

Plant Seeds For Our Future

Kansas City, MO World Peace Mediation Keynote Talk 12-31-11
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Thanks to everyone for being here and for your energy and commitment to world peace. Thanks also to Lama Chuck and all of the organizers of this event and for this opportunity to speak on the theme of peace. And I would also like to add my voice to those who admire Rev. Sam Mann, for his decades of ministry, service and advocacy for justice and peace, for making controversial and courageous stands because they were the right and just thing to do.

In my reflections and comments I try and benefit from and share the wisdom of sages and the wise. So first I will, of course, cite Alice's conversation Alice in Wonderland with the Cheshire cat from - at a crossroads she asks the cat: "*Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?*"

The Cat answers: "*That depends a good deal on where you want to get to.*"

Alice explains: "*I don't much care where.*"

The Cat responds: "*Then it doesn't much matter which way you go.*"

Another source puts our human dilemma this way--

Proverbs 28:18 states "*Where there is no vision, the people perish...*"

So when thinking about peace knowing what we want is crucial importance. I will return to the importance of the need of a clear vision shortly.

Although some might suggest that peace is merely the lack of violence and hostilities most would hold us to a much higher standard

1931 Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Jane Addams explained

"I believe that peace is not merely an absence of war but the nurture of human life, and that in time this nurture would do away with war as a natural process."

Pope Paul VI, stated

Peace is not merely the absence of war. Nor can it be reduced solely to the maintenance of a balance of power between enemies. Nor is it brought about by dictatorship. Instead, it is rightly and appropriately called "an enterprise of justice" (Is. 32:7). Peace results from that harmony built into human society by its divine founder, and actualized by men as they thirst after ever greater justice.

The Dalai Lama observed:

Peace, in the sense of the absence of war, is of little value to someone who is dying of hunger or cold. It will not remove the pain of torture inflicted on a prisoner of conscience. It does not comfort those who have lost their loved ones in floods caused by senseless deforestation in a neighboring country. Peace can only last where human rights are respected, where the people are fed, and where individuals and nations are free.

And from the Taoist tradition Lao Tzu wrote

If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.
If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.
If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbors.
If there is to be peace between neighbors,
There must be peace in the home.
If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.

This last source of wisdom speaks to the connection between peace within and peace without. Seeking inner peace as a source or foundation for increasing peace in the world is recognized by many faith leaders and by many activist groups.

The Peace Pilgrim commented "*When you find peace within yourself, you become the kind of person who can live at peace with others.*"

This is a very practical outer manifestation of an inner state of peace.

Others speak of the how the lack of a deep inner peace can undermine efforts for peace in the world – leading to ego, anger, and hate corrupting efforts for peace or just causing peacemakers to burnout. I can speak directly to the unhelpfulness of uncontrolled angry people, if left to their own making anti-war demonstrations at times anything but a peace demonstration.

While the world is beautiful complex web of life and mostly filled with love and cooperation. It also contains darkness, hate, greed, war and suffering.

While, I do not know each of you, based on the fact that you were here at 5:30AM, I can make some guesses about your orientation toward peace. It probably includes a faith and a spiritual dimension in your life and a belief in the power of prayer and meditation. You may see the unity of all life and the connections between the inner and outer world and seek to project the inner peace you have cultivated in yourself into the world. I appreciate the impact of consciously sending light and love into the world.

Some of you may also have an activist orientation and in addition to your inner work you roll up your sleeves and serve the hungry, work to end human suffering and the causes of violence and war.

Often for people who have focused on their inner life facing and confronting the darkness and suffering in the world is particularly painful.

A couple of statements by Martin Luther King, Jr., a hero of mine, come to mind in this regard. In his book **Strength to Love**, he spoke of the need for people to cultivate both “toughmindedness” and “tenderheartedness” within themselves. He wrote

“There is little hope for us until we become toughminded enough to break loose from the shackles of prejudice, half-truths, and downright ignorance. The shape of the world today does not permit us the luxury of softmindedness. A nation or civilization that continues to produce softminded men purchases its own spiritual death on the installment plan. But we must not stop with the cultivation of a tough mind. The gospel also demands a tender heart. ... What is more tragic than to see a person who has risen to the disciplined heights of toughmindedness but has at the same time sunk to the passionless depths of hardheartedness?”

