

JOURNEYING TOWARDS PEACE



Photo by Elsa Marty

**A DEVOTIONAL FOR INSPIRATION, REFLECTION, AND PRAYER
DURING LENT**

February 17 – April 3, 2010

*Bible & Theology Working Group
World Student Christian Federation – North America*



**UT OMNES
UNUM SINT**

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

Isaiah 2:4 NRSV

Letter from the Editors

The words from the Prophet Isaiah echo across the centuries, presenting a vision for how God will judge among the nations, arbitrate for many peoples, and help us turn our weapons of war into tools for living in harmony. “There is no way to peace — peace is the way,” wrote A.J. Muste, a peace activist and minister in the Dutch Reformed Church. If the way to peace is peace, as Muste claims, then what does it mean for us to journey towards peace during a time of war? This Lent, we encourage you to consider this question. The forty days of Lent are an invitation for each of us to deepen our faith, to walk with Jesus towards Jerusalem, and to explore the city and the wilderness of the world, our communities, and our lives along the way.

This devotional is a collection of words and images to lead you into reflection, guide you in prayer, and inspire your steps. Our contributors, many of them theological students, represent a diversity of perspectives from across North America. Whether you use this devotional individually or with a group, please know that you are not traveling alone. You are joined by friends in faith across North America, and perhaps, around the globe.

As we embark on this journey towards peace together, let us heed the words of all the prophets- from ancient times to modern day- who inspire us to work for peace, embrace non-violence, and turn our swords into plowshares.

With Peace,

Elizabeth Campbell & Katelyn B. Macrae

co-editors
Bible & Theology Working Group
World Student Christian Federation – North America

Ash Wednesday

Suggested Scripture: Joel 2:1-2, 12-17 or Isaiah 58:1-12, Psalm 51:1-17, 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10, Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

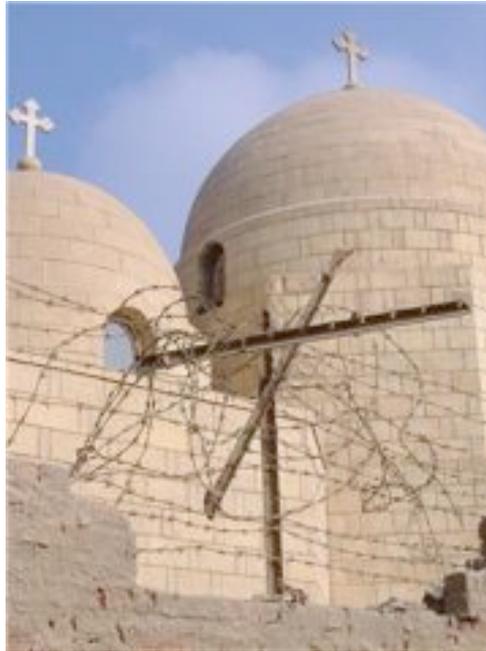


Photo by Elsa Marty

*⁶Is not this the fast that I choose:
to loose the bonds of injustice,
to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free,
and to break every yoke?
⁷Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
and bring the homeless poor into your house;
when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin?
⁸Then your light shall break forth like the dawn,
and your healing shall spring up quickly;
your vindicator shall go before you,
the glory of the Lord shall be your rearguard.
⁹Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help, and he will say, Here I am.*

Isaiah 58:6-9 NRSV

Reflections for Week I

Suggested Scriptures: Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16, Romans 10:8b-13, Luke 4:1-13



Photo by Elsa Marty

MAY THE FOLLOWING QUOTATIONS WHET YOUR REFLECTIONS:

Fear

Terrorism is the best political weapon for nothing drives people harder than a fear of sudden death. - Adolf Hitler

Fear is not a disease of the body, fear kills the soul.

A fear-stricken person can never know God, and one who knows God will never fear a mortal man.

Where there is fear, there is not religion

It is weakness which breeds fear, and fear breeds distrust.

There would be no one to frighten you if you refuse to be afraid. - Mahatma Gandhi

Imitation

The great strength of the totalitarian state is that it forces those who fear it to imitate it.
- Adolf Hitler

In Germany they first came for the Communists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Communist.

Then they came for the Jews,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a Jew.

Then they came for the trade unionists,
and I didn't speak up because I wasn't a trade unionist.

Then they came for the Catholics,
and I didn't speak up because I was a Protestant.

Then they came for me —
and by that time no one was left to speak up.

- Pastor Martin Niemöller

- *Compiled by Carlene Demiany*

Parable of the Principality

As you know, our hamlet lies enfolded by steep hills on either side, which rise to rocky overlooking crowns. Beyond, the hills slope higher still, forming gravelly barrens poked with caves. Baasha our hero lived there once.

