

"Praying On The Brink Of War"

Sermon Preached at Foundry United Methodist Church

By Rev. Dean J. Snyder

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Genesis 1:20-25

Matthew 10:26-31

Let us pray: Open our hearts Lord that we might know Jesus. May he so fill us that we might be instruments of his peace this week in our lives and the world. May someone this week because of the presence of Christ in us, know peace and love. We pray in Christ name. Amen.

I spent this past week at a Stephen Ministry Leaders training. Stephen Ministry is a lay ministry of caring to people during a time when they need particular encouragement and support. It's a wonderful program and I was privileged to learn about it this week at the Stephen Ministry training. And it was a reminder that it is as important in church that we care for one another, as that we care for the people outside our doors. And I hope that our Stephen Ministry program can continue to grow and become a ever more important and more central part of our life as a church.

Foundry was represented at the Stephen Ministry training by myself and by one of the our Stephen Ministers, Angela Johnson. And Angela, I need to say, was a hit. Because every time that I met some one it seemed during the conference and they read my name tag and see that I was Foundry United Methodist Church they would say "Oh, you must be from Angela's church."

So in Stephen Ministry circles we will apparently from now on be known as Angels's church. And I look forward to Angela's continuing leadership among our Stephen Ministry program.

The event was held in Corpus Christie, Texas. And I learned this week that Texas is different. There were people from all over the United States at the training. But about half of the people at the training were from Texas. There were people from almost every denomination of the Christian church that I had ever heard of at the training. But about half of the people who were there were United Methodist.

So I spent this past week with a lot of Texan United Methodist. And I need to tell you that it was a little unsettling because as we began the week it became clear to me that Texas United Methodist, many of them, feel that like we need to go to war. The conversation at my first lunch was about the war. And there was one man who was sitting at the table who was particularly aggressive about the need for us to settle this, he said, and to get it settled now. And his was not a sole voice among the people that I spent the week with.

Except during the course of the week the mood began to change. The second day that we were there we noticed that there was a large aircraft carrier in the bay, just outside of our hotel in Corpus Christie. And then we began to see young people in uniform come into the hotel. And, for the rest of the week we shared the hotel with young people in uniform and they looked so young. To looked to me as though they were children, preparing to be shipped out and to go to war.

And then on Friday people started noticing that CNN was announcing an alert orange. And people starting thinking about what that might mean. People who were preparing to fly out to be in airports and on airplanes the next day.

And I guess we knew it but we began realizing that if there is a war. This may be a war that is not just fought among some other people some where else. But this maybe a war in which we all may have some of our safety at stake.

And by the end of the week all of us, even our Texan brother and sister United Methodist had become much more somber, and quite, and serious. And I decided that I wanted to spend a few minutes this week talking about how to pray on the brink of war.

I have four ways that I have decided that I want to pray in the days and weeks ahead. And that I want to extend an invitation for you to be praying in the same sort of way with me. First of all I want to take a few minutes everyday to pray for peace. We can all pray for peace.

Over these past Sundays we've shared with you from this pulpit some of the statements made by the Bishops of The United Methodist Church and by the National Council of Churches. And the Bishops of The United Methodist Church and the National Council of Churches have encouraged our country in several ways including discouraging us from exercising a pre-empted strike. Urging us to not to do anything without UN approval. And to seek every way possible to disarm Iraq without war. And we shared some of those statements to you here in church.

I have received several notes and e-mails which I have appreciated, letting me know that not everyone in this congregation agree with our Bishops or with the National Council of Churches.

It is not only in Texas that some people feel, that some United Methodist feel, that war may be a necessary thing. And I want to acknowledge that and express your appreciation for communicating your thoughts and your feelings and ideas with me.

But we all want peace.

We can all pray for peace.

We all ought to be praying for peace.

I believe that there are people in the White House, that there are people in the State Department, that there are people in our Intelligence Agencies, that there are people in every branch of our military and especially, in every branch of our military, who are praying for peace. We all united in our prayers for peace.

Sometimes in a situation where we are facing possible conflict. We feel like we need to be strong. We feel like we should not show our fears. We feel like we ought not to appear to the rest of the world weak. But it is not a weak thing for us to long and desire and to pray for peace.

And we as a people no matter what we think about this situation and what it may require ought to be united and together. And a prayer that God might work out of this situation, the miracle of peace. We ought to recognize that we are all praying for peace.

So I'm going to take a few minutes at the beginning of each day this week, and I would invite you to join me, to stop and to intentionally pray a prayer of peace. And to believe that people of all kinds of different affiliations are praying with me for peace.

The second thing that we need to do if we are followers of Jesus Christ is to pray for our enemies. Jesus taught and then demonstrated through the model of his own life, that we are to love our enemies. We are invited to pray for our enemies.

I have received now maybe a half dozen e-mails or letters from different parts of the United States that have said something to me like this:

Dear Pastor of Foundry Church,
Does the President attend your church? And if so are you giving him hell?

And I have communicated back as kindly as I could to each of those persons saying no unfortunately the President doesn't worship at Foundry church, I wish he would. He hasn't come yet, I say. And the second thing I say is that it is my hope that I give no one hell -- for what I attempt to do is to preach of Christ who came to deliver us from hell, and not to cast anyone in to it.

