

**“Visions of Peace”**  
Rev. Ann Eichhorn  
December 4, 2022  
Second Sunday in Advent



Readings

John 5:1-9  
from Eugene Peterson’s Bible

Soon another Feast came around and Jesus was back in Jerusalem. Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there was a pool, in Hebrew called Bethzatha with five alcoves. Hundreds of sick people – blind, crippled, paralyzed – were in these alcoves. One man had been an invalid there for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him stretched out by the pool and knew how long he had been there, he said, “Do you want to get well?” The sick man said, “Sir, when the water is stirred, I don’t have anybody to put me in the pool. By the time I get there, somebody else is already in”. Jesus said, “Get up, take your bedroll, start walking.” The man was healed on the spot. He picked up his bedroll and walked off.

Psalms 122: 6-9  
from Revised Standard Bible

May they prosper who love you! Peace be within your walls, and security within your towers! For my brethren and companions’ sake I will say, “Peace be within you!” For the sake of the house of our God I will seek your good.

---

*Note: Ann was ill this morning, and Rev. Bill Eichhorn delivered her message in her stead.*

To begin this morning, I want to say a couple of things about the first reading and why I chose it. No doubt you have seen that we have retrieved the stirring angel from the closet archives, and she is hanging in the Sanctuary. I want to identify that in the original scripture, there is no mention of an angel. The angel was added later as a Jewish superstition about the disturbance in the waters of the spring connected to the healing virtue that was supposed to cure the first person to bathe in the pool after the movement of the water in the pool. There is real evidence that the sheep pool known as Bethzatha existed with four porticoes around it, with a fifth in the middle. What’s also interesting about this text is the mention of where Jesus was found during Passover. He wasn’t at the temple, but at the healing spot where so many people waited with many afflictions and high hopes. The man Jesus encountered at the pool had been there for thirty-eight years, unsuccessfully trying to make his

way down into the pool to be healed. This means that after 1,400 attempts, he still hadn't made it into the pool (do the math!), and yet something in him still wanted to be healed. On the day when Jesus was present to him, acknowledged his being, and asked him if he wanted to be healed that Jesus then simply announced to him that he *was* healed, and the man picked up his bedroll and found the strength, courage, and will to do what he had previously failed to do; he walked away. In this season, our stirring angel might be asking us similar questions to what Jesus asked this man: From what are we seeking relief? Are we waiting on someone or something else to rescue us from our personal struggles? Where do we go to gain the strength we need to get through something that seems unsurmountable? Ah yes, she is stirring us towards something new.

With the second reading from Psalms, we ushered in today the tradition of lighting the Peace candle on the second Sunday of Advent. Today I want to build on Bill's message from last week that focused on the belief that God is within us, and can be *known* within us. These words from Psalm 122 put forth the notion that peace is a way of life, but we know that in order to bring about this way of life, we must know some of the ingredients of peace, and how to build a peaceful existence, both universally and personally. Bill and I had an experience during the last year we were the co-leads for the UCC denominational Board for Homeland Ministries, Mission division, which showed us some of those ingredients. We planned a Peace Academy experience with young people from the United States who were invited to present a program on peace-making, primarily addressing the problem of racism in the U.S. We gathered ten young people from various UCC-affiliated colleges, churches, and church-sponsored programs who represented a broad diversity to become our team. They were gay, straight, male, female, African American, Native American, Japanese American, Mexican, and Caucasian, and they ranged in age from high school to college seniors. We invited them to go with us to the sister church relationship event in Germany that occurred every two years in conjunction with their week-long Kirchentag (church day celebration). That event included literally hundreds of workshops, presentations, musical events, choirs, brass ensembles, and daily worship opportunities; the last one culminated in a giant stadium that held 100,000 people. We asked the students to be our guests for ten days, and we brought them to New York a day early to meet one another and go over the plans.

I will never forget that first meeting. Everyone felt some excitement, but they also felt nervous about what they had signed up for when they saw who comprised the team. Within a few hours and after a few activities about bias, trust, acceptance, etc., we were able to identify some of the pictures and feelings the team members held about each other. We discovered that they didn't fully trust nor accept each other because of some of their experiences and their family belief systems. They also were anxious about what they would be "presenting" about racism and peace-making. Basically, we asked them to share their experiences and perspectives, and to learn to work with and support one another, and we told them we'd help them grow what was needed, and off we went to the airport the next day.

