

# People Create Peace

## Peace Sunday 2007



At 8:15 am Tokyo time on August 6, 1945 a US B-29 bomber dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima. Three days later on August 9 at 11:02 am a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki. The burning light of this human invention unleashed new possibilities of violence, killing over 200,000 people and causing irreparable damage. There are many images available through the web and for graphic short video clips search 'Hiroshima' on <http://video.google.com/>

Throughout the world people of peace gather at this time to pray for an end to the destructive power of nuclear weapons and to war. Over many decades peace activists in Aotearoa New Zealand worked hard to make the country nuclear free using strategies as diverse as the Peace Squadron of small boats challenging US warships and communities, churches, schools and businesses declaring themselves nuclear weapon free zones. This year is the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of the New Zealand Nuclear Free Zone, Disarmament and Arms Control Act, on 8 June 1987 in recognition of this country's opposition to nuclear weapons.

*Let us join in prayer in remembrance for Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to recall the past, to commit ourselves to work for peace and to seek hope for the future.*

### Reflections

#### Micah 4:1-4

To understand Micah it is important to recognise that he followed in the footsteps of the prophet Amos. Together they were the first prophets to espouse in an active way the cause of the oppressed and the welfare of poor people. Second, Micah came from the village of Mareshah in the southwest of Palestine. Mareshah stood on the borderline between the coastal plains and the central highlands, between Philistine country and Judah. Consequently it was a region regularly subjected to military conflict. The fear of invasion and war constantly threatened Micah's village. While the vision of Micah 4:1-4 is attributed by biblical scholars to his followers, the heart of the vision is consistent with Micah's hope for Judah and the whole region. Micah looks forward to the day when the weapons of war will be transformed into implements of agriculture. War will become obsolete and human beings will live in peace sharing the resources of the earth with one another. It is a magnificent call to disarmament and peace, and remains an enduring hope for humankind.

#### Psalm 85

There are three clearly identifiable sections to this psalm which according to some biblical scholars, transform it from being a traditional lament to an extraordinary prophetic vision. Verses 1-3 remember a golden age of the past when God 'restored the fortunes of Jacob' and forgave the iniquity of the people. The second section, verses 4-7, describe the dismal situation of the present where the people yearn for an end to God's anger and the restoration of God's steadfast love. The third section, verses 8-13, looks forward to a golden age to come when God will deliver the people, 'steadfast love and faithfulness will meet' and righteousness and peace will kiss each other'. The psalmist brings together in verses 12 and 13 the restoration of the land with the advent of righteousness or moral integrity. It is a poet's dream of a society where human beings treat both each other and the earth with respect, responsibility and faithfulness. The psalmist suggests that faithfulness, righteousness and peace are like life-giving water to both the people and the land.

## Matthew 5:1-12

This remarkable passage has sometimes been called the charter of Christian living. In twelve succinct verses or nine beatitudes Jesus sets forth the promises of God's purpose for humankind. It is revolutionary teaching, a challenge to the world's accepted standards. Thus it is important to understand each beatitude or blessing in contrast to its opposite. For example, the opposite of the poor in spirit are the proud in spirit, the opposite of the meek are the aggressors, the opposite of the peacemakers are the war-makers. In effect Jesus is saying rulers lord it over others, "but it shall not be so among you". (cf Mark 10:42-43 and Luke 22:25-26). We may say that this is the heart and essence of Jesus' message.

Our focus for Peace Sunday is on verse 9, 'Blessed are the peacemakers'. This is the seventh of the nine beatitudes and it is interesting that Jesus lists it as the seventh. Whether this was intentional or not, we will never know. In Jewish numerology the number seven is significant. The word peace is derived from the Hebrew word *shalom* which always means everything which leads to the highest good of human beings. In the Middle East the common greeting among Jews and Arabs alike is the word *Salaam* which means 'may the person greeted experience God's goodness in everything he/she does'. It is also important to notice that Jesus blessed the peacemakers, that is, blessed are those who through their actions and living seek to bring peace and God's goodness to others. This beatitude demands the making of peace, even when the struggle for peace may be costly.

One other meaning may lie behind this beatitude. The rabbis taught that the highest task of a human being was to build healthy and right relationships between human beings. This they taught was the essence of being human and is what Jesus implied. There are some who are always causing trouble, but there are others who are constantly bridging the gulfs separating people, healing division and working tirelessly for peace and an end to violence. These people are the salt of the earth, the light of the world and the hope of humankind. There is no higher calling in life.

## II Corinthians 5:16-20

In these few verses Paul sets forth the heart of the Gospel. Those who are 'in Christ' no longer look at the world the way they did before their encounter with Christ. They are new, that is, they now see things differently. They no longer see others 'from a human point of view' (v. 16), now they see others through the eyes of Christ. All things now take on a new perspective. A new age is breaking in upon them and suddenly they can embrace the world through Jesus Christ. With this new vision of the world, they are given the task of making peace and bringing healing, or using Paul's language, 'the ministry of reconciliation' (v. 18). They are to be witnesses to God's love and evangelists for peace. In v. 19 Paul suggests that the root of evil and discord is the estrangement of humanity from the love of God. But in Christ God has stepped in to heal this estrangement, first by offering forgiveness to all, and second, by enlisting those who have been forgiven into the ministry of reconciliation. The new person in Christ lives by a different set of standards: love replaces hate, generosity replaces selfishness, compassion replaces indifference and peace replaces war. As one biblical commentator observes, 'Nothing can bridge those seas of misunderstanding across which we shout at one another. The antagonisms that divide the world are due to our own inner conflicts. Peace is one of the by-products that come from the ministry of reconciliation.'



