



Sunday, September 27

Making Peace in the World

Eyes That Open to New Paths for Peace

Henry Koenig Stone

Psalm 2:1–3

*Why do the nations conspire,
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and his anointed, saying,
“Let us burst their bonds asunder,
and cast their cords from us.” (NRSV)*

Reflection: This week, we reflect on the tools needed for peacemaking in the world, as well as on the tools that are overused and ineffective.

The first and greatest tool for peacemaking is love: the kind of radical love that welcomes strangers into your home, that shows mercy to those you name your “enemy,” and that brings the courage to take risks for peace. As the saying goes, “Do I not defeat my enemies, when I turn them into friends?” A second tool is organization: relationships cultivated over time. Building up trust and mechanisms to build economic and political support beams for peace can be the source of much in the way of stability and reconciliation in the world at large. A third tool is humility: acknowledging the blind spots within our own assumptions and limited expertise. While this is sometimes a frustrating thing to do, it can allow us to better serve the needs of people, which may be very different from our own needs. We must remember that *we, too* are in need of an introduction to God’s peace.

In a world of fear and division, the temptation is always to be drawn to the power of domination over “Others” — whether we define people as Other by their skin, their language, aspects of their

identity or their chosen mode of faith. Too often, the first response we reach for when we are afraid is a violent one — a military crackdown to assert our own power and authority to police the world. But, barring very rare circumstances, diplomacy and multilateral international relations are more likely to lead to peaceful outcomes in the long run. God reminds us that, in the end, there is no lasting security that comes from force; the “conspiracies of the nations” are all in vain. The path of domination leads only to anger, suffering and violence. And so, instead, we are called to take our refuge in God — to trust in the call to honest witness in the world, to justice internationally, and, gradually, to a state of *shalom/salaam* between all peoples.

Practice for Peacemakers: This week, allow your assumptions about conflict to be challenged. Strive to see moments of contention as practice for peacemaking in your own life, and consider ways in which conflict de-escalation could be given greater priority in U.S. foreign policy.

Prayer: Dear God, help us to see the work of peacemaking through your eyes of love and understanding. May we not see an “Other” at the far side of the negotiating table, but instead be aware of the communion that is to exist between all of your children, regardless of ethnicity, geography or creed.



Henry Koenig Stone is the editor for this year’s Season of Peace Reflections. An activist and public policy wonk, he has previously served as editor of “*Unbound*” in Louisville, KY., and as associate for young adult social witness to the Advisory Committee for Social Witness Policy.



Monday, September 28

Peace in the World

Courageous Peacemaking

Gay Harter

Hebrews 13:1–2

Let mutual love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing so some have entertained angels without knowing it.

Reflection: In the 1990s I was the director of a small nonprofit organization that supported asylum seekers who were detained by the immigration authorities. Before the era of Homeland Security, it was known as the “INS,” but many of its practices were the same as those of ICE today. Asylum seekers could be released to the care of our organization once they had legal representation. In practice, that meant that an INS officer would call me to say that “Ahmed,” “Henry” or “Emmanuel” would be on the sidewalk outside the detention center in 30 minutes. Usually I had met them a few weeks earlier through visits to the detention center for Bible Study or worship.

These young men came from the conflict zones and dictatorships of the world: Iran, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Zaire. They were often minorities in their countries and had harrowing tales to tell of persecution and escape. They came to live at our house until they had work permits and could survive in the larger community.

The above verse from Hebrews was my guide in this ministry, and indeed we entertained many angels. There were risks involved. I had to make decisions about treatment for mental illness, involve the police in a stabbing, and confront my own inability to help in some situations. But the love, joy knowledge that were brought to me far outweighed those risks. I was taken into the hearts and lives of people from many different cultures and religions, and they were given a peaceful introduction to the country that would become their new home.

Peacemaking involves trusting the stranger, sometimes on the basis of very little knowledge, and sometimes at the risk of both personal and national security. Peacemaking involves heart-opening curiosity about the lives and beliefs of others. It involves shedding the mentality of exceptionalism to which we Americans are so prone. But it brings messages of wisdom, love and gratitude that are lasting.

Practice for Peacemakers: Make the courageous choice to welcome the stranger. Your church can help host an asylum-seeking family, or you can connect with a local organization that does refugee placements yourself. There are many ways to extend grace to those who are finding their way in a strange land for the first time.

Prayer: Great Being, who has created all of us humans, open our hearts to each other that we may dare to risk the peacemaking to which you call us. Amen.



Gay Harter is a retired social worker. She spent the last years of her career as director of the Refugee Immigration Ministry in Boston, MA. She is a member of First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Guilford, CT, and co-founder of the UCC Palestine Israel Network.