Baasha was our protector. Unfurled, his wings created a broad shade to shield us from the searing midday heat; and sheltered us from devastating storms. With his breath, he'd set fire to the surrounding prairie to keep down the sedges, so that we could easily perceive the approach of enemies; and when foreigners *did* come, to pester us with news from afar or bearing petitions for our assistance or even with warriors, perhaps, he'd swipe them from the ground and cook them at once, filling our lungs with delightful odors. We loved him, and we bowed and prayed to him, and it was an honor to be selected from all the youth of the village to go up once a year as tribute.

Our fame spread wide, ranging many hundreds of stadia in all directions. Other nations backed off, for they had no Baasha. Their hearts became accustomed to deference.

Yet as the years passed the nations grew discontented and tried to steal our Baasha from us, to take him as their own; they came with spears and hooks, but Baasha cast those aside with his tusks. They returned in larger numbers; we held our breath; but Baasha swooped down and picked a few of them off and the others scattered. That day we danced thanksgiving, and proclaimed a fast, to exalt great Baasha who took our own protection as his greatest task.

A Councilor proposed a generous plan: to send runners to our enemies' homes, and bid them come and live with us, beneath Baasha's shade. Her opponents cried out, what foolishness! But "Love your enemies!" she said, "As the Anointed insists." So we made the offer, but none came.

The Council therefore made preparations for an anticipated assault; we offered more prayers to Baasha and even sent up double tribute. On the dreaded day they rode into our valley pressed flank to flank, their backs glistening in the sunlight. And then all at once Baasha whirled down into their midst and snatched a viscount by his neck, and flapped his wings, and hissed, prepared to bear him off; but wait! He was heavier than stone! Baasha pulled all the harder, uncertain, until we could discern, "The viscount's feet are tied to those to his right and to his left, to the one behind and to her in front!" We prayed and chanted strength to Baasha. With some exertion, he brought them all a meter off the floor; the more to cook and eat! – we thought – and cheered.

Though no! These too were bound! Side was looped to side and waist to waist! Baasha did not relent – to do so would show Weakness on his part. "Pump more!" we shouted, and scrambled to the fight.

Three score soldiers were now suspended in the air; altogether they were tied to twenty more. Baasha flapped valiantly, but could make no gain. Our guard skirmished with their front lines, and advanced a little, but not far. Could Baasha give one last heave, and fly? Could we advance enough to loose the knots? We prayed and sung for victory, for peace.

The pyre was built tall. Its smoke rose straight. Upon it they burned Baasha's corpse and with him the bodies from both camps. They would not allow us to mourn separately.

His strength at last had failed him; but rather than take him for their own as we had expected, they let him fall. The earth shook mightily with his fall. The battle then ended; the invaders took no prisoners, and did not decimate our numbers. The shame of our defeat we supposed was punishment enough.

The sweet scent of burning flesh filled our nostrils one last time.

So, now we live with blistering sun upon our flesh, and its glare is noxious to our eyes. We swim in bucketfuls of rain that course unhindered through our streets. And, we endure foreigners who tell us about every manner of things whom, occasionally, we hear.

- James deBoer

A Prayer for Peace and Understanding

Gracious and Loving God,
We pray today for something that transcends words; we pray for peace.
But we acknowledge that we do not know what true peace looks like.

Help us to realize that true peace does not simply come from a lack of conflict with one another; it is something that does not come easily or passively. Rather, peace is a change from within. It comes only from allowing you to enter and to put a spark of inner light in our hearts that changes us. Our hearts must be changed so that our actions can radiate peace. So that we can proclaim the good news that we love our neighbors no matter who they are, what they are addicted to, where they live, what color their skin is, or what they have done.

Help us to realize that we are called to be instruments of your presence on earth. Instruments that when played together form the great symphony that is called the Reign of God. Help us to contemplate peace and nonviolence with the realization that true peace can only be attained when your reign has come on earth as in heaven.

But until that day comes, we are left questioning what true peace looks like. Does it mean only that we do not have altercations with others? Or does it mean that we fight the system through legislation or by putting our bodies in harm's way to protest? Does it mean avoiding conflict? Or does it mean seeking out conflict to change the world?

Holy Parent, we are often confused. Please nurture your children and help us to grow in understanding. Help us to discern your will and to follow it.

We pray these things in the name of the one who is known as the Prince of Peace, that we might be able to follow his example. Amen.

- Caleb Lines

Reflections for Week II

Suggested Scriptures: Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18, Psalms 27, Philippians 3:17-4:1, Luke 13:31-35



Photo by Elsa Marty

Reflection on Power and Grace

“One of the most pressing questions facing the world today is, ‘How can we oppose evil without creating new evils and being made evil ourselves.’” Walter Wink

Isaiah 2:4 calls for the creative response of pastors, theologians, poets, and artists. The following contribution comes out of my experience in a course entitled “Leadership in Hard Times,” where we analyzed the power dynamics at work in the congregational setting. As I read these words, I wonder where you are, as you read them? Are you a seminary student and could you analyze the ancient Hebrew in order to construct more sense for us? Are you a worker in the non-profit sect, striving to see how you can pragmatically live out your hopes for peace with your life choices? With the following reflection, I urge you to consider your own definitions of power and grace and how they impact your response to the Scripture above. Some questions follow my words to aid your reflection and engagement with the Scripture.

