

# SHARING THIS PEACE

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July 3, 2016

Readings: 2 Kings 5:1-14; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20

We gather today on Independence Day weekend. As Americans and as Christians it is a time not only for celebration, but also for self-examination. It is a time for examining the soul of our nation, and for looking into our own souls, as people of faith. IT is a time to consider where we stand, as Christians in America.

Over the past week I have been blessed to sit with and walk with and listen with a wide variety of peacemakers from around the US, Canada, Puerto Rico and Mexico. The theme of the gathering was: “When did we see you in prison? Breaking Social and structural injustice.” Several dominant concerns emerged over the course of the week. One of these was the reality of growing mass incarceration in our nation, particularly of black men and women, and more broadly of people of color. There is a cradle to prison pipeline for the black folk of this nation.

A second concern we shared together was the situation of undocumented immigrants from Latin America, and also that of asylum seekers from all over the world, thousands of people including children who are being slapped into what are sometimes called family detention centers—because it is illegal to house children in prison. Reverend Amaury Tanon-Santos reminded us that there are unmarked prisons privately operated that hold untold thousands of prisoners, largely bound for deportation. There is a lower standard for due process for these folks without residential status that there is for citizens. And we spent time together through the week mourning the violence, and grieving the imprisonment of thousands of Latin American workers and others from around the world.

So while black folk in disproportionately large numbers are imprisoned for offenses that are often minor or non-existent, Refugees from Latin America are being imprisoned with no real charge and only the dimmest understanding of their own rights. To whom shall these folk, including these children, to whom shall they appeal?

A third concern that emerged was that as a nation we seem to have become addicted to violence. We reflected together on the mass killing of forty-nine people from the lgbtq community in Orlando—mostly Latina and Latino individuals. We recalled the still fresh pain of the community of Mother Emanuel Church in Charleston South Carolina following the massacre just one year ago. We grieved a culture that seems to find drone killings acceptable, and where the unfettered access to weapons of assault seems to be more important to many of our leaders than life, liberty or the pursuit of happiness.

These are some of the concerns we discussed over the past week. And there were moments it seemed overwhelming. Because it is overwhelming.

How did we come to this terrible crossroads as a country? Some of the answer may be found even in our nation's origins. Judge Wendell Griffen, a black attorney and pastor of New Millennium church, an open and affirming church in Little Rock, who serves on the bench in Arkansas, reminded us that the Second Amendment itself is not a sacred text. In fact, it was adopted largely out of fear that Black slaves would rise up in the US as they had recently in Haiti. The white leaders of a new nation wanted to make sure that state militias were sufficiently armed to keep Black folk in slavery.

For five days we met, we prayed and studied, deliberated and attended workshops relevant to the concerns we shared for a society seemingly hooked on violence, seemingly addicted to the cycle of killing, a society that in fear is willing simply to warehouse people.

It is my conviction that on this Independence Day weekend we need not simply to grieve or moan, we also need to take up our individual and collective responsibility to try and make a difference. We are reminded by Luke's gospel that we follow one who came to "bring good news to the poor. [God] has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, 19to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." When Jesus was confronted by the sickness and oppression and structural violence that dominated his society, he did not have the resources to just start some mass movement. So he started small. HE started by sending out seventy people in twos, to bring PEACE to the villages and towns of Galilee. We too need to start from where we are, we need to be sent out in ones and twos and threes, confident that while we cannot turn the world upside down overnight, that our actions can and will make a difference. Hear again what Jesus as he sent them forth:

"The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; and greet no one on the road."

He was explicit about sending them to bring shalom—a just peace—to the households they visited. Hear his words. "Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace to this house!' And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not, it will return to you.

Jesus sent out seventy individuals for an impossible task, armed with no weapons, not even shoes. They went as utterly vulnerable agents of peace, bringing a greeting, bringing a message of healing and liberation.

When we become discouraged, we need to remember those seventy. We need to consider what it means to be the seventy today, in a world no less hooked on violence, a nation in which incarceration and detention, killing and fear have too often replaced the love of neighbor and God, the freedom to grow through education, and hard work.

Is it overwhelming? Sure it is. It's hard even to express our concerns to neighbors and family who live in fear, and who express that fear through words of prejudice and anger and hate. The prejudice anger and hate virus has taken possession of many souls! But this is where we are. And so in order to be good citizens not only of a nation, but of God's reign, we need to

embrace our own fear, and then leave it behind. We need to find the inner resources, the spiritual resources, to go forth, unarmed, to enter our neighbor's house or a prison cell, or a hospital room, and bring Christ's peace.

You may ask, Preacher, where shall I start? I believe that takes a longer conversation, and I don't have quick answers for you. But I am happy to have the longer conversation, ask questions, and enter into a process of discernment together. I do know one new resolution I came to. After Rev. Amaury, a friend and president of the Baptist Peace Fellowship spoke, I went to him immediately. HE had referenced a "family detention center" with which he was acquainted in the Newark New Jersey area. I said to him, Amaury, if you want to go to hold some form of action at this place, to hold up its location and its function in the public eye, I am in. I will go with you." Amaury is in too, and we will keep you posted as plans develop.

When we get discouraged, or when we cannot see how we individually might make a difference, it is good to remember the story of Naaman, the mighty Aramean general, much feared by the people of Israel. It was a young captive girl in his household who brought Naaman to healing. It was a young captive in his house, whose name is long forgotten, who brought him to a place of humility, and who brought him to peace. It was a young captive girl who brought him to the rivers of grace and mercy, and started the process of reconciliation between nations. Who is to say whether you or I might not do the same, in a time of violence and despair? It is this hope that sustains us, this possibility that compels us to respond in faith, and to step forth in humility and grace, carrying only the peace of God.