

“Reimagining Peace”

Isaiah 52: 7-10, 2 Peter 3: 8-15a, Mark 1: 1-8

This coming Saturday marks the 115th anniversary of the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize. The Nobel Foundation began its work with funding from the estate of Alfred Nobel, a Swedish chemist. The Nobel Peace prizes would never've been conceived were it not for the premature publication of Alfred's obituary. Imagine waking up one morning to find that the world thinks you're dead. For some reason or another – eager journalists, malicious neighbors, simple misfortune – there it is. Your obituary. Unfortunately, the headline leaves you no room to imagine the fondness people felt for you or the tremendous outpouring of gratitude displayed for your contributions to society. The headline robs you of that pleasure as you see the words that grab everyone's attention that morning, “Merchant of Death.” The text? an accusation that you'd grown rich by finding better ways for people to kill each other.

That's what happened to Alfred when his brother Ludvig died in 1888. A French newspaper mistakenly ran an obituary for Alfred that delivered some tough medicine.

Alfred Noble was an inventor – a genius inventor who created dynamite, the precursor to the nitroglycerin bomb. An interesting side note to all of this is that Alfred Nobel really believed that his invention would be the tool to peace. Eerily mindful of Thomas Aquinas' 13th century *Summa Theologica*, and his justification of war in terms of proportionality, Nobel is said to have written, “The day when two army corps can annihilate each other in one second, all civilized nations, it is to be hoped, will recoil from war and discharge their troops.”

Upon reading his erroneous obituary, Alfred Nobel must have done some soul searching. What did his life stand for? How had he impacted his family, his friends and the world? Was his life holy and godly? - Righteous, if you will. Were his gifts and talents and treasures shared to the glory of God? How might I repent? Putting his money where his heart was, Nobel restructured his will. Upon his death on December 10th, 1896, the world learned that most of his vast wealth would be used for five prizes, including one for peace. The prize for peace was to be awarded to the person who "shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding of peace congresses."¹

There must have been 545 Nobel prizes awarded since 1901, the first year they were presented (It took a few years to get the program up and running. Ironically, Nobel's family fought over his will.). The next five prizes will be awarded at ceremonies next Saturday night, December 10th, the 115th anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death. If you want peace in the world, you must have peace within yourself. If you want peace in the world, you must take steps to insure that your life and your legacy represent that peace, too.

This is the beginning of the good news. As John's baptism of repentance was an act of coming at peace with our own waywardness, so can each of us prepare the way for the Prince of

¹ www.nobelprize.org

Peace to enter our hearts and redirect our pathways toward peace for the world. It is certainly this peace that Alfred Nobel sought not only for himself but hoped more people would aspire to achieve.

Who doesn't remember the Charles Dickens classic, *A Christmas Carol*? Ebenezer Scrooge hates Christmas. Heck, Scrooge hates everything except money. He especially hates people – even his faithful employee, Bob Cratchit, and his own nephew and family (right down to Tiny Tim). We all know the story. On Christmas Eve, the ghost of Scrooge's former partner, Jacob Marley, comes to tell him that three spirits would visit that night. The first one comes: The Spirit of Christmas past. The Spirit of Christmas past recalls Scrooge's miserable youth when he lost his only love due to greed. The second one comes: The Spirit of Christmas present. The Spirit of Christmas present shows Scrooge the desperately poor situation of Bob Cratchit's family and gives Scrooge's a window into how joyful life could be for even the old man if he would be more generous. The third spirit comes: The Spirit of Christmas future. Now Scrooge sees the fate of his bitter life and it puts the fear of God in him. Scrooge suddenly realizes that life *is* good and time is too short. He seizes the moment and begins to live with a full heart for others.

If life were such that we could see ourselves from such stark advantage, might we, too be compelled to choose how to live differently? If life were such that we could see our shortcomings or our side-steppings or our wrong-way-windings so clearly how might we re-imagine goodness for ourselves and others? If life were such would we recreate the end of our own story such so that the most prominent memory of our life would be one that paved the way for peace...

I do believe that the first step toward peace in the world is a world full of people who are at peace within ourselves. When you and I are at peace in our family relationships, our friendships, and our faith in God, we'll find stop looking for fault with others in their home lives, their relationships, their religious practices and beliefs. When we open our minds to opposing ideas, changing technology, controversial research findings, we'll be less defensive toward others' thoughts, new ways to crack a code and difficult subjects. When we're at peace with what we've earned or been given or seem to have stepped into in life, we'll be less inclined to want what other people have. When we're at peace with ourselves, we'll stop looking for faults in others. When we're at peace with what we have, we'll stop our territorialist ways of wanting to rob people of things that are just not ours.

When we invite the Prince of Peace to enter our hearts, when we allow our Lord to come in to the core of our being and reign in our lives, we'll feel the fullness of the Lord and be at peace with who God has made in us and with what God has given us. We'll be more open to embracing who God has made of others and what God has granted them, too. This, I'm sure, is a pathway toward peace for each one of us. And this, I believe, is a formula for the beginning of a peaceful co-existence between people of all religions, political beliefs, and socio-economic backgrounds across the world. In this circular process of receiving God's gifts of grace, and extending that same grace in honor of the gifts others've been given, we will be embracing God's sovereignty in the world. We will be at peace within ourselves and be in a position to re-imagine an even greater peace for the world where God's rule reigns forever and ever.

Do you behave bitterly or judgmentally or angrily toward someone? Have you made some disappointing choices in your life? Are you wishing that you would've extended your talent or your treasures in a more constructive direction? It's never too late to do something about your life, make a change, prepare for a better future not only for yourself but for the world. It's not too late

to confront your circumstance and redress a wrongful attitude, reverse a pattern of inappropriate behavior - generally to get off your duff and let yourself be filled with the glory of the Lord.

If you're mindful of how you speak down to others, pray for guidance, apologize and start looking up to them for all of those ways that God has named them blessed. If you're aware of how you covet a friend or family member's possessions, job, family or even education, pray for guidance and thank God for the choices and chances and blessings in your own life. Take a class, read a book, ask for advice in something new or different. If you're worried about war in the world, begin to think through your own insecurities, your own anger, and your own negative reactions that could've become the stimulus to produce the kinds of war you're worried about, and make a list of all that's good in your life. Celebrate where God comes to be present within you again and again every day. Then, may the peace that passes all understanding enter in where the rough places have become unbearable and the winding roads have taken you on strange courses, and may you start again this very day to live with the peace and joy of Christ in your heart. This is the start of a coming again of Christ in your life and the new shape of peace on earth in Christ to come. Thanks be to God.