Tuesday, September 29

Peace in the World

Building Peace, Not “Peacekeepers”

Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson

Philippians 4:7

And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Reflection: The peace of God is nothing like the peace that the world understands and gives. Jesus told his disciples, “*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives*” (John 14:27). The peace that comes from the world, to pull from a Tracy Chapman song, calls “missiles — peacekeepers.” In crises, to some, police and military presence may provide a sense of comfort far more than the presence of a priest.

The world is dangerous. Our conflicting and competing loyalties keep us mired in combat, fighting to the death over our little pools, puddles and ponds. We guard them ferociously, lest anyone deign to believe they are entitled to any piece of them. Yeah, Tracy Chapman’s question is right: “Why are missiles called peacekeepers when they are aimed to kill?” That is “peace” as the world gives it; like the era of Pax Romana, “Roman peace,” where order was maintained by the vigilant efforts of a heavy military and police presence. It is in contrast with all this military might that Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matthew 5:9a).

Practicing peace in the world has absolutely nothing to do with having the strongest army, the most aggressive police force, or the bully brand name of *superpower*. God’s peace has nothing to do with ammunition or the manipulation and fabrication used to control creation. We are too finite to even attempt to comprehend God’s peace.

But we can learn to practice peace in a number of ways. One such practice comes from my mother, the late Mother Dovetta Wilson, who taught her nine children to “lend a hand whenever and wherever you can.” Another comes from my father, the late Deacon David Wilson, Sr., who

taught us to “always give something back, to build health and strong people and communities.” A third practice for peace in the world is to *remember that love is a verb*. I believe the King James translators got it right when they translated the Greek word ἀγάπη (agape) as “charity” (1 Corinthians 13).

Love is not only something to feel. Practicing peace in the world through acts of charity, mercy and grace are all expressions of the love called for by our God. In a world full of domination and violence, these acts of love are radical. But oh, how sweet the loving communion when we are made right with God and have made peace with others! There is nothing that can compare.

Practice for Peacemakers: Listen to Tracy Chapman’s “Why?” and consider the radical changes in perspective that are needed to build peace. This week, be conscious of the times in which your language plays into the assumptions of military dominance and violent, so-called justice.

Prayer: Dear God, we know that our practicing of peace means a willingness to be made vulnerable by loving and being compassionate toward one another. We know that your peace surpasses our understanding of how the world works. Instead of violence and the supremacy of power, you offer love. Help us to cast away the worship of power, to keep ourselves from being polluted by the violence of the world, and instead to accept the religion to which you call us: to look after orphans and widows in their distress, to extend mercy and love to our “enemies,” and to acknowledge the grace that you extend to all. Amen



The Rev. Dr. Ruby Wilson is senior pastor of Safe Haven UCC, and was recently elected president of the UCC N.Y. Conference’s Metro Association. She serves on the New York Conference UCC Commission on Ecumenism and Interfaith Relations, and is also the founder and executive director of JasD’Jor: Emerging Philanthropists, a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping families of special needs children and training children to use their gifts and talents for service to the world.



Wednesday, September 30

Peace in the World

Let Peace and Justice Begin with Us

Rev. Michael Neuroth

Psalm 85:10

Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and peace will kiss each other. (NRSV)

Reflection: One of my most cherished memories from my childhood is standing at the piano, singing with my grandmother. Usually my uncle would be at the piano while my “Nanni” would pick the songs and dance around the room, prodding each of us to sing along. She loved show tunes, but her favorite song was “Let There Be Peace on Earth” written by Jill Jackson-Miller and Sy Miller in 1955. It is a powerful song with a beautiful crescendo of commitment to “take each moment, and live each moment, in peace eternally.” It still gives me goosebumps when I remember belting out that refrain as a young boy.

While I still appreciate the song for its beauty and its inspiration to seek peace, the line “let peace begin with me” now rings somewhat hollow for me. Although peace includes transforming our own minds and hearts, too often the work for peace ends there. It isn’t enough for us to think about peace or sing about peace. As we see in Psalm 85:10, building a “Just Peace” involves relationship and connection. We are called to engage the other and unite peace with justice (“righteousness” and “justice” both come from the Greek word *δικαιοσύνη*) not at arm’s length, but closely. Building peace is not a solo act. It begins in relationship, and it cannot be sought independently from the struggle for justice in community. Peace must be active, applied, engaged — we must *wage* peace. Peace begins with *us*, and it begins through justice.

Through the years, I have interacted with some incredible people and organizations working to build peace. I have met with Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) in Hebron, Justapaz staff in Colombia, and Nonviolent Peaceforce Unarmed Protectors in Iraq. What inspires me most about their work is their engagement — the relationships they have cultivated, in communities and with people experiencing conflict, as they step into the fray. These peace *builders* risk

experiencing violence by drawing close in order to expose the injustice, address trauma and seek reconciliation through the vision of Just Peace.

