

May They be One in Us: a Spirituality of Peace

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Texas

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Abstract:

Peace is explored as a longing of the spirit for unity with God and community. The article examines peace as intimacy with the divine and a relationship of wonder with creation. Stories are used to explore ways we become open to the relationships of peace. The article concludes with ways people can be attentive to the sacred and the peace of the divine in their daily lives.

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Tonight I would like to focus on the ‘God of Peace’. In the Gospel according to John 17:21-26. Jesus prays: “Father, may they be one, May they be one in us as you are in me and I am in you.” In these words come the passionate longing of Jesus for the quality of oneness that is at the heart of God. And if there is anything any of us wants, it this ‘oneness’ at the core of our deepest longing. We want to be one. We want oneness in our families, oneness in our community, oneness in our city, our state, our country and our world. We want the peace that flows in harmony with the prayer of Jesus ‘May they be One! We too pray ‘may we be one!’”

But so often we take this as if it were of our own doing. We act as if it is all up to us. **God** is the God of peace. God wants to be a God of peace **FOR** us. If there is a gift of peace for all the world, and I believe there is, it is the peace that flows

from the heart of God to us and through us. It flows from the hope of God for us, the creativity of God within us, and the belief in us that God holds. It is God who longs for us to be one in God. It is God who is the gift of peace for us.

The prayer of Jesus was not simply *may they be one*, but may they be one 'in us'. What a wondrous invitation to both intimacy and inclusivity. It is often said that we are made of the same dust as the stars. All of creation is filled with the presence of God. As there is a wholeness in creation, there is also a differentiation. We are one and also unique in our oneness. In Jesus we see this expressed as a gift. "Peace I bequeath to you, my own peace I give you" (John 14:27). With this gift of peace bequeathed to us inviting us to participate in his peace, we become unique expressions of Divine peace in our world. It is a sacred trust, a vital trust a call to trust in the Giver of peace.

Peace is about a relationship. It is a quality of relationship that breaks us open from within the core of who we are: God's instruments of peace. The Prophet Jeremiah understood this as a calling: "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you came to birth I consecrated you; I have appointed you as prophet to the nations" (Jeremiah 1:5). Jeremiah didn't hear his call from an ego stance, but rather a deep awareness that it was God's action upon his life and within his life. If there is going to be peace in the world, if there is going to be meaning in the world, it is because we have been created in the image and likeness of God who will be forming and consecrating and appointing us to be in relationship with all of creation.

We need to pause for a moment and let the truth of our relationship with God and all of God's creation touch us. What breaks your heart open? What causes you to become attentive to the heart breaks within your world? What moves you to reach out and connect with your world? What stirs you to care? For many of us our hearts break open because we are an expression of God's compassionate love for all of creation. We are the love that God bestows into our world. We are called to be instruments of grace, instruments of peace. When we live

attuned to the grace of God we become healers in our world and are healed through others in the world.

As you may know, I am a stranger in the Abiding Love community. One day I sat in the foyer. There was a woman sitting at the desk folding small plastic bags. I asked her: 'what are you doing?' She simply replied: 'I am folding plastic bags'. And then she continued 'these bags will be used to hold potatoes so that on Monday people coming to the food bank will receive the gift of potatoes wrapped in a bag'. Now that may not sound like much, but I can tell you a peace enfolded me. She was not being pretentious nor curt. She was just doing what is done when we live attuned to grace. She was folding bags for the dignity of people who are served by the Church community.

On another day I was again sitting in the foyer. The little ones from the day care were walking out of chapel with their teacher. Three or four of them rushed over to me hugging my legs. The teacher said to me 'they are so loving they can't contain it.' They can't contain it – that is grace. I sat back and just wondered with delight at being touched by their expressive love.

