

“Waiting in Peace”

December 10, 2023

Based on 2 Peter 3:14, adapted

*Beloved, while you are waiting, strive to be found at peace.*

We begin, as we should, with *Beloved*.

If you hear nothing else from me today or throughout our entire service of worship, hear this: A great love permeates the universe from the beginning of time through the end. That love has claimed you [insert your name here] - *by name!* - and simply wants you to be well.

And also y'all, SPC.

And also all y'all, Wood Frog and Arctic Fox, Red Panda, Venus Flytrap, Sunflower, Appalachian Mountains, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Iran, and Iraq.

If all y'all and y'all and you [insert your name here] hear nothing else today, hear the most important thing: *God loves you! And so do we!*

Now hear a second thing: the goal of that love, if love is allowed to have a goal, is peace. *Shalom* in the Hebrew, *Salaam* in Arabic. A deep pervasive *well-ness* through all time and space, where all that has been wounded has been healed, and all that has been done wrong has been redeemed, and all that can be done right is now flourishing for mutual benefit. In the church we call this *the reign of God, the Beloved Community, the Peaceable Kin-dom* where the wolf has learned to lie down with the lamb and we who are human will study war no more.

This peace is THE thing for which we are waiting, I would venture to guess, this sense that all y'all really can be well, and that you [insert your name here] and that I really can be well.

We are waiting for that peace, and waiting, and waiting. And waiting. All we have to do is doom scroll for one minute on social media or channel surf cable news or sit through a faculty meeting at Shepherd or take a cursory look at our own inner chaos to feel as if we will be waiting forever.

Which could lead us to give up on our Belovedness or on the Belovedness of others, or both. This feeling as if we will be waiting for peace forever could lead us even to the *opposite* of peace, which is violence and destruction and self-loathing and other-loathing and revenge for real or perceived hurt within and without.

And when I say *us*, I mean you and me, but also us as a group of people or us as a nation or us as a species or us as a planet. This feeling as if we will be waiting for peace forever could become a self-fulfilling prophecy that extends the timeline of *not-peace* in perpetuity.

This is why our Lesson implores us, while we are waiting, to *strive* for that very peace for which we wait. To *try really hard* in the moment to live as if it that peace were already here, even as we wait for it to come in its fullness.

Be *diligent, earnest*, and even *zealous* in your pursuit of peace, our Lesson says, so that when the Prince of Peace finally does come in all of his glory, mythologically speaking, you will be so well practiced in what peace looks like you will barely even notice the difference. You may even hasten that day through your practice.

Two months ago, in my Pastoral Response to the Hamas Attacks and the Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza, I assured you that *resources remain from within all three Abrahamic traditions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - to lead us in a path toward a truly just and sustainable peace. We simply have to decide to use them. Many of us are. These are the stories I will continue to lift up in the weeks and months to come.*

As promised, here are some stories:

From Thomas Friedman in the *New York Times*, who tells the stories of Youssef Ziadna, a Bedouin bus driver who risked his own life to save Jewish youth at the outdoor music festival ... and Emad, the Israeli Arab from Jaffa who refused payment for two days as he repaired broken rocket shelters for his Jewish friends.

From Peter Beaumont in *The Guardian*, citing the Hebrew-language newspaper *Davar*, who tells the story of Israeli Jewish Peace activist Yocheved Lifshitz, who for years would help sick Palestinians in Gaza get to hospitals in Israel, then as a hostage confronted the very chief of Hamas, as only a grandmother could, by telling him he should be *ashamed of himself* for his role in the October 7 massacre, and then as she is released, stuns the world by shaking hands with her captor and wishing him, unbelievably, *Shalom*.

From Rachel Martin on National Public Radio, who tells the story of Palestinian Quaker Sa'ed Atshan, a professor of peace and conflict studies at Swarthmore College, who has somehow found a way to teach empathy and respect and a common language of peace among his Jewish, Palestinian Christian, and Muslim students.

And from Molly Hennessey-Fiske and Joanna Slater in *The Washington Post*, who tell the story of an unnamed Black Jewish suite mate of Kinnan Abdalhamid, one of three young Palestinian men shot in Vermont, who rushed to Burlington as soon as he heard the news, in order *to be the family member that [Kinnan] didn't have until family arrived*.

Beloved, *this* is what it means to strive for peace, while we are waiting for that Great Peace to come in its fullness.

We, too, here at SPC, are doing are part to practice peace through our Guns 2 Gardens Initiative, bringing together all kinds of people from various walks of life to transform this uniquely American way of waging war on our children into a garden of grace.

Beginning this time one year ago and continuing into June, gun enthusiasts - including our Beloved Jay Hurley - joined those who would love to get rid of guns altogether in dismantling unwanted guns, one circular saw at a time. Men in MAGA hats stood alongside trans youth inspecting the process one car at a time.

Twenty three unwanted guns, including three semi-assault weapons, no longer have the capacity to kill. Now they are gardening tools, for the first time on display in our nativity scene: an honest to goodness pruning hook, in keep with the call of Isaiah, a ceremonial shovel, and former shell-casings now turned into bells, each with their own unique sound.

*Beloved*, we have heard our God say, *while you are waiting, strive*, as hard as I know it is, *to be found at peace*. And perhaps, for a brief moment, as we ring the bell of the shell-casings of our own souls, we have indeed been found at peace.

[The Bell Rings]