Although not all of us are called to work in these settings, I do believe that we all must be willing to more closely connect our hope for peace to deeper engagement with one another and our communities.

Practice for Peacemakers: Take time today to learn more about the many organizations working to build peace in conflict areas around the world. Look for their stories of engagement and accompaniment. See how you can get involved directly and support their work financially. Further, see how you can build peace in your own relationships and community through deeper connections.

Prayer: God, help us live into our vow to be peacemakers. Let us be drawn toward one another and be willing to risk for peace. Let your Just Peace reign on Earth. Let it begin now. Let it start here. Let it begin with *us*. Amen.



Rev. Michael Neuroth serves as the United Church of Christ's policy advocate for international issues in the Washington, D.C. office. An ordained minister, Michael advocates on a wide range of international peace, human rights and economic justice issues reflected in UCC policy. Michael holds master's degrees in divinity, theology and social work from Princeton Seminary and Rutgers University. He lives on Capitol Hill with his wife, Amber, and their two boys.



Thursday, October 1

Peace in the World

Peacemaking Demands Justice, Not Domination

Ron Stone

Luke 14:31–2; 19:41–2

“Or what King, going out to wage war against another king, will not sit down first and consider whether he is able ... to oppose the one who comes against him ... ? If he cannot, then, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace....”

As he came near and saw the city [Jerusalem], he wept over it, saying, “If you, even you had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace!” (NRSV)

Reflection: As the Peacemaking Program celebrates its 40th anniversary, it is good to remember that it grew out of concerns about American foreign policy. The Peacemaking Program’s Founding Document was prepared in the optimism for peacemaking of Advent, 1979. However, the General Assembly’s adoption of “*Peacemaking: the Believer’s Calling*” in 1980 was followed by an election that led to a massive armament program. Since that time, American policy has repeatedly utilized superior armaments and the threat of nuclear weapons to dominate others. It is time to come to terms with the fact that U.S. foreign policy has long emphasized domination over peacemaking.

Over the years, diplomacy of the sort that Luke calls for has saved us from many wars and even reduced our nuclear arsenals. But developments in the Middle East and our own shortsightedness have drawn us into unending struggles in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and Iran, even though we know wars in Asia, with its multitudes of unknown religions and folkways, are not good projects for the U.S. We need to sit down and negotiate with our present and our potential enemies.

Peace for Jerusalem is as far away as it was for Jesus, and as it has been for the United States. Christian faith has done little for peace in Jerusalem. Neither Jerusalem nor the United States has known much peace during the last 100 years. The preceding 400 years for the Americas was full of wars against indigenous peoples, and the 20th century was a cataclysm of war. The future of

peace for Jerusalem requires, as Jesus said, negotiations for the terms of peace. Following Jesus means real terms of peace, however, not domination by a U.S.-supported government. Terrorism arises from any context of occupation, domination and enforced poverty — not simply from fanaticism. To truly be peacemakers in Israel-Palestine, leaders must work toward justice for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Practice for Peacemakers: Peacemaking by the Church takes work from the ground up. If your church does not yet have a peacemaking committee, create one to discuss issues of witness and foreign policy. This committee can report to session for education and a call to action in the form of public witness, protest or other calls for peace.

Prayer: Jesus, may our church become a supporter of peacemaking in a violent world, learning from you and binding us together in real community actions. Amen.



After 40 years of college, university and seminary teaching, Ron Stone (right) as The John Witherspoon Professor of Christian Ethics at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary in 2005. In the 1970s, he was one of the writers for “Peacemaking: the Believer’s Calling,” and he wrote or edited another two dozen books on social ethics, foreign policy, peacemaking and particularly on the work and thought of Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr.



Friday, October 2

Peace in the World

Liberty and Justice for All

Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle

Amos 5:23-24

“Take away from me the noise of your songs; I will not listen to the melody of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an everflowing stream.” (NRSV)

Reflection: I am reflecting on justice, long before you will read it, and wonder whether we will remember the intensity of this moment.

I am reflecting on justice while people across the United States and around the world are filling the streets, in outrage following the death of George Floyd, who was murdered when a Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into Floyd’s neck for eight minutes and 46 seconds. Part of what is fueling those protests are the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, who was shot and killed in Brunswick, Ga., while jogging, and Breonna Taylor, who was shot eight times and killed by police officers when they burst into her apartment in Louisville, Ky., in a case of mistaken identity. What meaning can peacemaking possibly have in such a circumstance — other than to unravel these patterns of violence and replace injustice with justice?

I am reflecting on justice only days after the president of the United States instructed his attorney general to clear the streets of peaceful protesters, which was done by the use of tear gas, rubber bullets, mounted police and police batons used to push people from Lafayette Park. This was done so the president could stand in front of a church he did not enter and hold up a Bible from which he did not read! God will have none of such noise and melodies.

