

Promised Peace  
Mother's Day, Sunday, May 9, In the Year of Our LORD, 2010  
First Congregational United Church of Christ  
Gloversville, New York  
The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

John 14:26-27

... the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

When I think of Julia Ward Howe, I am reminded of the words she wrote to the "Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory," the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." As much as I enjoyed singing them in church, as an organist I particularly liked the melody and the rousing refrain. It was a perfect piece for the way I liked to play the pipe organ. As Herr Salzberger, my instructor in Frankfurt am Main in Germany chided, "Ralph only knows three speeds: fast, faster, fastest and three volumes: loud, louder, loudest." In all fairness, I enjoyed playing the last stanza of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" in a solemn, almost stately, but certainly slow and diminished in volume way ... "In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea," ... What I *really* enjoyed was how that last stanza lead into the last refrain or perhaps even two renderings of "Glory! Glory! Hallelujah!" – and on the massive pipe organ at the Frauenfriedenskirche in Frankfurt, I could bring my knee up and push preset stops, adding rank after rank of organ pipes until I was finally racing around the keyboard with *each* finger triggering as many as fifty to sixty notes from different octaves and voices.

The one time I pulled it off and played the refrain at full volume with full arpeggios, it was tremendous! Well, it was tremendous until the Rector came running down the center aisle of that Catholic Church to shout at me to stop because that melody – so sacred to me – turns out was borrowed and in Germany – or at least in the Province of Hessen – was a German drinking song!

Oops!

Yesterday morning, when I woke to the sound of heavy rain on our home's metal roof, I was prepared to work more on this sermon based on those precious words from Jesus that we heard read this morning:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

As is true for most of us, the word "peace" suggests first and foremost an end to war, to the kind of hostility between or within nations that is so bloody and heart wrenching. But I also wanted to speak to what "peace" means in the context of broken hearts and souls - of those

who know flooding in Tennessee, spilt oil on the shores of the Gulf Coast, financial upheaval – not just on Wall Street but in nations like Greece whose financial future is so much in question.

On the personal level, that which speaks to the individual, “peace” can mean freedom from the emotional distress of conflict in a relationship or perhaps release from some seemingly bad habit or in some instances an addiction. Yes, some people think “peace” will come by winning the next \$266 million lottery – or even just a mere million – in that case thinking as so much of the world suggests, that money will buy not only happiness but peace of mind, peace of ....

And that is where the verses from the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John come into play. Jesus of Nazareth, Jesus the Christ, Jesus the One Who on behalf of the Creator Whose work would be continued by the Holy Spirit – wants us to hear what was said to the disciples:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

As much as “peace” suggests cessation, an ending of something, peacemaking is not static, not passive. Peace, peacemaking, needs action, indeed pro-activeness, purpose, intentionality, ... Peace, real peace, comes about with struggle, sometimes with confrontation with the “powers and principalities” that so often prevail in society if not in our own psyches.

At some point yesterday morning, as I tried to decide whether to roll over and go back to sleep or surrender to the sound of the rain on the metal roof of our house, the brain synapses made some interesting connection – and one of them had not occurred to me until yesterday. Last Sunday when my brain made those odd connections, it was with the word “Dawn,” the name of Sally’s friend visiting from Rochester and how it reminded me of the dishwashing detergent “Dawn” which is the best way to clean oil from wildlife. I included a quip about selling stock in BP and buying Proctor and Gamble, the company that makes “Dawn.” If you needed evidence of how *not* to follow my advice in the context of the stock market, the proof came this week when it was Proctor and Gamble whose stock plummeted to half its value during that 1000 point drop in the Dow Jones on Thursday.

Yesterday morning, the words spinning around in my convoluted brain were

Peace

Mother’s Day

Julia Ward Howe

Battle Hymn of the Republic

The Pipe Organ at Frauenfriedenskirche, Frankfurt

I rolled out of bed. Remembering how on Friday my mother called me from Virginia to have me do a google search on the internet, I thought maybe something would hit me if I googled the name of that church - Frauenfriedenskirche. I did – and two facts jumped out: first, that the marvelous pipe organ I played in the early 1970s was replaced in 1996 – the second, was Wikipedia’s translation of Frauenfriedenskirche – “Our Lady’s Peace Church.”

Ah! Clarity!

