

When It Comes To Peace, What's Your Hope?

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Congregational Church of Austin, UCC
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To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want.

Wendell Berry

Last week, we lit the candle of hope.

This week, we lit the candle of peace.

I'm wondering, when it comes to peace, for what do you hope?

I asked myself that question this week, when it comes to peace, for what do I hope?

I found myself not hoping for a world that's free of conflict and suffering.

Sure, I'd certainly like to see a world that's free of conflict and suffering, and better yet, live in such a world. But I don't hope for such a world.

It isn't because I think a world free of conflict and suffering is unrealistic. I have no problem hoping for things that are unrealistic.

It's just that, for me, I've come to accept that I live in a world that includes conflict and suffering. Conflict and suffering are part and parcel of this world, and I don't hope for it to ever be different.

A quick example—predator-prey relationships. There's an inherent conflict-of-interest in a predator-prey relationship, a life-and-death conflict-of-interest. The natural world is filled with predator-prey relationships, and the conflicts, often violent, that get played out in those relationships.

Humans have been both predator and prey in our relatively short time on earth. Just because we've domesticated most of our prey, and raise them on farms, doesn't mean we're not still predators. And some human predators treat other humans as prey, not to eat, but to control, exploit, or consume in some other way. Some believe humans are now the most dangerous predator on earth.

At any rate, I've come to accept that I live in a world that includes conflict and suffering. For me, hoping the world won't include conflict and suffering is like hoping water won't be wet. It doesn't seem like a good use of my hope.

What I do hope for is the capacity to live in a world of conflict and suffering in ways that contribute as little as possible to creating conflict and suffering, and as much as possible to minimizing conflict and suffering.

I think Wendell Berry best sums up my hope for peace in a world of conflict and suffering: "To live, we must daily break the body and shed the blood of Creation. When we do this knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, it is a sacrament. When we do it ignorantly, greedily, clumsily, destructively, it is a desecration. In such desecration, we condemn ourselves to spiritual and moral loneliness, and others to want."

My hope is to live as knowingly, lovingly, skillfully, reverently, and sacramentally as I possibly can, thus breaking and shedding as little as I possibly can.

But even that hope is unrealistic, for I know that I'll never contribute as little *as I possibly can* to creating conflict and suffering, and as much *as I possibly can* to minimizing conflict and suffering. I know I'll never live as sacramentally *as I possibly can*. That's unrealistic.

To do as little, and as much, *as I possibly can*, to live as sacramentally *as I possibly can*, would entail a whole series of radical changes in the way I live my life. Changes that are possible, but that would seriously disrupt the way I currently live my life. It's unrealistic to think I'm going to make every single one of those radical changes. It's unrealistic to think I'll change in every way possible.

And yet, that's where I place my hope. In something I think possible, yet unrealistic.

Hope creates tension in my life—tension between what I think to be possible, and what I think to be unrealistic.

By inspiring me with possibilities, hope challenges what I think to be unrealistic, and strives to transform what's unrealistic into reality. Hope is my inner drive to bring more of what's possible for my life into reality, my inner drive to make one more unrealistic change in my life, to live more sacramentally today than I did yesterday.

Some people hope for things they think are impossible.

Not me. I hope for things I think are possible, yet unrealistic.

That's not to say it's wrong to hope for things that one thinks impossible. It's not wrong. It's just that different people hope in different ways, and hope for different things.

And it's good to be aware of how we hope, and what we hope for, so that we make good use of our hope.

So that our hope is a strong spiritual power in our life.

One that sustains us. One that drives us, and brings about our transformation.

One that makes what's possible, yet unrealistic, a reality.

My wife, Robin, and I are both hoping to make major changes in how we live our lives in the not-too-distant future, changes that will disrupt how we currently live, changes we think are possible, though unrealistic. And therefore, kind of scary, and kind of exciting.

We want to live further off the fossil-fuel energy grid, to own a lot less and consume a lot less, and to integrate ourselves into a close-knit group of earth-sustaining and justice-seeking people, preferably in the southwest and close to the border. Leaving a much smaller footprint on the earth is one way we hope to contribute less to creating conflict and suffering, and to contribute more to minimizing conflict and suffering on this earth.

I'm praying for strong hope, so Robin and I can make the changes we'll need to make in order to live into our hoped-for life.

For what do you hope?

When it comes to peace, for what do you hope?

You may hope for a world that's at peace, a world without conflict and suffering.

You may hope for inner peace. Or peace between you and other people, people close to you or people far away.

Or peace between different groups of people, between nations, ethnicities, races, religions. Peace between employers and employees.

Or you may hope to make changes in your life, changes that seem unrealistic and crazy, changes that'll enable you to live more sacramentally in a culture bent on desecration.

When it comes to being a peacemaker, for what do you hope?

Jesus said, "blessed are the peacemakers." How do you hope to bless the world with your peacemaking?

What do you do you hope to do, or stop doing? Who do you hope to be, or stop being?