

# Peace with Justice Sunday

June 24, 2007

## *A Mighty Heart*

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### **Isaiah 2: 1 – 4**

The word that Isaiah son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

In days to come, the mountain of God's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it. Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of our God, to the house of God that God may teach us God's ways and that we may walk in God's paths."

For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of God from Jerusalem.

God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.

### **Luke 6:27-36**

<sup>27</sup>"But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. <sup>29</sup>If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt. <sup>30</sup>Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again. <sup>31</sup>Do to others as you would have them do to you. <sup>32</sup>"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. <sup>33</sup>If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. <sup>34</sup>If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again. <sup>35</sup>But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High; for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. <sup>36</sup>Be merciful, just as your God is merciful.

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If I were to ask you to complete this sentence with one word, what word would you choose. The sentence that needs completing is this. God is ??????. What comes to mind? Our Gospel lesson suggests that the missing word is LOVE. God is LOVE. It is that simple. And that love is an extravagant love. It is so extravagant that it even loves the enemy. Love one another. This is what Jesus taught us. This is what Jesus lived. This is why Jesus died. And this is the point of his resurrection. Jesus was and will always be God's love incarnate. Jesus had a mighty heart.

And that's why being a Christian is so difficult. Learning to love like Jesus loved is never easy. Having a mighty heart is super demanding. It calls us to say and be and do something that doesn't always come naturally to us human beings. Oh, it's easy to love those whom we love. But, oh, my, we do not want to love our enemies. We prefer to retaliate. We call them names. We boycott them. We even go to war against them.

But that's not how Mariane Pearl reacted after the beheading of her beloved husband Daniel Pearl, who was beheaded by Islamic militants weeks after his kidnapping in Pakistan where he was researching a story on shoe bomber Richard Reid. Mariane's memoir, *A Mighty Heart- the Brave Life and Death of My Husband, Danny Pearl*, opened this weekend at area theaters, with Angelina

Jolie playing the courageous wife of Danny Pearl. I would claim that the title, *A Mighty Heart*, is befitting not only for the slain journalist, but also for his wife, Mariane. She is the one who rises above the hatred and bitterness that continues to plague our post 9/11 world as she refuses to give in to the fear and hatred that terrorism typically elicits. Instead, she decides in the wake of her husband's murder, not to seek retaliation but rather to be open minded about learning about the causes of violence and hatred. Mariane has much to teach us about love.

On this Peace with Justice Sunday, we are challenged by God and by God's word to find this "other" way of love. When Isaiah was given his vision about the coming of the kingdom of God, it was a vision with love at its core. No longer would nations lift up sword or guns or dirty bombs or nuclear weapons against each other. Instead, they would find a way to solve their differences and gift one another with life rather than fight against each other with weapons of death.

Sadako had a mighty heart. Her story is such a tender one. It invites the whole world to pray and live for peace. The paper cranes are such a powerful symbol of what God intends for all of creation. Love. Peace. Justice.

In our pluralistic world, which is ever growing more and more pluralistic, it strikes me that conversion from hate and destruction to tolerance and respect is needed more than ever before. Humanity needs to claim a mighty heart.

It's too bad that we can't look to the world's religions to model pluralism and a mighty heart for every arena in life. After all, every organized religion has love at its core. Unfortunately, too often religious organizations disappoint us all. Several years ago when Jay and I were in South Africa on a 3 month pulpit exchange, we had the awesome opportunity of attending a number of sessions of the Parliament of the World's Religions which happened to take place in Cape Town during our stay in South Africa. There, leaders of all of the world's religions gathered to work together on a Global Ethic in the areas of education; science and medicine; religion and spirituality; the arts and communications media; government; agriculture, labor, industry and commerce. The speakers were inspiring. The work was visionary. It was an event with a mighty heart. And while all of it was going on at the gigantic Civic Center in Cape Town, a boycott of the Parliament took place outside of its doors. Every day, marching back and forth on the sidewalks around the Civic Center were fundamentalist Christians and Muslims, each holding high their placards condemning each other and all of the other world's religions. "Christ is the ONLY way" read the Christian banners. "Muslims will convert the whole world" read the Muslim signs. How tragic. How unhelpful. Pluralism calls for tolerance and respect, love and mighty hearts.

Recently, I read that openly gay students who want to serve as rabbis or cantors in Conservative Judaism are now welcome at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. The announcement came after the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards of Conservative Judaism gave seminaries and congregations permission to ordain homosexual rabbis and bless same-sex unions.

Conservative Judaism?! I had to find out more about this decision! It seemed remarkable. And this is what I uncovered. "This decision is in keeping with the long-standing commitment of the Jewish tradition of pluralism" wrote Arnold Eisen, the seminary's chancellor. "Pluralism means that we recognize more than one way to be a good Conservative Jew, more than one way of walking authentically in the path of our tradition and of carrying that tradition forward. It means that we respect those who disagree with us and understand that in the context of all that unites us, diversity makes us stronger."

Oh, that our own United Methodist denomination could be so wise, so God-like, so biblically based that we, too, could declare that on the issue of homosexuality and the church, there is more than one way to be a good Christian and that we can respect those with whom we disagree.

Apply this attitude of tolerance and respect and love to the recent decision made by our own Massachusetts legislature around the gay marriage issue. In this Commonwealth where we recognize the pluralism of heterosexual and homosexual covenant relationships, can we put an end to the verbal battles that have consumed so much time and energy, and understand that in the context of all that now unites us in our civil rights, diversity makes us stronger?

I was impressed to see that our Governor, Deval Patrick, after the vote was taken, went out to address the crowds assembled outside the State House. And there he concluded his remarks by raising his hand straight above his head, his index finger outstretched, and said, "One more thing: Do not gloat!" Then lowering his arm and pointing to those whose hopes had been dashed, he said, "Those people on the other side of the street are your brothers and sisters, too." That's an example of a mighty heart, of love in action: pluralism mingled with respect and tolerance.

And finally, there's the whole issue of national pride. Laura Thomson shared with me a poem that was read at her twins Annie and Will's Memorial Day Assembly at Centerville Elementary School in Beverly. It was written at Cornelia Strong College back in 1995 and was meant to be sung to Beethoven's *Ode to Joy*. We will sing this as our final hymn this morning. It is printed on your insert.

*All for One and One for All*

People, sing your country's anthem; shout your land's undying fame,  
Light the wondrous tale of nations with your people's golden name.

Tell your nations' noble story; raise on high your country's song.  
Join them in the final glory. Sister, lift your flag with mine.

Build the road of peace before us; build it wide and deep and long.  
Speed the slow and check the eager, help the weak and curb the strong.

None shall push aside another, none shall let another fall.  
March beside me, O my brothers, all for one and one for all.

Isn't this the essence of Peace with Justice? of celebrating pluralism and learning how to love our enemy so that there are alternatives to combating injustice with retribution and violence? Instead of war, there can be acts of restorative justice and peace-making.

"Speed the slow and check the eager, help the weak and curb the strong. None shall push aside another, none shall let another fall." Let us take our cues from the mighty hearts of our conservative Jewish sisters and brothers, from the mighty heart of a gathering of the world's religions that dared to have a vision of a Global Ethic for this world, from the mighty hearts of Sadako Sasaki and Mariane Pearl, from the mighty heart of our God whose being is none other than Love and from the one who is the Ultimate Mighty Heart, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, who taught us how to love and warned us that discipleship would put us at odds with much of the world. Peace with Justice. Mighty hearts. Pluralism and love. With God, all things are possible. So be it! Amen and Amen.