

May all Beings Know Peace 2nd Sunday in Advent 12-5-21

Divine peace is my path and my true nature.

Peace within me. Peace surrounding me. Peace from me. By Thy grace let there be peace.

I've shared this before, but it is fascinating-- and a little squirmy-- to step back and witness my process of praying, pacing, meditating, thinking... and pacing, and thinking and praying that leads me to finally being able to write these Sunday messages. I've long recognized *that* kind of "stewing" as a juicy part of my writing process, but already in these few times of speaking with you I sense something new. Your trust in me, and my desire to show up as authentically as I can for you, for God, and for myself-- that trust pushes me in the very best way towards walking my talk more deeply.

That Unity principle of walking the Truth, of living our Truth-- like all aspects of deepening our spiritual life-- is sometimes easier to state as a principle than it is to practice it. So as I share my thoughts and insights on the gift of Peace, and where and how that gift has shown itself to me-- despite my occasional fumbling in the dark-- I invite you to consider where has the gift of peace, of knowing peace shown itself to you?

On Tuesday morning I listened to a lovely guided meditation on my 10% happier app about "Calmly Riding the Waves" and a snippet of a Brandi Carlile song popped unbidden into my head and it stayed with me all week long!

"You can dance in a hurricane, but only if you're standing in the eye!"

As the voice of teacher Kaira Jewel guided us through a beautiful meditation about equanimity, she invited us to see the eight spoked wheel with an open center, a symbol of Buddhism, as an anchoring image-- the eye of the storm!

In the meditation, she taught a meaning behind this symbol that was unfamiliar to me, yet it struck a chord: the spokes represented "8 worldly winds, with pairs of opposites like Pleasure and Pain, Gain and Loss...and like our lives and fortunes, the wheel is always turning. These eight worldly winds are always blowing."

Her invitation was to learn how to recognize that those opposites, which we often see as “either/or” experiences, actually coexist with each other and that we can learn to “roll with the winds that are ever-changing and threaten to pull us off course, to stay centered and calm in the midst of the ups and downs of life.”

This week I felt the inner weather patterns of my life and those things that weighed on my mind and in my heart-- the people in my life that I was worried about, the world situations that seem never ending, never changing, even all of the things I’m excited to be learning about what goes into being your minister, but that I want to know how to do RIGHT NOW--

Those winds were swirling through me and you *can* dance in a hurricane, but only if you're standing in the eye.

And the peace of God which surpasses all understanding will guard your hearts and your minds... Philippians 4:7

Let’s listen again to the Daily World:

As I continue on the Advent Journey, my thoughts turn to peace. I remember what gives me peace – the beauty of a sunset, a comforting hug, a heartfelt prayer.

In those moments, peace encompasses all of my thoughts and feelings, transforming any worries or troubles.

I wish to carry that feeling with me always. I realize I do not have to wait for specific experiences to feel peaceful.

I have the power to claim peace at all times and in all situations. I affirm that Divine peace is greater than any worldly condition... God's peace is my peace, forever.

It’s so simple! God’s Peace is ever present and available, and like the Grace that surrounds us always, it only needs us to remember to lift our hearts and fill our sails to be in peace... Of course it is both that simple...and yet not always easy!

In the moment to moment winds of life-- some of which blow in terrifying, fierce gales-- what are the anchors that pull us safely into the eye of the storm? Where do we find the calm, the equanimity, the peace that sustains us, that invites us to *act* from the center, rather than *react* from the storm?

One of those anchors for me this week was sitting and breathing, and taking in that beautiful guided meditation, with the image of the calm center. One anchor was that little snippet of Brandi Carlile which turned into my mantra, my chant, my prayer sung aloud in my house many times during the past week.

On Wednesday, the Daily Word anchored me:

“...fear siphons my energy and causes me to shrink from the fullness of life...

I remember there is no place I can be where God is not, no situation I ever face alone. God isn't just with me – God is within me. Embracing this Divine protection, I am fearless knowing all strength, support, wisdom, and love are mine every moment of every day.”

Prayer. Meditation. Sacred reading that inspires and settles my spirit. These spiritual practices helped bring me back to my center, so that I could once again hear the voice of God whispering...and this time the voice of God sounded a lot like the voice of Sam at our spirit group on Thursday night...

I know many of you are also reading *The Untethered Soul*, although not everyone has had that opportunity. I honestly don't know if I had picked up the book on my own if I would have continued reading past my resistance to Michael Singer's authorial tone. He bugs me. A lot. :-D So like the fascinating process of witnessing my stewing writing process, it's been fascinating to witness my resistance to this book, and to move through that in the company of my spirit group's collective wisdom, insight and questioning.