Periodically I drop in on pastors to meet them and share with them information about our contemplative organization's mission. I am sure like most pastors; Pastor Lynnae had 20 other things on her plate that morning. But out of her office she came! She welcomed me and sat with me to hear what I needed to say. There was no aggressive 'what are you doing here?' Or an impatient 'please leave as I have church work to do'. It was a simple: Welcome! Her gift of peace came from within her and I heard echoed Jesus ' gift: *'not as the world gives peace, but my peace I give'*.

I am technologically challenged. I let Pastor Lynnae know I had a few PowerPoint slides I wanted to use for this presentation. Her response was to simply send them to the Business Administrator and she will know what needs to be done. The confidence of knowing there was someone who could transition this world of technology brought a wave of peace with

its tenderness. In living attuned to the grace of God, we emanate peace in the world around us by using the gifts and graces and talents we have received.

I have never walked into this building and left frazzled. I have never walked into the space and felt unwelcomed. The peace that flows as a consequence of love can fill the world. It is not about big things in life, but doing the little things attuned to the Peace of God within you that makes a difference.

The first slide tonight was ‘welcome come and rest your head and your heart’. To do this I think we have to step back for a moment. Our lives are so full. Listening to the news today, I heard of 150 people killed in an airplane crash. “ISIS has taken over another town,” the news reporter proclaimed. How do we listen to all the stories surrounding us? If we listen only with our ears we struggle with feeling angry or powerlessness. But God asks us to listen deeply to our heartstrings. Listen to the Spirit of God, the Heartbeat of Love deep within us. To step back and rest your head and your heart for a moment breathing peace into the world of pain and suffering may not change what happened, but it can change us in relationship with it.

I met a man this morning who works in prison ministry. He told me that he listens to stories that break his heart. He sees faces pained by life choices and he weeps. ‘What do I do with all I see and hear?’ he asks. “God I believe. Help in my unbelieving.” Life is not simply avoiding the pain nor our limitations. Peace is standing in relationship to people in all the joy and sorrow in life. It is a willingness to ‘stand with’ one another. As one of the seminarians who had just been diagnosed with cancer again said to the group “don’t take my suffering away from me but be with me in my suffering’. What an amazing gift of peace to just ‘be with one another’.

I see God’s peace in another story about a seminarian who was planning a vacation with her husband. Their total vacation budget was \$150.00. A deaf man walked past her and she could see how deeply stressed he was. She paused for a moment as she prayed ‘God what do you want me to do?’ She understood she needed to find this man and give him her

\$150.00. She found the man again and put the money in his hand. ‘You don’t know what this means to me’ he said. But she didn’t give to get anything back, she simply did what she felt God inspired her to do. The story doesn’t end there, two days later her sister-in-law sent her a check for \$150.00!

Andrew Harvey is an amazingly intense author, visionary, activist who is Founder of an *Institute for Sacred Activism*. His belief is that every action needs to be in relationship with the Divine. What Harvey asks of people is to dare believe in that relationship. If we are acting without that awareness of the Sacred, we will burn out. If we don’t act when we see the needs of our world then we are guilty of apathy (Harvey, 2009).

We are instruments of grace and peace for one another. We reach out and touch each other because that is what God invites us to do. Be that channel of grace in our world today, which quite frankly is desperately in need of it. We are one in that relationship of communion Jesus prayed for. And so as we extend the gift of peace to one another, really let it be the peace that comes from within you. The peace of Christ that dwells deeply within you longs to break forth through you into our world. Stand in relationship to one another, invite relationship with one another in the God of peace. *Father may they be one in us. As I am in you and you are in me, may they be so one that the world will know that you have sent me* (John 17:21-26).

Reference

Harvey, A. (2009). *The Hope: A guide for Sacred Activism*. Hay House.

Biographical Sketch

Sr. Jean Springer is Founder and Spiritual Amma of Eremos: A Center of Contemplative Life in Austin. Her belief and passion is the universal call to contemplation lived out in the daily lives of individuals and communities. She may be contacted at jeanspringer@eremos.org.