Julia Ward Howe is famous for something more than the "Battle Hymn of the Republic." Nearly forty years after playing "her" hymn in "Our Lady's Peace Church," I remembered that it was Ms. Howe, determined to thwart the ways and carnage of war, who issued her famous proclamation in 1870. Her "Mother's Day Proclamation" was all about peacemaking and I had failed to realize what it meant to sit at the organ of a church named for a Lady of Peace and think of the words written by a woman determined to make Mother's Day all about peace.

Julia Ward Howe and Anna Jarvis, determined to make Mother's Day all about peacemaking, were disappointed as the original intent of Woodrow Wilson and Congress to specifically honor mothers who lost sons in wars became lost as Mother's Day morphed into something different. As wonderful as it is to honor all mothers this day – those who bore us, those who nurture us, those who continue to mother us, the "peacemaking part" of Julia Ward Howe and Anna Jarvis is in large measure forgotten and overlooked.

Ms. Howe's Proclamation: hear in its words its lament *and* call to action!

Arise then...women of this day!

Arise, all women who have hearts!

Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!

Say firmly:

"We will not have questions answered by irrelevant agencies,

Our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage,

For caresses and applause.

Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn

All that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience.

We, the women of one country,

Will be too tender of those of another country

To allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."

From the bosom of a devastated Earth a voice goes up with

Our own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm!

The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."

Blood does not wipe out dishonor,

Nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil

At the summons of war,

Let women now leave all that may be left of home

For a great and earnest day of counsel.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.

Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means

Whereby the great human family can live in peace...

Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,

But of God -

In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask

That a general congress of women without limit of nationality,  
May be appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient  
And the earliest period consistent with its objects,  
To promote the alliance of the different nationalities,  
The amicable settlement of international questions,  
The great and general interests of peace.

The promise of peace, like all of the promises God makes to us, comes with a “catch” – namely that we have a role to play – we have to work for it – and that means all of us. The process of peacemaking might, at times, involve confrontation, challenge and protest of the status quos with which societies seem willing to abide but need to be opposed. Exploitation in whatever manner it exists stands in opposition to the visions of our God – and ought to be part of our agenda to change as well.

- For society to tolerate times, like now, when the rich get richer and the poor get much poorer, stands in the way of peace.
- For the peoples of the world to permit unbalanced use of the world’s resources, for the haves to cling to what they have in order to deny the have-nots of life’s basic sustenance, stands in the way of peace.
- For those who think that armed conflict is the way to solve disagreements – be it among nations or as militia groups in this county, ... all of that stands in the way of peace.
- And – belief that if one ignores a problem, be it an addiction or a difficulty in a relationship, ... that it will simply go away, is to close ones eyes to the reality that it might take some hard, patient work to find resolution to that which can cause such wrenching pain and hurt – to self and others.

The main premise is that the promise of peace will come with some effort, with a challenge to the ways of the world, and with faith that with some intentional if not hard work, at least a modicum of peace might come.

There is a rather doleful hymn in the Pilgrim Hymnal that is all the more suggestive this day – about peace, working for peace, the heartbreaking nature that the pursuit of peace sometimes invokes and the peace that is ours of God – “They Cast Their Nets in Galilee” by William Percy:

They cast their nets in Galilee – just off the hills of brown;  
Such happy, simple fisherfolk, before the LORD came down.

Contented, peaceful fisherfolk, before they ever knew  
The peace of God that filled their hearts brimful, and broke them too.

The peace of God, it is no peace, but strife closed in the sod.  
Yet let us pray for but one thing: The marvelous peace of God.

The disciples “got it” in the end – proved more than able to continue the peacemaking ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. That their efforts took hard work, personal sacrifice – that in some instances they faced the same persecution as had their LORD did not deter them in their work.

We can not be deterred either – and on this Mother’s Day, indeed all days, we need to recommit ourselves to efforts of peacemaking.

Julia Ward Howe. Mother’s Day Proclamation. Peacemaking. Prayers for peace, working for peace, challenges to peace, ....

Look – there are times I would just as soon go back to bed and listen to the rain on a metal roof – and hope and pray that peace will come – in all of its manifestations – without any work on my part ... but that is not the case – and isn’t any more true for the rest of us. As to the solutions, the specifics of the work - .... that is something for all of us to undertake.

Amen?

Amen.