Power; this word has wrangled up watchword level distinction in the rhetorical realm and culture of American Christianity. Nonetheless, at first glance, power may seem like a rather simple word. It is composed of a mere two syllables, and we hear the word often; of course, we imagine that we know what power implies and consequently understand its associated meaning and subtexts. *And yet*, power is a multifaceted word. For example, the website *Dictionary.com*, the contemporary Webster’s, defines power with a sum total of 32 *different clauses*. Herein, power is the “capability of doing or accomplishing something”; still too, its definition includes such notions as “political or national strength,” the “possession of control or command over others,” and even “deity or divinity.” In this regard, even though *power* has found itself forming and informing ample rally cries and analyses, it expresses itself in innumerable ways. Power is intricate, vast, and elusive, a concept calling out for further definition and re-definition.

It is words like these that remind scholars that we have important work to do. We are the celebrators of ambiguity, those who find the task of re-definition and re-clarification deeply reverent. Ultimately, if we examine our traditional as well as less traditional concepts of power, impacted by several influences, and juxtapose these notions with specific Gospel depictions of power, the meaning that emerges for contemporary Christians is momentous. Ultimately, both a more profound understanding of power and the subsequent willingness to grapple with its complexity and socio-anthropological influence is pertinent for the task of reconciliation, particularly when it comes to the church. As American Christianity becomes increasingly polarized by opposing ideologies and facets that strive to build up support and power for their individual *sides*, we are also challenged to imagine the shape of God’s power and what God would, in fact, have us as community charged by the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ, do. How can we take a stand for what we hold dear while recognizing the humanity and dignity of those who differ from us? This brings us to a second word, grace.

I recall one time as a college sophomore, when a friend urged me to define grace for her. The concept I envisioned was one of dancing and, therein, of living life with a natural and authentic sense of flow. I experienced grace as I entered the dance of the Triune God's love and recognized that I do not have to do and fix everything, that I am not alone, and therein I wished that others could experience this grace too. Additionally, grace has found itself at the forefront of significant theological movements in Protestant Christianity's history. Grace was Luther's watchword as well as Calvin's. But beyond being a common woman's name and forming half the title of one of the most popular church hymns, what can one say today about grace in American society? It is my thesis that wherever God's power is present, grace will also be there. Grace finds its source in God and is understood as an experience of divine goodness and care. This gift likewise has a communal element, in which one experiences God's care and goodness in such a way that he or she is often inspired to carry out an act of service or ministry to the community. A kind of Romans 12 ethic is experienced therefore, in which individuals find themselves capable of entering into community, of "rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep." In other words, grace leads one into relationship and into building up a whole rather than only an individual part.

Reflection Questions:

- 1) What kind of power that God employ in judging nations and arbitrating for people?
- 2) Do you see any connection between how God arbitrates (and the first section of the scripture), with the second section of the scripture, where swords are beaten into ploughshares... and nations do not learn war anymore (the resulting peace)?
- 3) Where is the place and function of grace (and building up of a whole) in the development of peace?

- *Elizabeth Campbell*



Photo by Ellie McCormick

A Present Present

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you
Words from a Savior that are tried and true
There is no other lover quite like Him
A purposeful soul Who went out on a Limb
As the stretched each one wide
Offering himself as the perfect sacrifice
Assuring us that though tribulation's in the world
We're close-knit, strung together like heavenly pearls
Because greater is He that is in me
And he's already overcome every enemy
O death, where is your sting?
O grave, where is your victory?
Your desire to have me overwhelmed is pure futility
Christ has given His peace
Not as the world gives, but as He's seen fit
So let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid
For truly we have the peace of God through the Ancient of Days
There is time for reflection
A time to celebrate
For the fruit of the Spirit does bear peace in us
As we abide in the Vine
Increasing in faith and trust

- Lyvonne "Proverbs" Briggs



Reflections for Week III

Suggested Scriptures: Isaiah 55:1-9, Psalms 63:1-8, 1 Corinthians 10: 1-13, Luke 13:1-9



Photo by Elsa Marty

Complicit

Let me be explicit,
I cannot be complicit with your water boarding, bomb
dropping, sniper shooting agenda.
Stop filling me with news media propoganda.
The truth is that my tax dollars commit crimes for
which no one will do time.
The system is illegitimate.
It's time to quit.
The USA says, "We are the world's big brother!"
Countries we invade can be saved by no other.

Friends, do I make myself clear?
We're fighting 'gainst our own fear,
An enemy we've created yet cannot see.
Friends, there's an alternative possibility.
Look and listen to the hungry, thirsty, homeless,
marginalized and sick.
God's people cry for help, they say, "Come quick!"

Peace is God's vision to mend this incision,
Love is God's way to heal our division.
When justice bends low,
Then righteousness will flow.
God will shake the tyrants from their thrones.
We'll stop destroying people's homes.
Weapons of war shall be no more.
Earth's people will build a new rapport.

