

“Peace of the 6 Year Old”

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When I was in seminary I was told by a very wise professor that if I were making a proclamation of any kind; political, social, religious whatever, I would know I was on the right track, if--- I could have that proclamation make sense to a 6 year old child's mind. I have used that standard many times in the past years, especially when I am trying to explain something as complex and difficult as let us say-- war and peace.

Peace is one of those indefinable words and yet, is there anything more important to have in one's life? The main tenet I have worked with in my life is that, if peace isn't personal as a force in the world, it will not have lasting meaning. If I can't stop the other forces; the hate, the prejudice, the me-first attitude in my heart, if I can't figure out a way of living peace in my own life, how can I expect anyone else to promote peace. And how can I expect peace to be given to me, if I have not made it a part of my own life and freely given that peace to others? Peace could be a very active force in the world. But I also know many people think it is only a passive response to happenings to oneself or the world. Far from it, peace is active, very active in fact.

It was announced in Gandhi's village that he would be giving people a demonstration on how he came to find peace such an active force in his life. The word spread rather quickly and soon there were hundreds of people waiting on that day in Gandhi's front yard. The mood was somber and yet there was a palpable excitement among the people waiting.

After a time Gandhi came out and looked at the people. There was a hush, "Quiet," they all told those who were still talking in the back, "Gandhi Ge is going to speak." But the quiet moments continued and still he stood there and looked at the crowd. People began to shuffle and look at each other curiously. "Why doesn't he say something?" someone asked in a rather loud voice. Gandhi sat down in the little courtyard and took out his prayer beads and began to chant. Slowly and painfully quietly he chanted as if he was alone in the yard. People began to shift uncomfortably. "We came here for a speech on how to be peaceful, and he is just sitting there," remarked someone angrily. Then someone got it, what was truly happening. And that person walked up to Gandhi and sat down with him and also began to chant. It took awhile, but soon most of the crowd also sat with the great man and understood, to practice peace, you must first be at peace.

This peace-making happens many times a day in everyone's life and it is often as mundane as smiling at the person in the checkout line at Safe Way who pushes their cart into your legs for the third time. Or smiling at

a car on Garden Valley that cuts you off and you are really, really angry. You want to shout at them, scream at them, at the indignity, the selfish way they are driving, but you don't, if you are living in peace. Instead, you blow them a kiss and send up a prayer for the repose of their soul. Well, not really, but you could send up a prayer for them to find a way to slow down before they hurt themselves or others.

Personal peace is how you talk to yourself and other people. Do you use words like, "I could kill you for saying that," or when you feel oppressed by someone, thinking of slapping them down, striking out, forcing, pushing, shoving, bullying etc?. The words we say to ourselves and others do get translated into actions. Peace is about not pushing that person's shopping cart back at them, when they have obviously let you know that you are in their way, even though you are in front of the line. And ironically peace is about, even when you have been hurt by someone, that you do not take revenge, but you find another way of letting them know they hurt you and find a way to heal the rift, even if you were in the right. Is this a hard thing to do? Absolutely yes! Will these actions stop the wars in the world? Probably not. But do peaceful actions spread like ripples on the water? Of course.

I am even talking to you now about personal peace because someone somewhere showed me the power peace can have in one's life. Someone took me by the hand and showed me how to be peaceful even when I may have wanted to strike back. How to be peace in situations where I would have rather liked to cause harm, because it is all personal. The Mid-East is personal. The war in Iraq is personal. North Korea wishing to bomb the US is personal.

What this peace service reminds us of, is not that world events are so far outside of our sphere of influence, that we should simply curl up in a ball on our beds and sleep the peace of denial. No, what it reminds me of, are the actions of peace I need to do on Garden Valley, in Safe Way, in my church, in my family, and when I meet all of you. There is a great deal of personal power in turning the other cheek. In not getting caught up in she said, he said, they should have, or why didn't they. We know this is truth, but it is often hard to look at our own behavior and much easier to look half way across the world and say, tisk, tisk, they should do this, or they should do that. And that is why having the filter of a 6 year old child's mind before you, as you proclaim a truth, is a valid one.

For example, try explaining "war" to a 6 year old. You start out by saying "Of course honey, we must bomb and kill these people because they are so bad." And they look at you with their eyes as clear as a pool of ice water and say, "But you said we shouldn't hurt other people." And you say, "Of course, and I meant that, but there are times that big people

have to make hard decisions and war is one of those hard decisions.” “But,” they retort, “You said we are to love everyone and try to be good to everyone.” And you see very clearly and with a sad and a heavy heart that the great compromising has begun. The breakdown of the high morals, the correct standards by which we would hope the world would work, the way we told our children the world should work, is now plowed under by confusion, pain and making pacts with the devil.

And still our 6 year old sits on their bed, teddy bear in hand, PJ’s with the little feet in them, waiting, waiting for us to tell them that what we originally said to them, of how they are to behave in the family, on the playground, in the class room, on the streets with their friends is indeed the way it should be in the world. They are waiting and we hesitate. Because we loath what it is we have to tell them. That there are is a two tiered system in the world, the one we tell them how to live just before they go to bed and hope with all the love we can muster that it will be the one they choose, and the reality of the world, where soon enough they will learn our message first of love and peace is not the one by which most of the world lives.

