

*Based on *2 Timothy 2:20-26. Words of Wisdom from Paul to Timothy.*

**incarnational translation below*

It was the Great Depression, the expansion of Jim Crow, the rise of Nazi Germany, and the devastation of World War II that formed the context for World Communion Sunday, in its inception nearly 90 years ago. In the midst of so much hatred and destruction, our forebears thought, how about reminding at least the Christians of the world that our host at the table is known as The Prince of Peace?

It was World War II for that generation. Korea for the next. And Vietnam for the Baby Boom, which includes many of you in our communion today.

For me and my generation – which at age of 47 puts me smack dab in the middle of Gen-X – it is September 11th that challenges our commitment to the table of peace.

I was 27 years old at the time, living a fabulous life. Jet-setting around the country and even the world for the national church. Ordained as a Ruling Elder in my local congregation, in the hopes that would satisfy the call to ministry that had been welling up within me. Frantic on that Tuesday, as really all of us were. Standing in my living room all afternoon watching the Towers fall. Literally saying out loud to the four walls, “I am either going to Afghanistan or I am going to seminary.”

Many years later a colleague of mine suggested I was trying to figure out how to respond to evil. And that is true. We all are, I think, trying to figure out how to respond to evil. Whether it is the evil of terrorism, or the evil of racism, or the evil of torture our own government perpetuated in our name, or the evil of an armed insurrection. We are all trying to figure out how to respond to evil.

As you can see, I did not go to Afghanistan, although I honor those who did. My heart breaks for the women and girls left behind as we have withdrawn twenty years later. My traumatized lizard brain kicks into overdrive whenever the thought “it could happen again” rears its ugly head.

I did not immediately go to seminary, either, although I did begin the ordination process, like Debbie Romano has just done, and I did begin taking one course per semester at Louisville Seminary while keeping my job with the national church.

Instead, I sought out the Peacemaking ministries of our denomination. The ones receiving our Special Offering today at the national level. The ones actively engaged in conflict mediation and violence reduction and interfaith dialogue and just about anything that tries to keep the inevitable conflicts we have as a human population from turning to war.

When Muslim leaders visited the national church offices, I wrestled an invitation to participate in interfaith understanding and advocacy for the Muslim community. As the drumbeat of war in Iraq sounded stronger, I joined in mass protests in Louisville and in Washington, D.C. with pastors across the country. And when the opportunity to join the national Peacemaking staff at a conference in Jerusalem hosted by the Sabeel Center for

Liberation Theology, which is a partner ministry of the national church, came along, I leapt at the chance. Surely this would be the best way to respond to the evil that had shocked us all to the core on September 11th.

And then I came home. Not just home to Louisville, where I lived, but home to my parents and my three brothers. For Christmas. And. It. Was. HARD. It was so hard I did not go by myself, and I did not go for long. I took a friend, and we stayed three days, including the day we arrived and the day we departed.

Both my father and one of my brothers earned their living through the military industrial complex. None of them understood why I was doing what I was doing. When my father found out I had met Yasser Arafat, he truly flipped a lid. Let's just say we were not singing a whole lot of Joy to the World at that particular holiday meal. It was tense. We ate. And we left.

On the way back to Louisville my friend and I debriefed. I cried a lot. I was so angry and so hurt and so ashamed of my family that I honestly started talking about walking away from them altogether. A true split. My conscience could not bear being in relationship with them any longer.

And my friend, God bless her, who is a much more hard core activist for peace than I could ever hope to be, she said, "What good is it to work for peace among Palestinians and Israelis if you can't find peace in your own family?"

And she was right. I was a hypocrite, full of "youthful passions," with convictions I still hold to this day, but absolutely tarnished by foolish and ignorant disputes that only breed infighting. All that time, through all those protests, through all of those conferences, I had been joining the song, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me." And I was not willing to practice it.

I resolved, then and there, with God's help, to change.

It has not been easy. It is still not easy. But I made the effort. I went back to the table. And every time I went back I resolved to ask about them. To listen to them. To try to understand why they thought the way they think. Not to agree with them, mind you. Not to cave in on my convictions. But to try to understand where they were coming from. And to try to share, honestly and without vitriol where I was coming from.

Year after year I went back to the table. Sometimes there would be a blow up and sometimes there would not. But never again did I even once consider "leaving" the family. Because my friend is right: I have no business calling for peace in any other community, including here at SPC and beyond, if I am not willing to work for peace in my family of origin.

I never told anyone in my family what I was doing, but eventually they did notice something had changed. In one heartfelt conversation with my father not that long ago, I acknowledged how challenging it must be for him and my mother to parent such radically different children. Especially me, the one who is not like the others.

And he said yes, it is definitely challenging. But he just kept telling himself, "Well, she comes back. She plays with the grandkids. She calls her mother every so often. So I guess she's okay. I guess we are okay."

“God has a way of changing hearts and minds,” says the Second Letter to Timothy, when we “cleanse ourselves from the tarnish of worthless babble,” when we truly try to “act kindly to everyone, humbly modeling mutual forbearance, willing to explain ourselves thoroughly to those who oppose us.” Not necessarily changing hearts and minds to agree on every issue. But to figure out how to sit at the table and use our forks for the nourishment of our bodies instead of as weapons to stab into the heart of our fellow table-dwellers.

I say all of this about my own story, knowing full well that my situation is not universal, that other situations include physical and emotional, spiritual and even sexual abuse, and that removing oneself from the table can in fact the most faithful action there is. If that is the case for you, I see you, I honor you, I cry with you.

Even so, there is this table, on this World Communion Sunday The table of Jesus, The Prince of Peace. Who found a way to feed Peter, who denied him, and Judas, who betrayed him, and all the rest, who abandoned him in his hour of need, and even the women, who stayed with him until the end but had no power to stop his agony.

Even so, there is this table of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. And there is this special silver of hope, passed down from our ancestors, beyond anything we can imagine with our rational minds. That is more than a mere fork and knife. That is more than a mere cup and plate. That is the only real way, in the end, that any of us can respond to the problem of evil. Which is The Way of Jesus. Which is a way of righteousness, and faith, and love and peace. A way that truly does bring us all to our senses as we discover deeper truth together. A way that rescues us from the spirit of destructiveness that can too easily ensnare us all.

So come to the table, my friends, whoever you are, whatever you have done, whatever you have left undone, whatever has been done to you. And the Lord will be with your spirit at this table. And the grace of God will be with us all at this table.

Let the church say, Amen!

*2 Timothy 2:20-26, incarnational translation**

In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves from the tarnish of worthless babble will become treasured utensils, precious heirlooms to the owner of the house, not stashed away in storage but ready for every good use.

Shun youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, in communion with those who appeal to The Way of Jesus from a pure heart. Refuse to participate in foolish and ignorant disputes; they only breed infighting. Those who walk The Way of Jesus must not breed infighting but act kindly to everyone, humbly modeling mutual forbearance, willing to explain themselves thoroughly to those who oppose them.

God has a way of changing hearts and minds when we do these things, bringing us all to our senses as we discover deeper truth together, rescuing us from the spirit of destructiveness that can too easily ensnare us all.

May the Lord be with your spirit, Timothy. And may the grace of God be with you all.

"Incarnational translation for preaching seeks to recontextualize biblical texts so that they say and do in new times and places something like what they said and did in ancient times and places" (Cosgrove and Edgerton, **In Other Words: Incarnational Translation for Preaching, 62).*