Let me be explicit.
I will not be complicit.

- *Katelyn Macrae*



Photo from School of the Americas Protest at Ft. Benning, Georgia, November 2009. The SOA Protest was part of
SCM Canada's Pilgrimage of Resistance.

Reflection

I've just finished the last class of my seminary career, a one-week intensive course on the ethics of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor, theologian and activist during the turbulent 1930s and 40s. Although he was a self-identified pacifist, in desperation he eventually became involved in a conspiracy to assassinate Adolf Hitler. When the plot failed, Bonhoeffer was discovered as a conspirator, arrested, and hanged in Flossenburg Concentration Camp on April 9, 1945.

As a student and admirer of Bonhoeffer and a committed Christian pacifist myself, Bonhoeffer's story has always both intrigued and disturbed me. Here was a man, so committed to living out the law of love as proclaimed by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, who nonetheless felt that when all was said and done, he had no other option than to participate in the use of violence to end the life of his enemy.

Bonhoeffer never attempted to justify his actions—self-justification itself, he wrote, is the foundational flaw of all human ethics. There are certain times in which it is impossible really to know right from wrong, and in these cases, one must act boldly on what one discerns to be God's call one one's life, forsaking all self-justification and throwing oneself completely on the mercy of God.

These convictions flowed from Bonhoeffer's ethic of responsibility. Jesus, Bonhoeffer wrote, is the responsible human being *par excellence*, and as the Body of Christ, the Church must assume responsibility not only for itself, but also for its society and that society's victims, unafraid to get its hands dirty and take on guilt for the sake of its neighbors. For those of us today who are reflecting on questions about how our Christian faith can be put in the service of those outside the walls of the Church and our lives at the disposal of our most vulnerable sisters and brothers, Bonhoeffer's conception of the Church as the responsible community and of the concrete neighbor in need as the norm of all Christian ethics are useful starting points.

Still, I think, there is danger here. Having grown up in an influential German upper-middle-class family with a considerable amount of power, Bonhoeffer may have internalized uncritically an assumption about the relationship between the haves and have-nots, the powerful and the marginalized, that though well intentioned, may be more paternalistic than Christian. What does it mean to assume responsibility for a people with whom one is not in direct relationship? How accurate is the presumption that it is Christian not only to die, but to *kill* for those whom one does not know? While I believe Bonhoeffer is absolutely right to assert that all who seek to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ must take the neighbor in need as the concrete source and norm of all their ethical deliberations, and that response to that concrete need is of primary importance to the Christian life, I feel it is crucial that we make a distinction between the Church's call to be responsible *to* others, and the somewhat more paternalistic assumption that the Church is entitled to be responsible *for* others. If we take the real, concrete, human life and death of our Lord as the prime example of what God calls humanity to be and do, we find that while Jesus does not hesitate to spend his time, his energy, and indeed his very life on his sisters and brothers in need, nowhere does he presume to take responsibility *for* them, employing violence to ensure their

survival and well-being. On the contrary, Jesus became himself the innocent victim of the great power that claimed responsibility for the lives of Judea's inhabitants, and he called his disciples to go and do likewise. As Bonhoeffer wrote in his classic work, *Discipleship*, "When Christ calls, he bids us come and die."

Ryan Dowell Baum



Fence at Ft. Benning, GA during School of Americas Protest, Photo by Katelyn Macrae

Reflections for Week IV

Suggested Scriptures: Joshua 5: 9-12, Psalms 32, 2 Corinthians 5:16-21, Luke 15:1-3, 11b-31



Photo by Elsa Marty

Reflection

“The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” is a famous quote by Audre Lord. But yet Isaiah preaches reforming the tools of destruction into the tools of peace. Through a recycling, waste-reduction approach, maybe this makes sense. Maybe it means to ensure that no one else can pick up those tools to use them for oppressive purposes. Perhaps it is sensitive to those with limited means to purchase or create brand new tools. The image of transformation, and re-purposing, is a strong one and very Biblical.

But yet I wonder where Lord’s caution fits into all of that. I see so much truth in her words too. All around me there are people trying to make change yet imagining it way too small. Using money, education, power, and prestige – appealing to consumerism, individualism, and competition – with the aim of doing transformational work.

Maybe our recycled sword, now in the form of a ploughshare, is still not radical enough because it still can only be held by one person. It still is made of iron and is too heavy for some to lift. It is still possible to use it for violent purposes.

Maybe as we hold our pruning hooks, and feel proud of our DIY skills that skillfully mask their former lives as spears, we still haven’t quite got it. Maybe there are people who have been hurt by the spears that we have yet to attend to. Maybe there are a million other spears that are still out there killing.

