

Speaking Peace  
Psalm 85:8  
December 10, 2023 – Center Harbor Congregational Church, UCC  
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There are a lot of moving parts in this service, so I'm not going to do a whole sermon this morning, but I couldn't let this second Sunday of Advent – Peace Sunday – go by without saying a few words about peace, especially now, when peace seems so elusive in our world. We can't turn on the television without seeing horrible images of war, or the faces of hostages, or the news of yet another mass shooting, or political arguments about whether those who have beaten their intimate partners should be able to own guns.

Jeremiah rails against those who shout "Peace! Peace!" when there is no peace, as though we could simply say those words and they would make the devastation of war and violence invisible. Turning the television off for a while is a good mental health choice for us, and we should all do that from time to time. But shutting out the constant images of violence just lets us pretend that the world out there is safe and just and peaceful. It doesn't actually bring peace.

Thinking of peace one-dimensionally doesn't help, either. A situation that lacks physical violence may still be spiritually violent. Peace without justice is no peace. It is subjugation. Just ask any Palestinian who lives in Gaza. And peace without safety is no peace either. It is terrorism. Just ask anyone who lives in Israel. True peace can only exist when everyone has a right to live in safety and when everyone is treated with justice.

All this leaves me in a difficult corner as a Christian, because I don't know how to actually bring peace in our world, though I hope and pray that our leaders do. I sure don't know how to bring about justice or safety in the most fraught corners of our world. I don't know how to stop gun violence. But I do know that as a Christian, I am absolutely called by God to do something – more than nothing – to bring about a true, deep, just, safe peace with whatever means I have, in every sphere in which I have any influence.

So, this is a good day to be thinking about our relationship with the wider church, and to remind us all that, together, we do support a Peace with Justice Mission Group, right here in New Hampshire. And we also support groups dedicated to economic justice, environmental justice, immigrant and refugee support, justice for our LGBTQ siblings, and racial justice. Our neighbors who know more about these issues than we do, who are passionately committed to them, are working year-round to bring peace in these areas. So, WE are already doing this work, simply through our financial support of the Conference through the Our Church's Wider Mission Basic Support offering. If you are interested in one of these mission groups, or if you just want to learn more about one of them, please let me know, and I will connect you with the right people.

We can do even more than this, of course, and we should. We can write letters to decision-makers. We can vote. We can support groups that work against gun violence. We can listen deeply to the pain of those on both sides of any conflict. We can make room for peacemakers in any situation, and recognize them as children of God.

And we can pray, earnestly pray, for peace.

And here I return to Psalm 85, which we read in our Call to Worship: "Let me hear what God will speak, for God will speak peace."

God will speak peace. I love that. Sun, moon, and stars are formed at God's word. Fish swim and grasses grow because God says so. God calls forth animals with God's word, and they appear. When God breathes, humankind is born. When God speaks, whole worlds are created. Let us pray for God to speak peace into every corner of our world. Let God's powerful word of peace echo throughout the earth. Let guns fall silent. Let all live in safety. Let justice reign everywhere.

Speak peace to us, O God. Speak peace.

Amen