

Messengers of Peace
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May 13, 2007
Mothers Day

Isaiah 52:7-10 Matthew 2:16-18

Hallmark cards, flower shops, Kodak commercials, the sweet, sweet story of mothers all around the world who are praised on this day for being extraordinary people. These are the images and sentiments that most often surround this day. I too wish that warm and loving sentiment to ALL women whether you be young or old, childless or with child, a daughter or a mother, an auntie or mentor, those who have good relationships with their mothers and those who do not. God's blessing and celebration be with all women this day.

And in that same light I wonder how many of us have ever heard the original story behind the first Mother's Day? I share it with you today because I think it has significant implications in light of our text this morning and where we find ourselves as a country. Oddly, the modern commercialized celebration of gifts, flowers, and candy bears little resemblance to the original idea.

The first person to fight for an official Mother's Day celebration in the United States was Julia Ward Howe. You may be more familiar with her name as the writer of the Civil War song, *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*.

Howe was born in New York City on May 27, 1819. Her family was well respected and wealthy. She was a published poet and abolitionist. She and her husband, Samuel Gridley Howe, co-published the anti-slavery newspaper *The Commonwealth*. As a progressive Christian woman she found herself active in the peace movement and the women's suffrage movement. In 1870 she penned the Mother's Day Proclamation. In 1872 the Mothers' Peace Day Observance on the second Sunday in June was held and the meetings continued for several years. Her idea was widely accepted, but she was never able to get the day recognized as an official holiday. The Mothers' Peace Day was the beginning of the Mother's Day holiday in the United States we celebrate today.

I thought you might enjoy seeing the original Proclamation (see www.quaker.org/chestnuthill/motherdy.htm) that explains, in her own powerful words, the goals of the original Mother's Day in the United States. I found it very interesting given the current situation we find ourselves in 2007. I have printed the full text in the back of your bulletin. It is a powerful piece. As you will read, it is a call to all women whether you be baptized of water or of tears to stand up and say yes to peace. "Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means whereby the great human family can live in peace, each bearing after his time the sacred impress not of Caesar, but of God."

Wouldn't it be wonderful if on some distant Mother's Day, the wishes of Julia Ward Howe could be fulfilled and the human race could celebrate a day when, all over the world, no mother would have to mourn the death of her child lost in war or terrorist

attacks...The dream and passion of a mother some 130 years ago and yet still only a dream of so many today.

As someone who grew up as a military brat myself, I feel and know the deep tension that arises, especially in this current war that we find ourselves in as a country. I feel the tension and I know we have mixed emotions. I know that we assume the opinions of others because of the support they may or may not give to the current administration or military.

As I wrestle with that tension as a Christian who reads and seeks to understand our biblical role as peacemakers, I find myself drawn to the process of how we as citizens of this country and citizens of God's kingdom discover what it means to be peacemakers.

In seeking out a faithful response I found myself this week drawn to the words of a mother:

First, the mother from our Gospel text this morning: "Then it was fulfilled what had been spoken through the prophet Jeremiah: ¹⁸*"A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation, Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no more."* (Matthew 2:17-18).

And then, the mother of Sherwood Baker, a fallen soldier in Iraq. Hear the end of this testament she gave at the National Cathedral in Washington DC in late March: "*Lord Help us*" she cried, "*War is our failure to love you. And peace is your command. Peace is not the easy way out – its creation is the most confounding.*

"Peace is the hardest thing we can do – help us – we lay our souls broken open before you and question, how do we follow your command to love each other. Surely it cannot be by mindlessly sending off the children of others to kill people we do not know. And though I know that nothing I say, no amount of logic, or protest will bring my son back to me – or bring any of the lost ones home. I ask the Lord to help us – we lay this grief before the Lord to help us – we lay this grief before the Lord – our souls broken – ready to rise to witness. Ready to rise to love God's world to peace".

As I look in to the face of my young son Kyan, and I try to imagine the world in the years in which he is a man, I desperately hope that this generation will get it right and discover that the **means** by which we reach the goal of security and peace will serve him well.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. writes it this way, "The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows. One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a **means** by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means."

King points out for us that, "One of the most persistent ambiguities that we face is that everybody talks about peace as a goal. However, it does not take the sharpest-eyed sophistication to discern that while everybody talks about peace, peace has become practically nobody's business among the power-wielders. Many men and women cry peace, Peace! But they refuse to do the things that make for peace."

What makes for peace? How do we, members and friends of Newport Presbyterian Church, heed the call of our text this day to become messengers of peace in

the complex world in which we live? How do we heed the call of the scriptures that cry out “blessed are the peacemakers”? How do we do all of that; and support with all of our love and prayers the sons and daughters, the friends and family members who find their jobs leading them into the battle fields?

I wish the answer was easy. I wish more than anything that it was a simple step 1, 2 and 3. But we all know it isn't. We all probably do acknowledge, despite our differing opinions, that peace is our command from God in Jesus Christ. And, I imagine, that as with anything, the only way to get there is by starting with our own hearts. It starts with our own internal work of those areas in our own lives that do not reflect peace. It starts at home in everyday situations. It starts with seeking peace in our own lives so that we can recognize it and work toward it apart from ourselves. It starts with demanding peace in the way we are treated as well as demanding it of ourselves when we treat others. It starts when we recognize that the ends are not cut off from the means. The running of the race is as important as reaching the finish line. Because, again in the words of Dr. King, “Ultimately you can't reach good ends through evil means, because the means represent the seed and the end represents the tree.”

How do we plant seeds of hope and peace when we walk through the halls of our middle and high schools? How do we plant seeds of hope and peace as we parent our children? How do we plant seeds of hope and peace when we sit in the board room, or staff meeting? How do we plant seeds of peace when we sit and console a friend who is depressed? How do we plant seeds of hope and peace when we vote? When we purchase? When we care for our earth? How do we engage in dialog with those whom we disagree? Do we dialog with those with whom we disagree and how hard do we work at that? How thoroughly do we seek out information that is important to have before arriving at conclusions about something? On a larger scale, how are you actively engaging in peacemaking activities? We learn peace by practicing.

After all, we are a nation blessed only and to the extent that we seek and follow God's will. *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* that Julia Ward Howe wrote reminds us that God is sifting out the hearts of men and women before the judgment seat. And urges, “O be swift my soul, to answer him, be jubilant my feet!”. *O Beautiful for Spacious Skies* prays that America would “confirm thy soul in self control, the liberty and law.”

During the most desperate days of the civil war an admirer assured Abraham Lincoln that God was on his side. Dismissing this DANGEROUS heresy, President Lincoln replied, “It is more important that we should be on God's side.”

If we are to live out the goodness we sing about, then we must have the faith and integrity to repent. We must repent because it is the way of God. We must have the integrity to remind ourselves and others that the **way** we reach our goal is as important as the goal itself. And like the mother of the fallen soldier, we must ask God to help us to be ready in our hearts to rise, so that we might be ready to rise to LOVE ALL OF GOD'S WORLD TO PEACE. God help us, that it be so. Amen.