And yes, Isaiah does speak a bit to a bigger picture. The nations are at peace, war is no longer taught. But the nations are still separate. And just what IS taught now? Maybe Isaiah points in the right direction, but I think we today need to start imagining and creating the real contents of the new world we dream of. It is not enough to say “not that.” How can we create a new world if we can’t imagine what it would look like? What passion will move us to work for it, and find the bits of it already around us, if we cannot deeply feel the possibility, and see a plethora of possibilities vividly in our minds’ eyes?

It is so, so hard to imagine a world completely new, things that are not merely removals or modifications of the things we already know. It is tempting but dangerous to use our familiar tools to try to build a just and transfigured world. Yet we, like Isaiah, are prophets and visionaries. And we do not speak alone – we join in a conversation of thousands of years, which is taking place all around the world right now. What are you hearing? How is the new world breaking forth in you?

- *Sheryl Johnson*

Reflection on Non-Violence

"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment." - Matthew, 5:21-22a

"But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." - Matthew, 5:39

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven." - Matthew, 5:43-45

One of the primary ministries of our Lord in His time upon the earth was in healing. The principals to spiritual enlightenment he taught and demonstrated are also the keys to emotional healing and spiritual restoration. When we hear the term "non-violence" we think of great men that led revolutionary movements such as Gandhi and MLK. We think of civil disobedience. We may even think of Tolstoy. But corporate problems originate in the heart of each comprising individual. The principals of peace among nations are the principals of peace for each man or woman. National healing requires the same process as personal healing. Groups and associations are simply clustered individuals. We know this, but we often fail to apply the principals of personal healing or enlightenment to corporate healing and enlightenment. Until we embrace the complete vision for healing presented by Christ, the history of humankind will look much like it has over the past 10,000 years or so. Just as we seem to cycle through the same mistakes with each succeeding generation, so the cycle of pain perpetuates itself on the more intimate level, in our families, among friends, spouses ...

I see non-violence as a comprehensive doctrine defined by the Lord in the words from Matthew spoken to the Jewish people of His day. It is a cessation of the cycle. It is refusing to pass pain on with more pain, to generate suffering out of suffering. And in this act of defiance, the defiance of non-violence, a barrier is erected against the passage of pain. In our pain we often become angry. That anger, in hopes of finding its outlet, turns the origin of pain upon another, sometimes in revenge, but often times our pain is visited by our anger upon the innocent and unsuspecting. Take a young man who received violence at the hands of his primary protector: his father. He is far more likely to vent that anger upon his spouse later in life. She is innocent. She did not provoke his anger nor ask to be it recipient, yet, in the laws of man, pain has a pay it forward principal. Revenge, as just as it may appear at times, perpetuates this cycle of brokenness. Throughout the testament of Christ, including the epistles, Christians are prohibited from seeking revenge. Why when it would seem so warranted? Because the Father desires that we become more like His Son, who we are told lives through us. The affect is that we become healers like Christ. Only in standing against the tide of pain do we create the conditions for healing.

Christ is giving us a way out. He is giving the sons and daughters of broken fathers and mothers the power of choice and the presence of healing. In telling us not to repay evil with evil, in leaving revenge in the hands of the Almighty, he said to me: 'your son

does not have to inherit the burden of your debt. He does not have to walk in the same broken condition, causing breakage as you have. You can stop, stand still, and let the anger, the violence, even the injustice stop with you. You can become a shield to those that stand behind you.' Yet abiding by the principals of man, the sins of the fathers are visited upon the second and third generation. But how powerful a message of hope: that he who held the sword can exchange it for a shield. That he whose ripples caused loss or pain or fear in the lives of others can, in stillness with the shield of non-violence and endurance, reverberate a frequency of restoration that will pay forward from one to the next, even from one generation to the next. We want a revolution of sustainability? We want to end all wars? We want our sons and daughters to be free of our debts? We must forgive our debtors. We must each exchange our sword for a shield. And He who invited us to this exchange is He who provides the power of the shield for each of us to hold.

- Frank May



Photo by Katelyn Macrae

Reflections of Week V

Suggested Scriptures: Isaiah 43: 16-21, Psalms 126, Philippians 3:4b – 14, John 12:1-8



Photo by Elsa Marty

A Lesson from the Snow



Photo by Elizabeth Campbell

I left the snow of Upstate New York and moved to California:

The Golden State, the place where you are supposed to be able to wear shorts year-round. The state of sunscreen mandates, surfing safaris, and warm water waves, where you can regularly buy strawberries, mangos, and juicy oranges.

I knew what to expect. Or at least part of me – it did.

Then there was that day: The first time I took a trip up 80N.

The snow was thick and tall; it dusted the streets with a heavy covering.

Unbelievable: I was in California and wearing snow-pants and snow-boots and all sorts of snow gear.

Christmas had come to July. Except it was not July. Just something right at an unexpected time.

We talk about peace like it's always that someday, sometime, apocalyptic—just not quite here kind of moment.

But when Vanier says that peace only happens one-heart-at-a-time, I agree with him.
So what are we waiting for?!

