

“There Is a Path to Peace”

Micah 4:1-8 In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as chief among the mountains; it will be raised above the hills, and peoples will stream to it. ² Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. ³ He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. ⁴ Every man will sit under his own vine and under his own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid, for the LORD Almighty has spoken. ⁵ All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever. ⁶ "In that day," declares the LORD, "I will gather the lame; I will assemble the exiles and those I have brought to grief. ⁷ I will make the lame a remnant, those driven away a strong nation. The LORD will rule over them in Mount Zion from that day and forever. ⁸ As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem." **Micah 5:1-5** Marshal your troops, O city of troops, {1 Or Strengthen your walls, O walled city} for a siege is laid against us. They will strike Israel's ruler on the cheek with a rod. ² "But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans {2 Or rulers} of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins {2 Hebrew goings out} are from of old, from ancient times." {2 Or from days of eternity} ³ Therefore Israel will be abandoned until the time when she who is in labor gives birth and the rest of his brothers return to join the Israelites. ⁴ He will stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD his God. And they will live securely, for then his greatness will reach to the ends of the earth. ⁵ And he will be their peace.

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I graduated High School in a time of relative global peace, or should I say that at least the US wasn't at war with any one, but then again there were all those little CIA instigated wars in Central and South America and, uh, the Cold War. I was a disillusioned teenager with a whole lot of emotional baggage to deal with while trying to figure out how I was going to make it in this world as I launched out into adulthood. Meanwhile the Reagan recession was beginning to set in as his administration began to shift the American economy over to a free market economy. Employment options were not complicit with the American dream. Like my brother I considered the United States Air Force as a career and I pursued that option right down to the moment where I was supposed to sign the dotted line, yet something inside of me kept me from doing it. I wasn't my brother and deep in my heart I was attuned to a different song than he was. He went on to make a career of the Air Force which set him up quite lucratively after retiring from military service. I have wound up a Christian minister. The word lucrative does not fit with the call and as I said I was attuned to different song that would have made working in the military (and I would qualify that by saying as anything other than a chaplain) a lie to my very being.

I was very much into music in those days, the mid-80's, and what moved my heart wasn't your typical teen-age crap. Elvis Costello (the other Elvis) sang a song that

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really summed up my way of seeing the world. I'll sing it for you, if I can. It goes like this:

As I walk through, this wicked world, searchin' for light in the darkness of insanity.

I ask myself is all hope lost? Is there only pain and hatred, and misery?

And each time I feel like this inside, there's one thing I wanna know:

What's so funny 'bout peace love & understanding? Ohhhh,

What's so funny 'bout peace love & understanding?

And as I walked on through troubled times my spirit gets so downhearted sometimes.

So where are the strong and who are the trusted? and where is the harmony?

'Cause each time I feel it slippin' away, just makes me wanna cry.

What's so funny 'bout peace love & understanding? Ohhhh

What's so funny 'bout peace love & understanding? Ohhhh

What's so funny 'bout peace love & understanding?

If “peace, love, and understanding” is the sort of stuff that moved me, I could not have with any sense of integrity made a career of learning war and so I stand before you with a message to proclaim that there is a path to peace and it is in Jesus Christ.

We often hear it said that if there were no religions, there would be no war. Quite a few armchair philosophers think that religion has been the cause of all the major wars since the beginning of who knows when. In all fairness to them, I will admit that Western history wouldn't be what it is without Christians killing in the name of Jesus Christ whether it was killing pagans, Muslims, heretics, or each other. We would be naïve to think that when war breaks out, a person's faith does not play a part in coping with it. Unfortunately, religion can be used as the motivator for getting people to go to war. Case in point, the war on terror became a religious war as soon as it was declared to be a war against evil. Nevertheless, there is a path to peace and it is in Jesus Christ. Global peace cannot be separated from the faith of and faith in Jesus Christ. He is the king to whom the nations of this world will eventually flock to learn his ways.

Micah compels us to look to a day in the end of days when nations will flock to Jesus Christ to learn the paths of peace. In that day Jesus will teach us his ways that we may walk in them. He will judge and settle disputes between nations and the result will be that war will not be learned anymore and the implements of war will be converted to peaceful and fruitful purposes. There will be peace and prosperity for all people not just prosperity for a few and a lack of peace for everybody. Indeed, he will be our peace, this Jesus who came forth into this world in the little town of Bethlehem just as Micah foretold. Because Jesus was born in Bethlehem as Micah said we can rest assured that all that Micah has to say about peace in the last days will come and is coming about. In fact, we are living in those days and we are that remnant of the lame, exiled, and God-afflicted that he has gathered together through whom the world will learn his path to peace. As we are that remnant we have to take seriously that it is we whom he is calling to get off our duffs and teach this world peace rather than buying into its ways of war thinking that war can lead to peace.

Both war and peace are things that must be learned. I think we take for granted that war is just a way of the world that cannot be avoided, but it truly is something, a science, that we learn and unnecessarily so. War is like prejudice. It is indeed something we teach our children. My grandfather was a veteran of WWII and in his way had a lot to say against war, but I also remember sitting on his front porch one summer

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evening when a black man walked down the street and everybody got quiet in order to keep a watchful eye on him. For no good reason, I learned that evening that a black man in a white neighbourhood was something suspicious. And none of the adults on the porch realized what was happening. The odd thing was that everybody said hello. Our children learn war in insidious little ways just like that: squirt guns, stick rifles, video games, books, text books, playing cowboys and Indians. As I wrote this sermon, it just struck me how much of my childhoods was spent playing war games. If we wonder why war is still an option in our world we have to look at what we are teaching our children. If we are not teaching them the ways of Jesus Christ, then they have no alternative but to learn the ways of war. It is also not a valid excuse to say that we must teach our children war because there are other nations out there who teach their children war. Micah says in verse five of chapter four: All the nations may walk in the name of their gods; we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.” We, his church, are those who walk in the name of Jesus Christ and teaching and letting our children learn war is inexcusable no matter the reason.

There is a path to peace and it is in Jesus Christ. There will come a day when nations, not just individuals will flock to him to learn the paths of peace. I’ve spent some time in the mountains and when you’re in the mountains you have to know the paths. My father gave me many talks on what paths to follow out in woods because it is very easy to get twisted around and not even know it. You can think you’re following a mapped trail only to find out too late that somehow you got off the mapped trail to follow a deer trail and there ain’t no going back. You’re lost. When that happens, you head down off the ridge until you come to water and you follow the water because that always leads to people.

You and I, this church, the true Christian faith, we are like one of those little streams of water that lead the lost out of the mountains. Because Jesus is living in our midst, because the Holy Spirit flows through here, we have peace to give to this world. It is in Christian community that Jesus teaches the world the path to peace. On this path the world will learn from us the lessons of things like forgiveness, charity, hospitality, humility, and sharing. We are part of a nation that Jesus has gathered from among all the nations. Our first allegiance is to Jesus and the peace of Christ. I am not far off in saying that if the Christians in this world would choose the ways of peace and refuse war at all costs, there would be no more war. He has called us to himself to learn the ways of peace that we might teach the ways of peace to this world. Therefore, we must choose to learn that peace rather than the ways of war. Peace at all cost does not have war as an option. Amen.