

Rekindle the Gift

Rev. Alan Claassen

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Today is a confluence of several significant holy days from several different wisdom traditions. In the United Church of Christ it is Neighbors in Need Sunday where we remember and support justice and peace efforts around the world, including our Council for American Indian Ministry. The CAIM has been in the Dakotas for generations supporting the indigenous wisdom of those people of the land. And so we stand with the people of the Standing Rock protest.

Among Christians this is World Communion Sunday where we celebrate what unites us: one bread, one body, one cup for all. In the Jewish faith this is Rosh Hashana, the first day of their New Year and the beginning of the Days of Wonder. It is a time for making amends, acts of charity, and prayer. And as we learned in the 10 am worship service, on this day in India they are celebrating Mahatma Gandhi and his Spinning Wheel Revolution.

In preparing for this morning's sermon I was holding the significance of these calls for unity, peace, and social justice in my mind as I selected the readings, the prayers, and the songs for the worship service. What you find below is a collection of those selections, which I somehow quilted together, thanks to the guidance of the Indwelling Spirit.

We began the worship service with John Lennon's song, "Give Peace a Chance." We also sang the beautiful hymn from Ghana, "Jesu, Jesu" that includes the words, "Loving puts us on our knees, showing our faith by our deeds, serving the neighbors we have from you." The Choir sang a spirited version of "By the Rivers of Babylon" that included the words, "How can we sing our song in a strange land." How can we sing our song of love and peace and justice for all when it seems like our own land has become a strange place to us, with so much violence, bigotry, and poverty?

At this point I shared a piece by a dear friend of mine, Rev. Stephen Garnaas Holmes.

Grace and Peace to you.

*How could we sing the Lord's song
in a foreign land?*

—Psalm 137.4

The world around us can seem foreign:
strange ideals, the consumption of lives,
the poetry of evil, ill-costumed words,
violence slithering through smooth phrases,
death clad as commerce, fear as pride,
the noise of the glib machinery of injustice,
the wailing of anger, cynicism and dread.

How can we sing the song of peace,
the gentle air of love amid such clamor?

Be still and listen to the silence within,
the mothering heartbeat,
the sea of mercy breathing about us,
heaven humming a little lullaby,
a song for a child afraid to rest,
sung to us, soft, since our beginning,
song of the earth despite our cruelties,
song of slaves in chains and mothers in labor,
song of your own pulse and breath.
Listen. The Steadfast One is singing to you.

Go back to the stillness you came from
and listen.
Let the song written by the Composer of the Universe sing in you.
Let it become your only voice.

Then I took us back through words that we already shared together in the worship in Food for Thought,
Opening to the Spirit and the Call to Celebration.

A Proclamation for Peace

by Kim Stafford

Whereas the world is a house on fire;
Whereas the nations are filled with shouting;
Whereas hope seems small, sometimes
 a single bird on a wire
 left by migration behind.
Whereas kindness is seldom in the news
 and peace an abstraction
 while war is real;
Whereas words are all I have;
Whereas my life is short;
Whereas I am afraid;
Whereas I am free – despite all
 fire and anger and fear;
Be it therefore resolved a song
 shall be my calling – a song
 not yet made shall be my vocation
 and peaceful words the work
 of my remaining days.

Opening to the Spirit

by Thich Nhat Hahn

Peace is all around us; in the world and in nature, and within us, in our bodies and our spirits. Once we learn to touch this peace, we will be healed and transformed. It is not a matter of faith; it is a matter of practice. May all beings be at peace. May all beings be free of suffering.

Call to Celebration from a Jewish Prayer book

Leader: Where there is prejudice and hatred,

People: Let there be acceptance and love.

Leader: Where there is fear and suspicion,

People: Let there be confidence and trust.

Leader: Where there is poverty and disease,

People: Let there be prosperity and health,

Leader: O Creator of the Universe may we have the vision to see

People: That each of us, in some measure, can help to realize these aims.

– *Gates of Prayer: The New Union Prayer Book*

After these readings that affirmed our common song that spans all spiritual traditions I reviewed passages from the 2nd Timothy reading that spoke to me. They are in bold in the following.

