

Bread, Storms, and the Things That Make for Peace

Meditation for WCC Morning Praise and Prayer **Celebrating the United Nations International Day of Peace**

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Bible References: Exodus 16:31-35; Mark 4:35-39; Romans 14:17

Friends and colleagues,

Before I begin, I thank the World Council of Churches for entrusting the General Board of Church and Society of The United Methodist Church with leadership of this Morning Praise and Prayer.

For me, it is also a welcome return to a fellowship that has accompanied and enriched my ministry for decades, beginning with the WCC Assembly in Vancouver in 1983.

As a member church of the WCC, The United Methodist Church appreciates the chance to join the ecumenical fellowship in worship and witness.

It is especially fitting that we gather today to celebrate the United Nations International Day of Peace. This year's theme, "Invest in Peace: For Everyone, Everywhere, Every Day," reminds us that peace is not merely an aspiration but a daily vocation. The ecumenical movement has long reminded us that peace is a pilgrimage we undertake together, in faith, hope, and solidarity.

Friends and fellow pilgrims in the work of peace,

Today, as the churches pray with and for the peoples of Uruguay, Paraguay, and Argentina in the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Prayer Cycle, we are reminded that the journey toward peace is always both local and global.

Gathering here at the John Knox International Center carries special meaning for me. In the 1980s, this place helped anchor my formation in international human rights and humanitarian law; years later, in 2018, I was re-elected president of CoNGO—the Conference of NGOs—in this very setting. This house of hospitality has long joined faith, public witness, and advocacy in the public square.

On this International Day of Peace, I am mindful of a phrase I have often used:

We live in a world in excess of fear and in deficit of hope.

Fear is hardening borders, deepening suspicion, and narrowing our moral imagination. It persuades us that security can be achieved without solidarity and survival without justice. And where fear flourishes, peace becomes difficult to imagine.

It is precisely into such a world that our readings speak.

In Exodus, the people of Israel find themselves in the wilderness. They have escaped bondage but have not yet reached the future God has promised. Their anxiety concerns sustenance.

In Mark's Gospel, the disciples find themselves amid a violent storm. Their anxiety concerns survival.

One community fears hunger.

The other fears the storm and the sea.

Yet beneath both fears lies the same question:

Can God be trusted?

Can we trust that life is larger than our fears?

Can we trust that the future need not be held hostage by anxiety?

The manna in the wilderness was more than bread.

The calming of the sea was more than a miracle.

Both were invitations to trust.

And trust may well be one of the scarcest commodities in our world today.

We speak often of geopolitical, ecological, and humanitarian crises. Yet beneath them lies a deeper crisis: a crisis of trust.

Trust among nations and peoples.

Trust in truth.

Trust that cooperation remains possible.

Without trust, diplomacy falters, cooperation weakens, and peace becomes ever more elusive.

This is why these readings matter on the International Day of Peace.

They remind us that peace is more than the absence of conflict. Peace is the presence of rightly ordered relationships. Peace emerges when trust becomes stronger than fear, and solidarity more compelling than suspicion.

Hear also these words from the Apostle Paul in Romans (14:17):

"For the kingdom of God is not food and drink but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit."

Paul does not dismiss food. Israel needed manna. Nor does he dismiss survival. The disciples needed calm waters.

Rather, Paul reminds us that God's reign concerns something larger.

Bread alone does not constitute the kingdom.
Survival alone does not constitute the kingdom.

The kingdom becomes visible when bread is joined to justice, survival to peace, and community to shared flourishing.

As one peace movement slogan put it:

"At the table of peace there shall be bread and justice."

Bread, because bodies hunger.
Justice, because dignity belongs to all.

Peace that ignores hunger is fragile.
Peace that ignores injustice is false.

A living faith, therefore, is not one that merely prays for peace. A living faith is one that seeks peace and pursues justice.

Indeed, this conviction lies at the heart of the ecumenical movement's Pilgrimage of Justice, Reconciliation, and Peace. Peace is not a destination but a practice, nurtured, repaired, and renewed along the way.

Yet our understanding of justice must continue to deepen.

For too long, much of our discourse on justice has remained narrowly anthropocentric.

But the assaults on human dignity that trouble our world are inseparable from the assaults upon the integrity of the planet itself.

The task before us is not to abandon social justice but to deepen it, freeing it from anthropocentrism and twining it more intentionally to planetary justice.

God's *oikoumene* embraces the whole inhabited Earth and the community of life that God has declared good.

The wilderness that sustained Israel and the waters that Jesus calmed belong to that household.

For this reason, peace today must be understood not only as reconciliation among peoples but also as right relationship with the Earth, our common home.

This is one of the great tasks before the United Nations and all who care about ethical multilateralism.

The challenges confronting humanity exceed the capacity of any nation acting alone. They require cooperation rooted in trust, solidarity rooted in dignity, and hope rooted in shared responsibility.

Ethical multilateralism begins with the conviction that institutions exist not for power but for purpose, not for privilege but for human dignity and planetary flourishing.

Peace is not something for which we hope once a year.

It is something we practice every day.

The ecumenical movement carries that conviction through its pilgrimage for justice, reconciliation, and peace. The United Nations expresses it through cooperation among nations. Faith communities deepen it through moral witness, spiritual discipline, and public engagement.

Perhaps that is the gift of these readings.

The manna tells us that there can be enough.

The calming of the storm tells us that fear need not govern our future.

And Romans tells us toward what future God is calling us:

justice,
peace,
and joy in the Holy Spirit.

Not one without the others,

but all three held together as signs of God's reign among us.

So may we become people of trust in an age of fear.

May we seek peace and pursue justice.

May we help build an architecture of solidarity and protection and an infrastructure of welcome and hospitality.

May we deepen our commitment to ethical multilateralism, recognizing that our future is shared.

May we care for the Earth as God's *oikoumene*, our common home and our common responsibility.

And may there indeed be, at the table of peace,

bread and justice,

justice and peace,

peace and joy,

for all peoples and for the flourishing of the whole community of life.

For this is the vision toward which God calls us.

And this is the pilgrimage upon which God leads us.

Amen.