.

"The umpires said a player cannot be assisted by their team around the bases," Knox said. "But it is her only home run in four years. She is going to kill me if we sub and take it away. But at same time I was concerned for her. I didn't know what to do. . . .

"That is when Mallory stepped in."

Mallory Holtman is the greatest softball player in Central Washington history. Normally when the conference's all-time home run leader steps up to the plate, Pam Knox and other conference coaches grimace.

But on senior day, the first baseman volunteered a simple, selfless solution to her opponents' dilemma: What if the Central Washington players carried Tucholsky around the bases?

The umpires said nothing in the rule book precluded help from the opposition. Holtman asked her teammate junior shortstop and honors program student Liz Wallace of Florence, Mont., to lend a hand. The teammates walked over and picked up Tucholsky and resumed the home-run walk, pausing at each base to allow Tucholsky to touch the bag with her uninjured leg.

'We started laughing when we touched second base,' Holtman said. 'I said, I wonder what this must look like to other people.'

Holtman got her answer when they arrived at home plate. She looked up and saw the entire Western Oregon team in tears.

'My whole team was crying,' Tucholsky said. 'Everybody in the stands was crying. My coach was crying. It touched a lot of people.'

Western Oregon won the game 4-2 and extinguished Central Washington's playoff hopes.

Holtman downplayed her role, which her coach said is typical of the White Salmon, Wash. native.

'In the end, it is not about winning and losing so much,' Holtman said. 'It was about this girl. She hit it over the fence and was in pain and she deserved a home run. . . .

'This is a huge experience I will take away. We are not going to remember if we won or lost, we are going to remember this kind of stuff that shows the character of our team. It is the best group of girls I've played with. I came up with the idea, but any girl on the team would have done it.'

Tucholsky will graduate this spring as a business major with a minor in health. She plans to continue her studies at Portland State and pursue a career in the health field. But she will never forget the generosity of her opponents in her final collegiate game.

‘Those girls did something awesome to help me get my first home run,’ she said. ‘It makes you look at athletes in a different way. It is not always all about winning but rather helping someone in a situation like that.’”

Though winning is the reason for the game, it seemed that the norms for the game were not sufficient that day. The player at first base Mallory Holtman offered humility and hope as she saw a situation that she could impact. She put aside her competitive spirit for a few moments and made a heroic choice and then with the help of a teammate, they got involved in the hard work of carrying an injured player around the bases.

It is a model for all of us. To be willing to set aside our rights for the benefit of another. To see even in the most difficult situations that path of hope and then to offer the hard work, the consistent devotion to the path of peace.

The Resurrection calls us to re-order our lives based on forgiveness, liberation, redemption, peace and justice. Not only are we expected to make the necessary changes, we are given the power to live as God’s Easter people. We leave the season of Easter next Sunday as we celebrate Pentecost, but I pray we do not leave the season as we entered it. I pray that transformation is happening in your heart and mine, in your life and mine and because of all of us, in this world. May peace become not just a dream, but a reality!