But, if you listen to and remember the chants that have risen from the streets of this country, you will hear what justice means. Justice means the full enforcement of the provision of the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which guarantees “equal protection under the law.” Justice means the full embrace of the language of the Pledge of Allegiance’s promise of “liberty and justice for all.” Justice means not only living up to the language in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal,” but also agreeing that the promise extends to men, women, nonbinary people, and indeed to all people, regardless of creed, color or identity.

Justice is necessary for peace.

As we consider making peace in the world, we must remember too that the wider world has wisdom for peacemaking that applies to us. The United States, just like ancient Israel, is guilty of ignoring its own foundational laws that were designed to create a just and equitable society. Even as we may protest and boycott systems of oppression and apartheid in the world, we must have the humility to accept similar judgment.

Justice and peace cannot come, at home or abroad, unless we live up to our highest ideals of equality and self-improvement. In order to build peace, it is time that we do justice.

Practice for Peacemakers: Consider the ways in which self-glorification gets in the way of justice in your life, and in the life of our country as a force for or against peace. Reread the Declaration of Independence (or the Bill of Rights, or another founding document) and reflect on the aspirations and the failures of the vision for justice at that point in time. Where have we failed to realize the vision's original potential, and where have we moved that vision forward? Write down your thoughts and share them with others in your church or community, asking them to do the same. Then use those thoughts as a starting point in your local activism.

Prayer: Dear God, as we strive to be peacemakers in your world, remind us to listen. Let us not sing songs of self-praise, but instead let your justice roll over us like an ever-flowing stream, guiding us on a path that washes away the structures and systems which hold injustice in place.



Now retired and living happily in Shaker Heights, OH, the Rev. Dr. Marvin McMickle served for many years in different roles: as president, as professor of African American religious studies, and as director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School.



Saturday, October 3

Peace in the World

Rooting for China

Randall Stone

Matthew 5:9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” (NRSV)

Reflection: To many, China has become a disquieting word within American political and economic discourse. Pundits and politicians worry about the time, coming soon, when the U.S. economy will no longer be the largest on the planet. Some analysts point to historical parallels, suggesting that war is likely during a power transition. Presidential candidates charge each other with being “soft” on China, as they once did in reference to the Soviet Union. Indeed, China offers a troubling image as a repressive regime that tramples the rights of ethnic groups and citizens of Hong Kong, and that is becoming more belligerent towards its neighbors. Avoiding violent conflict with China may not be easy, but it is essential.

Peacemaking requires hard work, starting with a shift in perspective that takes us away from *realpolitik* and focuses instead on shared goals and the necessary conditions to achieve those goals. To start: it’s important to remember that *the world needs China*. China will be an essential partner in current and future struggles with climate change and infectious diseases. The dynamism and innovation of the world economy depend on engaging the talents of all of the world’s people, which requires open markets and the exchange of ideas. There are no attractive future scenarios without peaceful coexistence with China.

Second, the alternative to China becoming the largest economy in the world *is to keep one-fifth of the world’s population in permanent poverty*. China has a population of 1.4 billion, so its economy will surpass the size of the U.S. economy when it reaches roughly 23% of the U.S. standard of living. China’s economic growth has been impressive, but it started from a low level: 88% of China’s population was under the international poverty line in 1980. China has been returning to its historical share of world GDP after recovering from a series of disasters in the 20th Century — civil war, invasion during World War II and economic mismanagement and

famine under communism — which had reduced most of its population to subsistence agriculture. Raising 850 million people out of poverty yielded impressive growth rates, but still leaves China a poor country with about one-sixth the U.S. level of per capita income. We should be rooting for the people of China, encouraging their rise out of poverty even as we encourage their government to relax its iron grip of control over them.

Third, *U.S. supremacy is not a necessary condition for sustained peace*, nor is it sufficient to guarantee security. In fact, the effort to maintain a temporary advantage may well undermine world order. In the long run, a peaceful world is hard to envisage without multilateral cooperation that allows all of its peoples to strive for development.

Practice for Peacemakers: Read an article in an international newspaper, and try to put yourself in the writer's perspective. It is good to regularly leave your comfort zone and challenge some of your assumptions.

Prayer: God, free us from the idolatry of trusting in power for our safety. Free us from the sin of fear: fear of others, fear of loss of control, fear of the future. Grant us the courage to engage in the hard work of negotiating fair and equitable settlements that allow room for all of your people to reach their full potential.



Randall Stone is a professor of political science at the University of Rochester and the author of books and articles on international relations. He is a member of Henrietta United Church of Christ and treasurer of Genesee Area Campus Ministries.