

Reflection for INCO Peace Celebration: "God's Dream of Peace"

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In Spanish, *paz*. In Hebrew, *shalom*. In Arabic, *salaam*. In Russian, *mir*. In Italian, *pace*. In Greek, *eirene*.

I don't need Google to help me find these words. Though I speak only a little Spanish and once briefly studied a little Greek, I know the words to say. And it occurs to me that there probably isn't another word or phrase I could translate into as many languages I don't even speak at all.

In English, of course, the word is "peace" ...

But it's not an adequate translation. You probably know that. For most of our world, however, peace is a relatively thin word. It has come to mean nothing more than a time when there isn't a war (or at least a time when violence isn't on our doorstep). Nothing wrong with that, but it doesn't capture what either the Jewish or Christian traditions mean when speaking of peace. *Shalom* is a much thicker word; it means "fullness" and "wholeness" and "prosperity" and "tranquility" and much, much more. (I don't know for certain, but I have a very strong hunch that *salaam* means much the same.)

Martin Luther King, Jr., knew this. He once observed that "true peace is not merely the absence of tension; it is the presence of justice." His most famous of sermons, the speech he gave in the 1963 March on Washington, was an articulation of that deeper understanding of peace: "I have a dream," he proclaimed. He called it a dream, but it was really a call for peace: not the polite peace of "making nice"; rather it was the resilient vision of peace that could work through, and amidst, human resistance for the sake of living into God's dreams for all humanity.

I'm an ordained minister in the Christian tradition, a priest in the Episcopal Church. The head of our denomination these days is Michael Curry. In one of his sermons, Bishop Curry tells a story from his childhood that goes back to that historic march. A group of ministers and community leaders were meeting in his family's living room and he, being an interested child in what the adults were doing, crept close and listened in. He didn't really know what he was listening in on at the time. It turns out it was a pretty big deal: it was the summer of 1963 and they were making plans to go to Washington.

He says he didn't understand the significance of that living room meeting at the time. And looking back on it, he doesn't think that even the adults knew fully at the time what they were walking themselves into. He says: "as they worked on details, looked for funding, settled conflicts among themselves, and organized a movement, they probably didn't realize they were part of a greater dream."

Martin Luther King knew he was part of something bigger. When he stood on the Washington Mall, he spoke of his dream, insisting that it was "deeply rooted in the [larger] American dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed – we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all [God's children] are created equal."

But Bishop Curry goes further to insist that this larger "American dream" is itself only part of something much bigger still:

The truth is, this dream of which King spoke is deeper than the American dream. It is as deep and old as Sir Thomas More's concept of utopia, or Dante's vision of the transforming love of God. It is as deep and old as Francis of Assisi giving up all that he had to proclaim good news to the poor. ... It is as deep and old as the apostle Paul declaring that ... there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, but a new human family (Galatians 3:28) ...

This dream ... is as deep and old as Isaiah's messianic vision in which the wolf "shall live with the lamb" and in which people will no longer "hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain ..." (Isaiah 11:6, 9). It is as deep and old as Moses, standing before Pharaoh and declaring, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews: Let my people go" (Exodus 9:1).

Ultimately this dream is as deep and old as the dawn of creation, when "the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy" (Job 38:7). It is as deep and old as when God, from the infinite depth of unbounded love, declared a beginning, "Let there be," and there was (Genesis 1:3). There is a dream!

The dream of God is a way of speaking of God's passionate love which seeks reconciliation, reunion, and communion between God and all of God's children.

*Crazy Christians* (pp. 30-31)

I take heart from the point of emphasis INCO has chosen for our gathering here this evening. We are not drawn together merely hoping for a little peace and quiet of our own; we are being drawn into "God's Dream" of peace for all human life, all human society, and all creation.

And I love that we heard (and saw) the storybook for children by Desmond Tutu. He's lived these words, of course, and he's preached them as well. He's also written an adult version of the storybook without pictures. It's a spiritual memoir entitled *God Has a Dream*. It's for adults, but he still addresses us children:

Dear Child of God, before we can become God's partners, we must know what God wants for us. "I have a dream," God says. "Please help Me realize it. It is a dream of a world whose ugliness and squalor and poverty, its war and hostility, its greed and harsh competitiveness, its alienation and disharmony are changed into their glorious counterparts, when there will be more laughter, joy, and peace, where there will be justice and goodness and compassion and love and caring and sharing. I have a dream that swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks, that My children will know that they are members of one family, the human family, God's family, My family."

In God's family, there are no outsiders. All are insiders. Black and white, rich and poor, gay and straight, Jew, Arab, Palestinian and Israeli, Roman Catholic and Protestant, Serb and Albanian, Hutu and Tutsi, Muslim and Christian, Buddhist and Hindu, Pakistani and Indian – all belong.

*God Has a Dream* (pp. 19-20)

We all want peace in our world. So let us dream. But not merely for ourselves. Oh, we must nurture peace in ourselves because we cannot share with another what we do not have within us. But it's not enough in the end; it's too thin.

So let us take care to sink our roots deeply into our faith traditions, into all of the ways that we are reminded that none of God's gifts, not even the gift of peace, is a thing to be hoarded as a private treasure. And so, may we abide in that "dream [of God that] is as deep and old as the dawn of creation, when 'the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy.'"