Let's get started now! Let's open our hands to each other, risk partaking in acts of
adventurous caring; create a party and invite everyone; there's a parable about that!

So let's start acting now!

Why?!

Because everything in this world cannot be explained by our expectations;
this New Yorker learned that there is in fact snow in California.

And once we stop thinking that peace can only exist in the realm of the utopian, we
might recognize its possibility right before our eyes,

And some might say I'm mixing my metaphors and others might say I'm relying on a
miracle, but isn't miracle-reliance part of the liturgy of the Church?!

... **Elizabeth Campbell**
San Anselmo, CA (Jan 2010)

The Peace of Sheer Silence

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

Isaiah 2:4

He said, Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, for the LORD is about to pass by. Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the LORD was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the LORD was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence.

Kings 19:11-12

When one is told that the theme for reflection is peace and anti-militarism, it is easy to read our passage from Isaiah and assume that God's arbitration will therefore be peaceful. However, there are those Christians among us who proclaim God's quest for peace through violent means, through vengefulness, through wrathful punishment. Then again, other Christians in the vein of Martin Luther King Jr. follow the principle that hate only breeds hate and violence only breeds violence, meaning that love is the only way to stamp out oppressive violence, meaning that LOVE is God's method of arbitration.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, I was lost and ready to explode because the strongest Christian voice was not a voice that resonated within me. It seemed that the only Christian voice prevalent in the media was a voice proclaiming that God arbitrated against New Orleans transgressions through the violence of a natural disaster. These voices seem to return after every natural disaster, including the most recent media aftermath slung at Haiti.

In a cloud of anger and despair, I came across this passage from 1 Kings: ...but the LORD was NOT in the wind...the LORD was NOT in the earthquake...the LORD was NOT in the fire. Even though it challenges my conventional understanding of God's omnipotence, this passage moves me to tears of relief even today. It is comforting to think that, no matter what certain television personalities claim, God was NOT in the strong winds of Katrina, God was NOT in the earthquake of Haiti, AND God WAS NOT IN THE FIERY WORDS FROM THE PREACHERS ON TV. God speaks in the quiet, in the peace. In the midst of surround sound voices proclaiming the sins of these already brutalized communities, in the midst of unfounded condemnations of these already vulnerable communities, in the midst of violent verbal assaults against these already forsaken lives, 1 Kings helps me find the peace and quiet of God.

So, what does God tell Elijah in that sheer silence?

God whispers to Elijah, Get back to work. Elijah was running from a choice to use violence in the name of God. Elijah was hiding from God, afraid of the consequences for the error of his militaristic strategy. But God finds Elijah, and gently instructs, Get back to work. Don't be forced into hiding by the violent voices of televangelists! Don't run away from your divine call to preach a gospel of peace simply because you have made a mistake! Get back to work!

As a nation, we have made the same mistake as Elijah. We choose to act violently; we choose to unnecessarily use our military force. As a result, we were hiding from our humane responsibility when the wind blew through New Orleans, when the earthquake rattled Haiti, when the fire of poverty swept through our world. Because we chose a path of militarism, our guns drowned out the sheer silence of God's loving plea to respond to our siblings' devastation and oppression. As a nation we need to redefine the purpose of the military. We need to transform our destructive military power into a corps of productive humanitarian aid. God is NOT in the disaster, but in our ability to listen to the silent call to help afterward.

- *Jack Davidson*



Site of La Quesera Massacre, El Salvador, Photo by Katelyn Macrae

Reflections for Week VI

Suggested Scriptures: Luke 19:28-40, Psalms 118: 1-2, 19-29, Isaiah 50:4-9a, Philippians 2:5-11



Photo by Elsa Marty

SALAAM ALAIKUM

"Salaam alaikum,"
May God's blessing be upon you
Brother, sister, stranger, my friend
"Shalom",
Peace be with you,
And also with you...and you...
And you~
"Namaste",
Your spirit and my spirit
Are as one...
Qu'ran, Talmud, Holy Scripture,
Sanskrit
Different language, tongue,
Dialect, yet the same~
Oneness in teaching,
Oneness in belief
Love...
"Love one another as I have loved you."

- *Sandy Duross*

The Parable of the Old Men and The Young

So Abram rose, and clave the wood, and went,
And took the fire with him, and a knife.
And as they sojourned both of them together,
Isaac the first born spake and said, My Father,
Behold the preparations, fire and iron,
But where the lamb for this burnt offering?
Then Abram bound the youth with belt and straps,
And builded parapets and trenches there,
And stretched forth the knife to slay his son.
When lo! an angel called him out of heaven,
Saying, Lay not thy hand upon the lad,
Neither do anything to him. Behold,
A ram, caught in a thicket by its horns,
Offer the Ram of Pride instead of him.
But the old man would not so, but slew his son, -
And half the seed of Europe, one by one.