As I mentioned earlier, my inner weather patterns were very much up and down this week with those close to home worries, and the general existential threat that I feel when I look at the state of our world. So those spiritual practices, and feeling the support of our prayer chaplains, all helped me come back to center.

And then our spirit group both nourished AND upended my comfort! One little question complicated that inner peace in a remarkably powerful way! Singer uses an analogy of a house that we build to protect ourselves from the dazzling sunlight of being fully present to enlightenment.

We want to stay in the sundrenched field, so we build a house there...and then we eventually get locked into the safety of that house which ultimately then keeps us from the sunlight. We each shared about the walls we've built, and as we circled around the chapters... Into the calm of being anchored in my familiar spiritual practices, a simple little question entered in: "What if"?

What if I am meant to notice where I settle into comfortable patterns of habit, even good habits, that keep me from fully living in the light?

What if I am called not only to *feel* peaceful, calm and centered...but use that calm center to go deeper, to look again and again at the patterns of my thinking and fretting?

What if the point of remembering that *there is no place I am where God is not*, is that living fearlessly in God calls me to then remember that *blessed are the peacemakers...*

What if being a peacemaker means that I am called to *be an embodiment of Christ-peace*, to live in such a way that I am witness to living the Truth of my faith and my principles, witness to a world that needs that Truth.

Peace I leave you, My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor fearful. John 14:7

Seeds of Hope, a collection of writings and talks by Henri Nouwen, edited by Robert Durback was published in 1991. It's amazing how pertinent his wisdom still feels today, as I read it as a call to *be* that Christ- peace.

In a section titled Sentences on Peacemaking here is some of that wisdom:

When peacemaking is based on fear it is not much different than war-making. Only those who deeply know that they are loved and rejoice in that love can be true peacemakers.

Prayer – living in the presence of God – is the most radical peace action we can imagine.

Prayer is peacemaking and not simply the preparation before, the support during, and the thanksgiving after.

Prayer is not primarily a way to get something done. In prayer we undo the fear of death and therefore the basis of all human destruction.

In Unity we are called to not only understand spiritual teachings, but to live that Truth. If I take down the walls that limit me from living in the dazzling light of Truth, and I reach a personal sense of inner freedom-- is that enough? Of course not. The vision and mission of *this* community are so powerful because they reflect our aspiration to envision awakening for ALL, through prayer and service.

The Truth is that in order for us to embody that vision, to enliven that mission, and to live in resistance to the world's clamor, we need each other. In many of the writings in ***Seeds of Hope***, Nouwen was speaking about resisting the nuclear proliferation that dominated the world powers in the 80's, but his words resonated when I think of the concerns of both my personal world, and our larger world today.

How then can peacemakers stay alive in this world? The simple answer is together. As long as we look at resistance as performing individual acts of heroism there won't be many peacemakers who will survive the enormous pressures put upon them. Resistance which works for peace is not so much the effort of brave and courageous individuals as the work of the Community of Faith. Individual people, even the best and the strongest will soon be exhausted and discouraged, but a community of resistance can persevere even when its members have their moments of weakness and despair. Peacemaking can be a lasting work only when we live and work together... If there is any word that should characterize the life of Peacemakers it is the word gratitude. True peacemakers are grateful persons who constantly recognize and celebrate the peace of God within and among them. This might at first sound romantic, but those who have lived through periods of true pain and agony know the mystery of gratitude. We know in our innermost being that suffering and agony will not

be able to destroy our gratitude since we have found...a peace that is not of this world.

And you, my new Unity of Albany family, *you* are signs of peace and presence. I have already in these past few weeks witnessed many ways you support and hold each other through the winds of life. You circle each other in prayer, you reach out when a community member is facing grief, or health challenges.

You celebrate with each other, learn from each other, change lightbulbs, stuff envelopes, water plants! You sing! You are *as a community* living into your aspirations, into the vision you share for transforming the world. You are living your Truth, even, I imagine, with an occasional very human fumbling in the dark-- living as peacemakers so that you are tangible, breathing signs of God's goodness, everywhere present.

And I have felt your support as well! Your welcome and kindness has offered me a safe place to learn about what Unity stands for. Your welcome invites me to trust that showing up as real, as human, as open as I can be-- that you will meet me in that center where we learn from each other how to continue to grow into *our* vision and mission.

Because the world truly needs us. So may we continue to share the practices that nourish us-- and you are invited again to do that today during our Fellowship on Zoom at 11:30.

May we continue to hold each other gently in love and compassion *AND* may we hold each other's toes to the fire of Spirit calling us to be *uncomfortable*. May we be Advent people, fearlessly walking together with God as we grow ever more deeply into the light of truth, the light of hope, the light of peace, and bringing that light to the world.

May it be so. And so it is. Amen.