

Towards Peace in Korea

Paju/Seoul, Opening Eucharist

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“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” We have gathered here to do just that, and to work at tearing down the barriers between us that make enemies. We are here to practice peace-making, to un-learn our ability to make war, to shape communities that seek peace and harmony rather than division.

We are here to affirm that peace is ours in Christ. We are here to re-member, recall, re-collect the pieces of broken human community, that they might be fully restored in Christ. The members of this body are one, even though we too easily forget and work against that reality. When you and I gather around this holy table of word and meal, when we gather beyond this room for conversation, for meals, and for fellowship, we begin to re-member the reality in which we already exist. May our prayer be that whatever clouds our memory be blown utterly away.

That great image of nations streaming to Zion to worship the one God in peace should challenge us. We cannot look around to find a full and perfect example – there is too much corruption, too much self-serving behavior, too much strife in all the cities and nations around us. Yet there is also hope, and there are glimpses of human community restored, if we are willing to look. However tentative and imperfect, peace has come in South Africa, peace has arrived in Ireland, peace is being built one school at a time in Afghanistan, and peace may yet emerge in the Middle East.

This gathering can be a witness to that possibility. Wherever people begin to look for the image of God in people they would rather see as enemy, Zion emerges from

the mist, and the nations begin to stream toward that holy mountain. The truth and reconciliation commission of South Africa is a mountain of peace toward which the nations are indeed streaming.

Wherever people gather in councils of peace, rather than war, God's instruction bears fruit. This gathering has the potential to be another such witness to God's holy mountain. May teaching go forth from here to bring peace in every corner of the world.

Whenever people ask how this nuclear reactor may be an instrument of peace, how it may be turned to energy production and treating cancer, rather than producing weapons of war, there the Spirit of God is at work. When food and medical care and education are shared with those who have none, instruction is going out from Zion.

Yet this is never a passive process, a waiting for the Spirit to work alone. You and I, and all whom we meet in our daily rounds, can share in that work of the Spirit. Each one of us has the ability to engender change, to forge weapons into instruments of peace. And when we move together in the power of the spirit, the earth begins to move as well.

That work of shifting the ground begins with our own attitudes, responses, and actions. How do we perceive the stranger – as threat or as the image of God? There is a part of each one of us that awakens to full alert at the presence of a stranger, an unknown, one who is “other.” That reaction is an instinctual survival skill, and in itself is neither good nor evil. But what we do with that heightened awareness is a moral decision. When we become profoundly aware of the presence of “the other” we are confronted with a series of choices. Is this other a threat, a potential blessing, or do we need to gather more information before we decide? We might do well to remember that the unknown stranger just might be a divine messenger, or an angel. I begin to be convinced that every such stranger may bear a divine message if we are able to discover and receive it. Certainly every encounter brings an image of God, an image we do not yet know, and that meeting must therefore be rich with creative possibility.

What divine messages have been received in our time in Geumgangsán? Where and in whom did we meet God anew? How will we discover an unknown image of God in this meeting here? That divine image is most certainly here, all around us, and it is found more readily when we receive the stranger with openness, and even vulnerability.

The choice between vulnerability and fear underlies the human ability to make both peace and war. That choice is what most profoundly underlies Jesus' witness, his life, death, and resurrection. Living in radical openness to the image of God in the other may lead to death, but it is also the only route to full and abundant life.

The human ability to make war has mostly to do with fear: people and their leaders live in fear of their neighbors or what they may do; some use fear to control others and fill their own desires. Some live in fear of territorial expansion, or access to resources and the basic stuff of life – like water, fuels, cropland, or fisheries. Neighbors may live in fear of reprisals for old injustices, like Jacob and Esau, or Israel and Palestine. If we do not settle or forgive those old disputes, we will continue to live with fear.

Living in fear only degrades life, for it leads inexorably to violence. Living in fear denies the fundamental hope we share, for it condemns us to remain in the grave of the past. Christians are not meant to live in fear. We are born anew in hope, for a dream that we expect will become reality. That great dream of God is for a restored and reconciled creation. We make peace now so that God's cosmic dream may be made real. Jesus says, "do this, love your enemy" now, in the present, so that we might "be perfect as God is perfect." That perfection is a becoming, undergirded by reconciling work in this age, luring us on toward the existence of all creation in the full presence and perfection of God.

Peace-making requires confronting fear, both our own and the fear that keeps others in that grave. Loving our enemies means letting go of our fear of their perceived difference, letting go of our fear that they will take something precious from us, letting go of our fear that they intend only evil toward us. Loving our enemies means insisting that each is made in the image of God, that each of us can live in peace only when all live under their own fig trees and with vines bent low and heavy with fruit. It means insisting that there is abundance for all in God's great dream of a restored creation.

If we would make peace, we must feed all our neighbors, both stranger and friend, with the same gusto we feed our own children. We must seek the welfare of all with the same energy we search for education and health care for our own families. Loving our enemies is only another version of loving our neighbors, for in truth all God's creatures are neighbors. We do not have the luxury of distinguishing stranger from

neighbor or friend. Setting down our swords and spears, and remaking them into tools for farming or educational computers or machines of healing means we have to meet those neighbors in all their diversity and see only the beloved image of God.

May this gathering be invitation to see the image of God we all share, even when overlain by fear and enmity. May we be transformed in this meeting, so that we may go forth and transform the world. May God's peace be made real, may the *shalom* of God spread forth from Zion – no, may it **speed** forth from Zion. May God's peace spread over this earth like the blessing of rain cloud in the desert.