*Lt. Wilfred Owen, Poet,
Killed in World War I*

Homecoming

In dreams I see our first-born, only son,
His sad pale face glimpsed through the windowpane,
All blurred now by an unforgiving rain
Of tears. His war's over; it's death that won.
They say it took him in a muddy field,
Torn there by bullets and exploding shell.
A nightmare death of pain and noise – a hell
In which he saw our blasphemy revealed.

Back here at home we'd played at God, and lost,
Letting him go, hugging old hatreds tight;
His laughter, song, warm mischief were the cost
Of pointless map lines, redrawn overnight.
His broken body's in a flag-wrapped box.
All's silent but the ticking of the clocks.

*In memory of Wilfred Owen
Arthur Latimer*

Maundy Thursday

Reflection

At the time of this writing, our sister Necta Montes (WSCF-Asia Pacific Regional Secretary) and many other people in the Philippines are living anguished moments due to the abduction and torture her uncle and 42 other medical and health workers have been enduring at the hands of the military and police. This kidnapping, which occurred during a First Responders Training, sponsored by the Community Medicine Foundation, Inc. (COMMED) and Council for Health and Development (CHD) at Dr. Melecia Velmonte's Farm, in Morong, Rizal, under the allegations that the participants were involved in a bomb-making training, is the umpteenth episode of human rights violations at the hands of Philipino government to harass and abuse those who oppose President Arroyo's regime under the guise of fighting terrorism. Dr. Montes, a lay leader in the health ministry of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines, is a victim of illegal arrest, disappearance and detention. The United Church of Christ in the Philippines resolutely calls for an end to de-facto martial law tactics on the part of the Armed Forces in the Philippines and the Philippine National Police. We call for the respect of the human rights of Dr. Alex Montes and the 42 other detained health workers, including their rights to legal counsel, access to visitors, and due process. Dr Alex is a respected leader in the healing ministry of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines.

In this time of Lent, we remember those who, like Dr Montes, are targeted by a militarized society only because of their activism to alleviate the sufferings of the poor and the marginalized and who critique a corrupt power system that wants to self-perpetuate trough violence, economic exploitation and environmental destruction. We pray our mother God to judge between the nations oppressing their citizens for the interest of the few,
We exhort our healing God to arbitrate for many people who are injured at the hands of military personnel around the world,
We beseech our God of peace to convince governments around the world to beat their words into ploughshares and care for the welfare of their people and not of their elites,
We ask of the governments in North America to stop funding regimes that use their spears to harass, violate and denigrate
We plead our sustainer God to support all those who march against war, who advocate with their elected officials to change funding priorities, who resist militarism in all forms so that one day no nation shall lift up the sword against another nation and that we shall not learn war anymore.
Amen .

- Luciano Kovacs

COMMUNION LITURGY

Often on Maundy Thursday, communities gather together to share a meal and remember the Last Supper, the meal that Jesus shared with his disciples before going to the cross. We invite you to use this communion liturgy as you gather together to remember Jesus' life and the way that we are all joined across generations and with each other through the breaking of the bread and the sharing of the cup. This liturgy was originally written by Katelyn Macrae for Shalom United Church of Christ in New Haven, CT. Feel free to adapt it for the liturgical needs of your community.

INVITATION

ALL: Jesus, we gather this evening as a community, just as your disciples did centuries ago. As we walk together on this Lenten journey, our eyes long to recognize you and our hearts quicken as when we think of your love. Come join us for this feast.

Leader: For you have shown us that:

Voice 1: This table.

Voice 2: This table.

Voice 3: This table.

ALL: Has an open invitation.

Leader: Friends, this night we remember Jesus' words that all who are weary and burdened down can come to him, and he will give us rest. And so to all who have heard God's call, all who wait in the cold night, all who have felt the Holy Spirit tickle their soul, and to all who have been made less than, excluded, and left out, to Everyone, God extends an extravagant welcome.

THE GREAT THANKSGIVING

Leader: The Lord be with you.

People: And also with you.

Leader: Lift up your hearts.

People: We lift them up to the Lord.

Leader: Let us give God thanks and praise.

People: It is right and fitting that we should, at all times and in all places, give thanks to you, our Ever Loving God.

Leader: We thank you and praise you Great Creator. You fashioned the world from chaos, creating day and night, earth, sea and sky, sun, moon and stars. Under your care, trees and plants blossomed, giving food for all to eat. O God, when we see the works of your hand we remember that it is you who made creation and blessed it with goodness.

We thank you God, for you are a provider. Through prophets like Moses, you led the Israelites out of slavery, parted the seas, and gave your people manna from heaven when they had nothing else to eat.

You sent us your Son, Jesus, who showed us your way of love, peace, and light. When the world would not listen, and took Jesus to the cross, you raised him to new

and everlasting life. After Jesus' death, his followers gathered to form the church. At Pentecost, you sent the Holy Spirit to guide us to do your work in the world.

God, we know that there is more light and truth yet to break forth, and so tonight we open our whole selves up to hear your voice, as we join with people in all times and places around your table to proclaim:

THE SANCTUS – *Santo, Santo, Santo*

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

We remember that on the night that Jesus was betrayed, he gathered in an upper room with his disciples around a table to share a meal. He took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-27).