We need this toughmindedness to see through the deceptions and misinformation and spin which disguises war as humanitarian efforts, cutting social safety net as tough love and collateral damage as inconsequential. We also need softheartedness to care about the wellbeing of those different from ourselves, to fire our compassion and not allow us to sit quietly by as others suffer or as killing and murder is done in the name of security and fear. Perhaps part of this combination of traits is the heart opened state, which enables us to see the other as a part of ourselves and our interconnectedness and unity.

An excerpt from “Parables: The Arrows of God” by Megan McKenna further speaks to the need for each of us to act with peace, courage and selflessness in our hearts

“There was a woman who wanted peace in the world and peace in her heart and all sorts of good things, but she was very frustrated. The world seemed to be falling apart. She would read the newspapers and get depressed.

One day she decided to go shopping, and she went into a mall and picked a store at random. She walked in and was surprised to see Jesus behind the counter. She knew it was Jesus because he looked just like the pictures she'd seen on holy cards and devotional pictures. She looked again and again at him, and finally she got up enough nerve and asked, 'Excuse me, are you Jesus?'

'I am.'

'Do you work here?'

'No,' Jesus said, 'I own the store.'

'Oh, what do you sell in here?'

'Oh, just about anything!' 'Anything?' 'Yeah, anything you want. What do you want?'

She said, 'I don't know.

' Well,' Jesus said, 'feel free, walk up and down the aisles, make a list, see what it is that you want, and then come back and we'll see what we can do for you.'

She did just that, walked up and down the aisles. There was peace on earth, no more war, no hunger or poverty, peace in families, no more drugs, harmony, clean air, careful use of resources. She wrote furiously. By the time she got back to the counter, she had a long list.

Jesus took the list, skimmed through it, looked up and smiled, 'No problem.' And then he bent down behind the counter and picked out all sorts of things, stood up, and laid out the packets.

She asked, 'What are these?'

Jesus replied, 'Seed packets. This is a catalog store.'

She said, 'You mean I don't get the finished product?'

'No, this is a place of dreams. You come and see what it looks like, and I give you the seeds. You plant the seeds. You go home and nurture them and help them to grow and someone else reaps the benefits.'

'Oh,' she said. And she left the store without buying anything."

MLK also wrote , *“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”* So as we are able I encourage each of us to rise to the occasion and to grow beyond ourselves and face the darkness and expand the ways we can help transform the darkness and suffering into light and love.

By with this inner strength and peace we need to develop our vision to surpass what the pundits tell us is possible.

Another of my favorite quotes is one from the aviator and author of the novella *The Little Prince*, Antoine de Saint Exupéry, who once wrote:

“If you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders.

Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.”

So I ask you *“What kind of future do you yearn for?”*

What are positive visions of hope that can inspire you and others?

Perhaps your vision is of a world in which we value our differences and recognize that each person is a part of one human family.

Perhaps it includes a realization of the UN Declaration of Human Rights:

Affirming that no one be subjected to torture; Everyone has a right to freedom of expression and the right to work under just conditions without discrimination; the right to a standard of living adequate for health and well-being for him or herself and family including food, clothing, housing and medical care...

Perhaps you are moved by John Lennon's imagining:

No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world
You may say that I'm a dreamer
But I'm not the only one
I hope someday you'll join us
And the world will live as one

Or perhaps you share Dr. King's dream—when he said:

...we will be able to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood.

With this faith, we will be able to work together, to pray together, to struggle together, to go to jail together, to stand up for freedom together, knowing that we will be free one day.

What is your dream? What is the dream that you would be willing to pray for and to devote your life and energy for?

It has been said that

Vision without action is simply a dream.
That Action without vision is just passing the time.
Action with Vision is making a positive difference.

Thank you for being here this morning and for all of the prayers, love, light and actions you take to realize a more just and peace-filled world.