

THE BATTLE FOR PEACE

[The service began with four people reading peace quotes, then lighting the peace lamp; however, after each time the flame was blown out by another. The readings ended with the lamp not burning.]

There are battles waging; there are battles being fought.

One side believes that there are good and bad guys.

The other believes that some make bad choices and there is hope for everyone.

One side thinks that the end justifies the means, and are comfortable with painful and heavy costs to get to that end, which includes cutting social spending and doing violence and destruction.

The other side sees the solution and redemption as being in the process, and thinks that the idealize “end” is an illusion that never is obtained.

Most people on all sides want to do what is right, and are passionate about their trust in their colour of reality.

That is why there are battles and wars.

One side feels threatened and justified.....,..... as does the other.

One side knows that freedom, justice and salvation are very expensive, and so more often than not, a life..... or lives must pay the price.

The other side knows that such things take constant work, and the process includes everyone. Therefore no life is expendable, and no one has to die.

One side is seems to be winning,..... but really is losing.

The other side seems to be losing, and often is, **and** can't accept losing.

As you likely can guess, I represent one side,..... and, of course, I think my perspective is better than the other side's.

Regardless of one's position, nearly everyone will agree with General Sherman of the American Civil War who said that “war is hell.”

Like an inferno, war can destroy all forms of life and resources, and with out end, terrorize the survivors.

Moreover, war demands hate, anger, secrecy, deception, lies and the making of more enemies.

War is NOT a good thing, yet most everyone accepts it as “unavoidable” or as a “necessary evil”,.....

And, I have no idea how people who claim to be Christian fit “necessary evil into their theology?

Yet,..... the tools and means of war are glorified, especially this time of the year. Red lapel poppies no longer conjure up the shameful blood soaked fields of WW 1 with the crimson cry of “never again.”

No,..... far from it. They are now an empty seasonal accessory ready for the rationalists to overlay the message, “Soldiers are our saviours. We can’t live without them.”

The other side is winning.

The blathering of Don Cherry’s military litany, fighter jets in hockey team logos and doing stadium fly overs, and the warnings that we are threatened have tilted our culture to accept militarism and all it’s fabricated rhetoric. Military patriotism is the new “thoughtless” and irrational norm in our society. So, we accept spending billions on weapons, even if it means closing libraries and cutting aid to the hungry.

And, I find this surrender irritating..... troubling,.... and frustrating.

The other day, I asked someone, “Why did you say that soldiers fought and died for our freedom,..... when that has never, ever happened?”

We had a good discussion, and he admitted that it was true that no soldier has, nor needed to kill or die for our freedom.

I again asked, “Then why did you say that?”

I was dumbfounded by his answer, which was, “Well, that is just something you say,..... I guess to make the soldiers feel better.”

But, it’s a lie,..... and it’s destructive.

Glorifying the acts of war makes more soldiers and opens the door for more war.

Another myth or ... example of ignorance is that..... when confronted with a threat the only choice is fight or do nothing, and pacifism is viewed as doing nothing.

The message of peace is not getting out, and it seems like the forces for peace are in retreat.

I think our church is trying to hold the line. We are involved in peacemaking, such MCC, MDS, Foodgrains Bank, CPT, Creation Care... and other such things. Those engagements build community, trust, give hope, empower the weak and proclaim honesty—all acts of peace. In addition, we have openly assaulted the rant of militarism with our peace declarations.

And, there are many others actively working for peace, yet... it seems like the peace flame keeps getting blown out.

We need to not only work for peace, we must also speak out for peace.

Because, more awareness, more truth,..... and more peacemakers are needed. There are not enough active and vocal pacifists.

That is why I found it frustrating when so few Mennonite Churches joined the “Live for Peace” campaign,... which was and is... the action of openly proclaiming the message of peace and openly declaring to be a peace church.

I learned that some churches held to the “Two Kingdom” philosophy which asserts that peace is a personal issue and that the church should not engage the culture or political domain.

The “Two Kingdom” theology concedes that God only rules over the church, that culture is exempt from God’s mandates.....and .. that God is Not so powerful, so the church can be or ... better be... *the quiet in the land*,..... because God can’t or won’t protect Christians from the outside world.

At the heart of this passive pacifism is the assumption that we are not accountable for what happens in the secular world.

In other words, God gives the quiet Christians an exemption pass.

Yet, people suffer and die from silence and inaction.

There is no excuse for the “quiet in land” when all of creation is moaning.

People suffer and die when we don’t speak out or take action against injustices..

Anna was a new student from a strange place. She mostly likely was from an Eastern European country.