2 Timothy 1: 1-7

Paul, an apostle of **Christ Jesus** by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from **God the Creator** and Christ Jesus our Lord.

I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.

I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your **grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.**

For this reason I remind you to **rekindle the gift of God that is within you** through the laying on of my hands;

for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of **power and of love and of self-discipline.**

What struck me in this passage from 2nd Timothy is that we become who we are through a variety of “lineages.” We are who we are through the spiritual teachers we follow. We are also who we are through the love that we have received from our grandparents and parent, and from teachers, friends, favorite musicians. They all give us a gift. They remind us of the gift that we been given that is uniquely our own. To be able to sing our song in a strange land in a strange time we need to be vigilant in rekindling the gift so that we do not lose hope. We need to practice touching peace, responding to our neighbors in need.

Then I took a pause and shifted the focus to World Communion by saying, “I love committees, and I will tell you why.” I then shared to story of how World Communion Sunday began in a committee.

The History of World Communion Sunday

A Presbyterian Gift

World Communion Sunday is a gift of the Presbyterian Church to the larger ecumenical church. The first celebration occurred at Shadyside Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, PA, in 1933. World Communion Sunday grew out of the Division of Stewardship at Shadyside. It was their attempt to bring churches together in a service of Christian unity in which everyone might receive both inspiration and information, and above all, to know how important the Church of Jesus Christ is, and how each congregation is interconnected one with another. From that first service to the worldwide practice of today, the concept spread very slowly at the start.

It was during the Second World War that the spirit caught hold, because we were trying to hold the world together. World Wide Communion symbolized the effort to hold things together, in a spiritual sense. It emphasized that we are one in the Spirit and the Gospel of Jesus Christ."

In 1940 the Department of Evangelism of the Federal Council of Churches (a predecessor body of the National Council of Churches) promoted extending the celebration to a number of churches around the world [on the hope] that the practice become widespread. Today World Communion Sunday is celebrated around the world, demonstrating that the church founded on Jesus Christ *peacefully shares* God-given goods in a world increasingly destabilized by globalization and global market economies based on greed.

I then carried this further by sharing the following. This is our call as followers of the Way of Compassion, taught by Jesus, Buddha, Moses, Mohammed, Rumi and our grandmothers.

Our Calling

by John Knight

... At the heart of our calling are three universal and abundant powers:

The power of giving. The gifts of the people in our neighborhood are boundless. A growing church calls forth those gifts.

Second, **the power of connection.** In association we join our gifts together and they become amplified, magnified, productive, and celebrated.

Third, **the power of hospitality**. We welcome strangers because we value their gifts and need to share our own. Our doors are open to all in the spirit of unconditional love. There are no strangers here. Just friends we haven't met. We have a calling. We are the people who know that we are all neighbors in need. And when we act together, we are neighbors in blessing.

I then brought this to a close with another piece by Rev. Stephen Garnaas-Holmes, which lifted up once again the call to rekindle the gift within us, which is ultimately and intimately a gift from the Indwelling Spirit.

Rekindle the Gift

by Rev. Stephen Garnaas-Holmes, from 2 Timothy 1.6

Dearly Beloved,

Grace and Peace to you.

“Rekindle the gift of God that is within you.”

You have a treasure in you, a seed of glory planted from stars,
a song written for only you to sing.

You have gifts to give.

The treasure is buried, and it may take some digging to recover.

The song is forgotten, but still hidden in your bones.

Nothing that happens to you can remove it,
no fear or shame destroy it, no failure ruin it.

It is who you are.

Rekindle the gift.

Listen for the quiet voice, the Spirit of Life, singing in you.

Listen... and sing. Tune your life to its melody.

Let it sing in you, let it sing you into life.

Rekindle the gift that is God within you.

Give God this joy – for it is God who is singing.

Then we moved into a time of sharing prayers, Holy Communion, and joyful singing of “All You Need is Love” led by Scott DeTurk and Carl Oser.

Amen!