I could go on for a long time recalling some of those life-changing encounters the team experienced, not only sharing their own experiences, but learning from the young people gathered at that German convention, among whom were Turks, Poles (at the time as divided as East and West Germans), Czechoslovakians, and folks from some of Germany's other sister churches in South Africa. In their intense conversations and discussions with one another, the team learned they shared similar experiences such as having come from broken families, experienced poverty, having been bullied,

hated, and feared, and having been seen as “different,” unfriendly, and suspect. Having been asked to participate in a variety of ways to build a new peace-filled future, their ideas exploded forth. One that stands out in my memory came from members of our team who had come from blended families of two or more races and cultures. Part of their promise and vision for the future was that they would honor all people equally, and not let themselves become divided within their own families in relation to their affections or their behavior or interactions. They learned a lot about acceptance, getting rid of biases, approaching each other with openness and love, forgiving the ignorant, finding ways to care for one another, and seeking new ways to overcome their differences.

This morning, as we explore new possibilities and understandings about *peace*, I want to share with you two amazing poems from two people well-known to you here at CCC, Kim Weichel and Scott DeTurk. Kim, a long-time peace champion on both coasts will share with you her “Pathways to Peace,” and Scott and Gabby will perform for you Scott’s song entitled “What Does It Mean to Be at Peace?” Here are the words to both Kim’s piece and Scott’s song:

### **Pathways to Peace**

Kimberly Weichel

What does peace really mean?

It means much more than the absence of war

Peace is about how we treat each other

And how we live with our neighbors

Peace starts with each of us

How we practice love and respect in our families

What we teach our children

And how we listen and speak with love

Peace is how we respect differences

Whether it be religion, culture, ethnicity or perspective

Peace is knowing we are interdependent

Acknowledging that we each bring different gifts

To live a peaceful life means many things

It means forgiving people who you feel have hurt you

It means learning from each situation

And having a positive attitude about life

It means respecting the environment

Developing healthy relationships

Living our values in our workplace

And being peace in all parts of life

It means having a healthy media

That feeds us nourishing stories and balanced news

It means having soulful work environments

In which we can feel respected, creative and fulfilled

Peace means speaking up when we see injustice  
And taking a stand when we feel something is wrong  
It means speaking our truth with others  
And being the change we wish to see

Peace is a state of mind, a way of being  
It is also a path of daily action  
Peace is deep connection with myself and others  
Peace is personal, political, spiritual and practical

Peace starts with each one of us living it each day  
With love and acceptance in our heart  
And understanding as the common bond  
That binds us on our various pathways to peace

\* \* \* \* \*

What Does It Mean to Be at peace?  
Scott Deturk, 2022

What does it mean to be at peace?  
A simple life without a care.  
To breathe each breath and have no fear,  
To hold your loved ones safe and near  
A warm and hearty meal to share.

What does it mean to be at peace?  
To know your child can grow and learn.  
Be free to come, be free to go  
And in your heart you'll always know  
Your home is there when you return.

Is peace just a fleeting state of mind?  
A quest that we seek but never find.  
Something to believe, or something to achieve  
In the moment, day by day.  
Is peace the goal or is peace the way?

What does it mean to be at peace?  
To sing a baby's lullaby.  
To sleep and dream all through the night  
Waking with hope to the morning light  
And never have to wonder why.

To have your own comfortable bed  
No dread or worries hanging over your head.  
To dare to know that the flowers will still grow  
Through the scars in the earth.  
There will always be rebirth.

What does it mean to be at peace?  
To treat each stranger as a friend.  
Dance as the joyous music strums,  
Calm from the silence of the drums  
Knowing all things come to an end.

Is peace just a fleeting state of mind?  
A quest that we seek but never find.  
Something to believe, or something to achieve  
In the moment, day by day.  
Is peace the goal or is peace the way?  
Is peace the goal or is peace the way?

I invite you to finish this message today by considering Scott's question about what it means to be at peace and/or by meditating on the pathways to peace Kim shares in her poem.