PRAYER OF CONSECRATION

Leader: Spirit of the Living God, come join us at this table. Let each of us gathered here know your presence and hear your call so that, together with your Love, we may heal the brokenness that divides us from our selves, each other and the world. Bless this bread and this cup, so that it may be a sign and symbol of your love and sacrifice for us.

People: God, be with us now. We long for you to call us, and be transformed from our old ways of division to new wholeness with you. We want to drink from your cup of blessing, and eat your bread of new life.

Leader: Come then, the table is ready. The gifts of God for the people of God.

DISTRIBUTION OF THE ELEMENTS

PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

ALL: Loving God, we give you thanks for this table where all are welcome. Thank you for blessing us with the presence of your Son, Jesus Christ. Increase our Love for one another. Incline our ears to hear your call. Strengthen our faith to trust your presence. Guide our feet to walk on your path. Amen.

BENEDICTION

ALL: And now, go out into the world in peace, be of good courage, hold fast to that which is good; render to no one evil for evil; support the weak, help the afflicted, love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in God's presence, now and forever more. Amen.

Good Friday

Suggested Readings: Psalms 22, Hebrews 10:16-25, John 18:1 – 19:42



Photo of Child's Grave © Greg Griffin 2001

"They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means The Place of the Skull). Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. And they crucified him . . . It was the third hour when they crucified him."

Mark 15:22-25

Prayer

Source of our Being, Spirit of Love, Prince of Peace,
we are broken people.

We seek power and honor and in doing so we step on people we don't even know
or see.

We can never be satisfied and so we covet shiny new toys,
we steal from the mouths of children in foreign lands,
we murder creation by polluting and waste,
we worship the idol of security and military power.

Forgive us, we pray.

Have mercy, we pray.

In this time of turning and returning,
we come to you with our own brokenness and the brokenness of the world.

O God, you know the pain and suffering of the world,
the silent cries of those who are oppressed, the horror of those surrounded by war,
the hunger and hopelessness of the poor, the wounds of those who are abused,
the rage of the exploited and the vulnerability of the marginalized.

As we have walked this Lenten journey, we know you are with each and every
one who experiences the desert of despair.

You listen and you are present even when we feel unworthy and can not accept
your love,
and when we are unwilling to see and feel your compassion.

Be our guide and our companion, send your Spirit to empower us and give us
courage,
that we might accompany one another, seeking healing, love, justice and peace for
world of pain.

May our tired limbs be roused to dance for joy,
may our parched mouths find living water,
may our desperation turn to hope as we move toward resurrection.

You are the source of our being, the giver of life, Creator, Mother, Father, God.
You are the spirit of love, the fire of passion, the wind of storm and calm, the
power of true relating and shalom.
You are the prince of peace, the one who felt the evil of human madness as you
were beaten and crucified,
and you granted forgiveness, not violence.

You are LOVE, PEACE and GRACE.

Sustain us in the wilderness, renew our souls and make us whole
as we seek to participate in your reign, your kin-dom, your shalom.

Amen.

- *Rachel Medema*

Some portions of this prayer were adapted from prayers in *Celebrate God's Presence: A Book of Services for the United Church of Canada*, Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 2000



Photo by Ellie McCormick

Easter

Suggested Readings: Psalms 118: 1-2, 14-24, Luke 24: 1-49, Acts 10: 34-43,



Photo by Elsa Marty

On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen!"

Luke 24: 1- 6a NIV

Thank you for participating in this Lenten journey of reflection and Bible study with us. We hope that these days have encouraged you to move forward in our communal callings to be peacemakers, growing in our connection with God who has shown us the great goodness of peace. Thank you again to all who contributed through writing as well as presence with the development of this devotional guide.

Blessings & Happy Easter!

The Bible & Theology Working Group

World Student Christian Federation- North America

Contributors

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Frank May is the CEO of a small chain of leisure goods stores in the southeast, a furniture distributor in Louisville, KY, and founder of African Development Initiative. He is active in his home town of Chattanooga, TN, spearheading a buy local movement, working with social entrepreneurs, and serving where he can. He became connected to Student Christian Movement in 2002 when he provided design services to the office in Switzerland through the design firm he owned at the time.

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WEBSITES

REGIONAL

World Student Christian Federation – North America
www.wscfna.org

CANADA

SCM-Canada, the affiliated movement of Canada
www.scmcanada.org

Jeunesse Etudiante Chrétienne (JEC), an associated movement in Quebec
www.mouvementjec.org

UNITED STATES

SCM-USA, a soon to be affiliated movement of the United States
<http://sites.google.com/site/scmusanow/>

United Methodist Student Movement, an associated movement in the United States
www.umsm.org

Lutheran Student Movement, an associated movement in the United States
www.lsm-usa.org

GLOBAL

World Student Christian Federation
www.wscfglobal.org