But what I love about a 6 year old is that they do not easily let you off the hook. They are fierce in their perception of what is right and good and necessary, once they understand what they have been told. They are legalistic to the core and demand that if you said it, it be the truth. Therefore, my suggestion is, if you are faced with a conundrum that you cannot figure out, if you don’t own a 6 year old in your family, you either find one, or use the 6 year old that still lives inside you and you ask them what you should you do? Should you be vengeful? Your 6 year old would say of course not. Should you be unforgiving because you have been hurt, revengeful, resentful, bitter, ruthless, merciless? The 6 year old, holding the potential of the world in their hands would say of course not. “You said,” they would begin, “you said I should try hard to love all people and be fair and good and kind to all people and animals. Isn’t that what you said?” And you will look at them with all the love you can muster and say “Of course I said that, and I meant it.” And then you will indeed go out and live the best life you possibly can, because it is the heart of a child that is leading you. And wasn’t it Jesus who said, unless you become like a little child you will not enter the kingdom of heaven? And wasn’t it Jesus who said “Let the children come to me.”

Lao Tsu, a philosopher and legendary author of the Tao te Ching, from the 6th century BCE put it best when he said, if we want peace in the world, there must be peace in the nation. If we want peace in the nation there must be peace in the city. If we want peace in the city there must be peace in the neighborhood, if we want peace in the neighborhood

there must be peace in the family. And if we truly want peace in the family there must be peace in our hearts.

So, I would like to teach you a song today that is about peace, the peace of the heart, that will affect the family, the neighborhood, the nation and the world. It is a 6 year old song. I chose it because it is truth. Kids are about truth. They haven't learned all the ways of denial, disclaimers and denunciations. They are pretty clear, as clear as this message of peace can be.

May our time together be a reminder of the hundreds of peace cranes that have come from all over Oregon. May we know that we are not alone in our peace venture. May we tell ourselves in the dark night of the soul, where there is only tragedy and pain, despair and gloom, that there are probably many more reasons to be hopeful about our world than the reasons we are given by the national news to panic. There are many more people who agree with us about peaceful relations with all peoples, then there are people who wish only to have power over.

The terror alerts that you hear in the airports are not orange, or blue or yellow or green today. No, on this night, in this beautiful natural setting we tell the young at heart, the young person who lives in our heart, that no matter what happens, what matters most is that we were true to ourselves, our faith, our belief. Even in the face of death, with that assurance, we will meet it peacefully. You see, you don't all of a sudden become peaceful as the big challenges in life come at you. It is rather a step by step process, where you have practiced peacefully, ways of living all along the way, with your 6 year old holding your hand, looking up at you with open, perfectly trusting, loving eyes. Who could hate with that kind of pressure, with that kind of belief and expectation of your great powers? Kids believe adults have great powers, and they are right, we do. But do we use them?

Think of all the people in the world, dead or alive that you have admired. Who were they, religious leaders, writers, philosophers, political leaders? Well, that 6 year old waiting for your answer on how the world could work could be the next Mother Theresa, the next Dag Hammarskjold, the next Susan B. Anthony, the next Martin Luther King Jr., the next Gandhi, the next person to make a great difference by showing us how to love, peacefully.

So, the song, the children's song I want to teach you, your part is "Peace, peace I think I understand, Peace, Peace is holding someone's hand." Isn't that what we teach our children? Trust the process, trust someone at sometime in your life, put out your hand and touch someone else. We tell our children don't be afraid of monsters, don't be afraid of

the dark, don't be afraid of challenges, don't be afraid, don't be afraid. Go out, we tell them, be your best selves, your courageous selves, be your brave and beautiful selves and even in the face of your greatest fears you are going to be all right. And today we tell ourselves the same things. Let this time we have spent together in peace, be a reminder of all we wish to give our children, the children of this city. Being peaceful is about taking risks, reaching out and taking someone's hand.

Song: Peace is when the wind stops blowing. Peace is when the sun is showing. Knowing that my family's are near, love brings me peace.
PEACE, PEACE I THINK I UNDERSTAND. PEACE, PEACE IS HOLDING
SOMEONE'S HAND.

Peace is when I'm tucked in bed, with a kiss upon my head. Peace is smiling while I sleep. ,Love gives me peace.

PEACE, PEACE I THINK I UNDERSTAND. PEACE, PEACE IS HOLDING
SOMEONE'S HAND.

Don't let anyone take away your peace. Many people have lived and died for the kinds of peace we have learned to live with and have showed us the way. The peace of 2009 is in our hands now, and I believe with all my heart that these are worthy and creative hands, hands that put together this peace service, hands that reached out and called us to come today and be a part of this city-wide celebration of peace. The warmth and the purpose that our hands bring to each other and this circle, may it spread to all of Roseburg and all of Oregon and places beyond our knowing. Amen, Blessed Be, So be it, and oh yes, go in peace.