

Sermon Preached at Wellington Fellowship

May 18, 2008

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Today is Peace and Justice Sunday and I think that it is wonderful that we as a United Methodist Church has designated a Sunday for reflection and thought on Peace and Justice. But I also find it a bit worry some that we have to actually designate a specific day for Peace and Justice. It reminds me of those calendars that have all the random Holiday's printed on them, like National Ice Cream Day or National Dress like a pirate day. Now these holiday's are fun to celebrate, but usually once the holiday is over we forget all about it. Unlike December 25th, which we all know is Christmas; no one seems to remember that Jan. 28th is National Kazoo day. So this makes me wonder how many people will really remember that today is Peace and Justice Sunday. After the sermon is over and as people leave the church, will peace and justice become as distant a memory as National Kazoo day? Or will we remember this day and try to implement Peace and Justice in our life?

As Christians, I believe that we are followers of the prince of peace we should be pursuing peace and justice every day. We should be the biggest Advocates, and the biggest peace makers. Our verse from Mica say's that God requires us to SEEK JUSTICE and Hebrew says that we should STRIVE FOR PEACE. But even with this said, there seems to be a disconnect between Christian's and peace makers, between Christians and social justice. We treat peace and justice like those random holidays's that are good to celebrate, but that have no real meaning in our lives. The church has become like the priest in the story of the Good Samaritan, walking on the wrong side of the road, passing by opportunities to reach out and create peace.

Bishop Machado spoke about this disconnect at General Conference, which was just a few weeks ago. He told a story about a church in Brazil that had just been assigned a new pastor. The new pastor arrived to see a wonderfully thriving church, but a very poor and rundown neighborhood. The pastor also noticed that there was no form of outreach being extended from the church to the neighborhood, they were putting no effort into creating peace within their neighborhood. So the very 1st Sunday this new minister got up and preached an outstanding sermon on service and outreach. The people absolutely loved it and the pastor received so many positive compliments on his sermon. The next Sunday, the pastor got up and preached the same sermon again. This continued for several weeks, until finally the head of the SPR committee or the personnel committee pulled aside the new pastor and said you know I

really enjoy your sermons, but do you remember what you preached about the first week you were here? Yes I do replied the pastor. And the 2nd week? Yep. And the 3rd? It was the same. Well then why do you keep preaching the same sermon every week. The new pastor replied, I will keep preaching the same sermon until the people of the church take what I say and implement it in the community.

So why is it so hard for the church to implement peace in the community? Why do we continue to keep walking on the wrong side of the road? Well I believe that one of the reasons is that we do not have a good definition for peace. When we talk about peace in the church we are usually refer to things such as calm waters, soothing melodies, or lit candles. We think of inner peace practices such as prayer or meditation. And even though these things are an important part of peace, they are only one part. They only make up one side of the road. And it's the other side of the road that we are missing. It's the other side of the road that is in fact going to make us active peacemakers.

The definition of peace that we as a church need is actually a definition full of conflict and strife, trouble and despair because peace is not a Utopia. Peace is not the absence of conflict. Instead, peace is what we will do with that conflict. It's the hardships that give us the opportunity to create peace. It is the trouble of this world that is calling out for peacemakers.

For Example, the story of the Good Samaritan is full of conflict. First there is the conflict between the traveler and the robbers. Then there is the historical conflict between the Jews and the Samaritans. But it is this conflict that ended up creating the opportunity for peace. In life conflict is inevitable. It is what we do with that conflict that matters most. If the church wants to become an example of peace in the world, it is going to have to go looking for trouble. We are going to have to cross over to the other side of the road into the mists of the conflict, even though it may be uncomfortable or scary or unusual. But it is the courage that we have to press through those scary moments that will lead us to GOD.

The newest Chronicles of Narnia movie just came out this weekend. In that movie Lucy, the youngest of the four human kings and queens of Narnia, is sent to find Aslan, who is representative of God. In order to do this she had to ride through the dark forest alone while being chased by wild animals and enemy soldiers. But because of her courage she made it through and found Aslan. If we have the courage to go looking for trouble, the courage to step out of our comfort zone to do something that is scary for us, we too will find God, because, as a church, it's just not enough to celebrate peace and justice Sunday and then leave the rest up to GOD. We have to be the one to identify the trouble in our community and then go out and do something about it. We have to get involved. We have to pick up those who have fallen, for it is these little steps that will make a big difference. Larry and Joyce Horseman have a bumper sticker on their car that reads WORLD PEACE. But when looking at that sticker, I see an

even more important message than world peace. I see a message that comes from the background – which is a picture of a Colorado License Plate – This reminds me of the power of local acts. It reminds us that we can all be advocates for WORLD PEACE even right here in our own communities, right here in our own towns, because this is where it starts. It starts with the little things that we all do to bring peace to our homes, our work, and our community. And it truly is the little things. It's the way we reach out to a neighbor to just say hello or to help with a small project. It's the way we speak up for those who can't speak for themselves. It's the way we give up part of our selves – part of our time or our talent- so that others in need may receive. It's the way we get involved in our community. It's the way we help out at work or at school. It's our volunteering or our service. It's our courage. For this is our calling, to pursue peace all the time, with everyone, and in doing so we can become the good Samaritans of the world.

Now this church is at a turning point. We are discovering our identity and finding our place in this community. We have been successful in our efforts thus far, but what is our next step. What is God calling us to do? Perhaps he is calling us to address the issue of poverty. Perhaps he is calling us to create an outreach program for our youth in our schools. Or perhaps he is calling us to be community builders. But whatever it is that God is calling us to do, it is you who are going to make it happen. This is your church – you have helped create it, you have seen it grow, and now it is your turn to decide the mission of this church. Now I am leaving soon, but I know that when I come back to visit, this church will not be like the church in Bishop Machado's story. But instead, you will have become an example for peace in this community. Otherwise I may have to come back and preach this same sermon again. But I have seen your determination and I know that you have the courage to cross over to the other side of the road. So I challenge you to think about the troubles that you see in this community. Think about the ways that you want to reach out to the community, the ways you want to help.

On each of your chairs this morning you found an index card. And I would like you to write on this card your vision for the church. Write down your thoughts on mission, your thoughts on peace. Once you are done, place them on the table over by the door, so that these ideas can become the foundation for the mission work of this church.