I believe that there are people in the White House praying for peace or that we would be at war today. And that where our prayers for our enemies began is with our own prayers of confession, not our accusations of other people.

If we are at the brink of war it is because of the failure of the church of Jesus Christ. It is first because of the failure of the church of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we ought not be pointing the blame to someone else as though we were innocent or not implicated because it is the church of Jesus Christ that is called to love our enemies and to turn them into friends.

And it is our failure to do that, that brings us to where we are today.

I know that each time that I come to church and I walk out of church with more money left in my pocket than I decently know how to spend, while there are people who are suffering hunger and homelessness in other places in the world, and who look at my lavish wasteful spending, I know that I have participated in the situation in which we find ourselves today.

The United Methodist Church up until this year has been the only main line protestant denomination who has increased the missionaries that we have sent out into the world, to serve through out the world as doctors and teachers and to demonstrate the love of Christ through their service on our behalf. And now we've frozen the number of missionaries in the world. And we've not sent out nearly enough people.

There are persons in our own congregation who feel a clear call to serve in the mission field, that we have not been able to support and to send out.

The failure of people to know that we are Gods people who seek to love them is first of all ours. So that before we point and blame anyone else, our prayers for our enemies need to begin as prayers of confession, church. We have not done what we should have done. We have enjoyed too much, things that we did not need while other people suffered.

We have not taken the love of Christ into every corner of the earth. We have not sacrificed ourselves for others. We have treated them with such disregard that they have viewed us as their enemies. When we are called to give all of our talents. All of our resources all we are for those in need.

So we pray for our enemies.

I intend to spend part of each day in the weeks ahead in prayer for my enemies and in a prayer of confession for not caring enough. For not serving enough. For not loving enough in the name of Christ.

On the brink of war we pray for peace. We pray for our enemies. We pray for one another. We pray especially for those who are most vulnerable. The innocent people of Iraq who may suffer. The people of our own military who are at risk. For one another as we struggle through with the question of how we

should act. And what we should do.

We pray for one another.

So, I intend to spend a few minutes each day in the weeks ahead. Praying for those at risk and praying for those in our military.

And fourthly during these days, we need to pray for ourselves. We need to pray that in the midst of the possibility of violence that our heart do not become crafts or become cold.

A few weeks ago there was a peace march here in Washington and it came through my neighborhood. Jane and I happened to be on Pennsylvania Ave. when the peace march came by on the other side of the street. And there's a ledge above some shops on Pennsylvania Ave., and there were some people who had positioned themselves there, and they held up a big sign to the peace march that said hippies go home.

There were about one hundred people who left the peace march and they walked over on the median strip. And they stopped marching for peace and they glared back at the folks standing on the ledge. And they began taunting each other and something nasty began to happen between people who had come to demonstrate on behalf of peace.

We need to pray for ourselves during these days because war and violence has the capacity to make all of our hearts cold and callous.

So, I intend over these next days to take some time to pray for my own soul. That my soul might not become a heart stone. But might be a heart of flesh. That I might be able to be a caring person in the midst of all things.

When I went to Texas this week and I was sitting at a table, mostly with Texan United Methodist, we were having lunch and it was the first meal of the day and there was a man at the table who was ready to go to war. And letting us all know about it, I was really uncomfortable. At the end of the lunch the leaders of the event, said that we should find someone else at our table to share with. It had to be someone of the same gender. Woman sharing with woman and man sharing with man. And he was the only other man at my table.

So, we pulled our chairs off to the side and we went through the sharing exercise that they gave us to do, and I was anxious to have it over with. When we finished it, they said, "Oh, by the way the person that you just shared with will be your prayer partner for the week."

So each day, at the end of the day, Bill and I would find a quiet place to sit. And I would share for a few minutes what was going on inside of me and then he would share for a few minutes what was going on inside of him. And then we would try to pray for each other.

Friday, the last day when everyone was talking about the orange alert and needing to go to the airports to fly home. I expressed my concern about this city that I love. And all of us who work here and the members of my congregation who were in one way or the other a part of the military.

And my worry about what would happen to them. And my concern about the people of Iraq. And my sadness over the possibility that there might be war.

Bill said to me, "of course I don't want war. Of course I pray for peace."

And we held each others hands and we ended the week with Bill and I praying for peace.

I hope that you might find three minutes, five minutes in the beginning of the day in the days ahead to pray for peace.

I hope later in the day, maybe around lunch time, you might be able to find three or five minutes to pray for our enemies.

I hope this week that, maybe towards dinner time, you might find five minutes to get alone somewhere and to pray for each other, especially the most vulnerable and the people in our military.

And then, I hope somewhere before the end of the day, that you might find three, four or five minutes in the days ahead to pray for yourself. Pray for your own integrity, that you and whatever your situation in life is, that you might do what you feel God calling you to do. That your heart might not become callous. That you might stay alive to the voice of God within your life.

Then I would ask this other thing.

That however you feel or think about what's going on in Iraq, what's going on in the UN, what's going on here in Washington, that you try to find someone else who thinks differently than you. That you try to be with that person, and that you try to listen and to hear. And that the love of Christ might grow in us all.