I was 8 years old, and so was she.

She wore “old world” clothing, didn’t smell like the rest of us, and her English was very limited.

A group of boys in my class picked on her. They teased her, belittled her and often called her a gypsy.

I don’t know if she was or not, and no one knew her story. I imagine it was not easy escaping from an Eastern Bloc country, in those days.

All I knew was that I was glad “those” boys were not picking on me.

So, I remained silent and kept small when they were teasing her.

One time, as I walking home from school, Anna was walking a few steps in front me, when “those” boys ran past me and commenced to tease her.

She tried to ignore them.

I felt sorry for her, but I didn’t possess any noble thoughts about trying to stop them..... because I was afraid I would be picked on or worse.

Suddenly, Anna couldn’t take it any more, and she took off running across the street. The street’s name was Windermere Ave.

It’s a strange thing how shoes are left on the ground when a body is projected through the air. It’s also very peculiar how sounds can become muted and time can slow way down.

Anna seemed to be in the air for a long time, and the car colour was black.

I don’t know where the boys went. I went over to see Anna.

Death has its own smell.

Someone asked me her name. I said, “Anna”, but I didn’t know her last name. I was told to go home, and I did.

The story was spun about a poor immigrant girl from a backward place who wasn’t accustomed to busy roads.

But, I knew better....., and I said nothing.

Inaction and silence is not God’s way, nor can it be ours..... because People suffer and die when we don’t speak out or take action against injustices.

God speaks out in Isaiah for all to:

loose the bonds of injustice; take away the yoke that oppresses people.

to share our personal food with the hungry;

to give shelter and clothes to the homeless and needy;

to not speak evil things, and to not hide.

In Romans 12, Paul echoes Jesus’ message to love even our enemies, to help those in need, including strangers, and to associate with the lowly / the powerless. Plus, we are to entrust God with making the world whole. We don’t do vengeance,..... we just do, in the love and manner of Christ,..... what we can do, and trust God with the rest.

However, when the peace light keeps getting extinguished it’s hard for the passionate to not get frustrated and try to **make** peace happen.

It’s not easy to witness the other side dominating our culture.

And so, it is tempting to try to force our opinions on others, but trying to control what is not ours to control is..... a form of violence.

The gist of war is to assert control over others.

Sometimes, well meaning passionate people can try to own what is not theirs to own..... and regardless of the side or the theology, that is wrong..... and counter to peace.

Yes, we are called to work for peace, to live peace, to do justice, to defend and assist the weak, to love and be gracious,..... and to proclaim God’s way..... the way of Christ..... which is declaring publically all those things.

Indeed,..... but we are not in control. We just do our part, trusting others and God in the process.

Sometimes surprise happens, in spite of overwhelming odds.

Sometimes the spark catches, and the flame of peace shines through, breaking the darkness. { a youth comes forward to light the peace lamp, and it remains lit. }

There was a farmer who desperately needed help on his farm, so he ran a help wanted ad in the local paper. A week went by, and no one responded to his ad. Then finally, a young man knocked on the farmer's door, and said that he was looking for work.

The farmer asked the man, "What can you do? What are you good at?"

The man replied, "I sleep well at night."

The farmer thought his answer was strange, yet he really needed help, and the fellow seemed like a nice guy, so he hired the young man.

A couple weeks later, a tremendous violent storm blew in.

The farmer could hear the thunder, the wind howling and the hail pelting against his house. Fearing the worst, he ran out to check on things.

Fighting the wind and shielding himself against the hail, he made it to the shed and saw that his tractor was secure inside and the door was firmly shut.

He then ran to check on his cows.

He discovered that they were all safe and secure in the barn, and he also saw that the henhouse door was closed with the chickens all inside.

Curious to see if the young man was alarmed and bothered by the storm, he went to see what he was doing.

The farmer peered in the window, and saw the young man sound asleep.

The young man faithfully did his job. He did what he was asked to do, and he knew that the storms was beyond his control.

He slept well at night.

We must do what we can do.

God has shown us the way, has asked us to be faithful,... and enables us to do what we can do.

Peace includes the awareness that we are not in control. We just do our part, and trust the rest to God.

That does not imply the selfish notion of hiding from conflict.

We must be followers of Christ, if we want to grasp and do peace.

More often than not, peace is done in the midst of a storm and when all seems dark.

Even so, We must do what we can,..... and not feel badly for not doing what we can't do.

We must do what we can,..... and not feel badly for not doing what we can't do.

Learning the difference,..... can take a life time.

And,..... so..... we are being saved, too.