Sinhala Children light candles for peace in Sri Lanka.  
(MONLAR)

### Opening Prayer

Loving God, you called all life into being, the earth, the sky and the sea;  
Your gracious presence is all around us, within us, above and below us  
Your Spirit calls out to each one of us to work for justice and to offer kindness,  
To heal the wounds of the earth,  
To feed the hungry,  
To set the captives free,  
That peace may come on earth. Amen.

## Prayer of Intercession

Gracious God, we gather in this shelter-house of prayer to give thanks for your love and grace and to pray for peace and reconciliation in our deeply divided world. We remember those who died at Hiroshima and Nagasaki – and those who continue to be sacrificed in the name of war.

L: Open our eyes to see

P: That we may create peace in our world.

We thank you for the strong walls of churches which have given refuge and sanctuary to the broken and poor of this world, and provided space for countless prayers for peace and healing.

L: Open our eyes to see

P: That we may create peace in our world.

Loving God, your son Jesus sat at table with the betrayed and rejected of his day, we pray for those who do not feel welcome, who are alienated and live lives of loneliness and isolation.

L: Open our eyes to see

P: That we may create peace in our world.

Compassionate God, your son Jesus stood alongside lepers and those who had no place to lay their heads. We pray for the thousands of people without homes, for those who live with HIV and AIDS, for those whose livelihood has been destroyed by war and conflict.

L: Open our eyes to see

P: That we may create peace in our world.

Generous God, your son Jesus belonged to a refugee family. We pray for the millions of people who are displaced and dislocated, who face hunger and disease on a daily basis. May our country open its borders to welcome those who come as strangers and refugees in our midst, making room for those whose life experience and traditions are different from our own.

L: Open our eyes to see

P: That we may create peace in our world.

Life-giving God, we pray finally for ourselves. May we learn and practice the ways of peace here in our community, reaching out to those who need your healing love, building bridges of understanding between those separated by fear and ignorance and working for reconciliation and peace. We remember the sick, the weak, the vulnerable among us. Enable us to find new ways of supporting each other.

May we learn humility, gentleness and patience and, when required, grant us the courage to speak the truth in love to the powers and principalities of this world.

L: Open our eyes to see

P: That we may create peace in our world.

Amen.



Act: P. Jeffrey

Children have a right to a life in South India.

## Time for Children

Bring a lantern and light it. Ask them what it is and what it might be used for. For older children you could contrast the bright light of the bomb that brings death with the light of the Christ candle symbolising peace. Christchurch people have gathered on Hiroshima Day to light peace lanterns and float them on the Avon River for over thirty years. It is a tradition originating in Japan where people have floated lanterns to remember the victims of the bomb since 1948. ( see [http://www.ibic-hiroshima.com/pm2001/english/e\\_history.html](http://www.ibic-hiroshima.com/pm2001/english/e_history.html)) You may like to try making your own lanterns to float in a nearby waterway. For instructions see <http://www.progressiveportal.org/lanterns/basemaking.html> and <http://www.progressiveportal.org/lanterns/shademaking.html>.

Alternatively you may have some one present who is willing to bring a peace placard, a nuclear weapon free zone certificate or peace badge and share a story with the congregation of how Aotearoa New Zealand became nuclear weapons free. People might be invited to bring one of these symbols to share in the service.

## Blessing

May God's peace be yours,  
And well, and seven times well  
May you spend your lives.

May you be an isle in the sea,  
May you be a hill on the shore,  
May you be a star in the darkness,  
May you be a staff to the weak,  
May the peace Christ Jesus gave fill every heart  
for you  
May the peace Christ Jesus gave fill you for  
everyone.  
Amen  
(adapted from Iona)

## Suggested Hymns

A Mighty Stronghold Is Our God (WOV 8)  
Christ is Our Peace (AA16)  
How happy you who work for peace (AA 63)  
Kneels at the feet of his friends (WOV 561)  
Lord, Make me an Instrument of Your Peace  
(WOV 666)  
Teach us, O loving heart of Christ (AA 130)  
Shalom, Chaverim!

## Take Action

There are many places of conflict in the world and in our own communities. New Zealand churches have committed themselves to taking part in the Decade to Overcome Violence from 2001-2010. For more information see the DOV website: [www.overcomingviolence.org](http://www.overcomingviolence.org)

CWS partners including through ACT (Action by Churches together) International are responding to those in need and working for a more peaceful and just world. You might like to take up a peace offering and send it for those struggling to survive in zones of conflict – some examples are Palestine, Darfur and Zimbabwe. (For more information see [www.cws.org.nz](http://www.cws.org.nz) or contact [cws@cws.org.nz](mailto:cws@cws.org.nz). Display materials are also available.

You may also like to join in the International Day of Prayer for Peace on 21 September, 2007, an initiative of the World Council of Churches. See <http://overcomingviolence.org/index.php?id=1487>



“Peace lanterns” (Courtesy of the Peace Lanterns Operating Committee)

On the evening before the August 9 atomic bomb anniversary, the peace lanterns - with candles made by children - are placed around the Peace Fountain at Nagasaki.