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# To be hopeful, do hopeful things

John Dear | Apr. 5, 2011 On the Road to Peace

A few weeks ago, after visiting oppressed Palestinians in the southern region of the West Bank, I climbed the Mount of Olives near the Old City of Jerusalem to pray in the beautiful little chapel of Dominus Flevit, which commemorates Jesus? lament of Jerusalem. Behind the little altar, a big window looks out over the Kidron Valley directly at Jerusalem, including the Old Wall and the golden Dome of the Rock mosque. It?s a stunning place to pray over Jerusalem and the world.

> *?Jerusalem, Jerusalem,?* Jesus cries in Matthew?s Gospel, *?you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how many times I yearned to gather your children together, as a mother hen gathers her young under her wings, but you were unwilling! Behold your house will be abandoned, desolate. I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ?Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord!? ? (Matthew 23:37-39)*

While following news of the Pentagon?s latest war in Libya, I recalled Luke?s version of Jesus? arrival on the outskirts of Jerusalem. According to Luke, Jesus broke down weeping over the world?s refusal to learn ?the things that make for peace.?

It?s one of the most touching scenes in the Gospels. He has walked over a hundred miles on a campaign of nonviolence from Galilee to Jerusalem, only to arrive at the Mount of Olives, see the famous city, and burst into tears because of its collaboration with the Roman empire in the demonic spirit of war. He could see that its destruction was inevitable.

> *As he drew near, he saw the city and wept over it saying, ?If this day you only knew the things that make for peace -- but they are hidden from your eyes.? (Luke 19:41-42)*

Alas, we too have not learned the things that make for peace. We have hundreds of thousands of armed troops waging war and military occupation in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Libya, not to mention our hundreds of military bases around the world. Our economy is collapsing, we have diminished funding for schools, jobs, housing, healthcare or environmental clean up -- but nonetheless we continue to spend billions for warfare and killing. We are so disconnected from reality, from our humanity, from global suffering. We seem addicted to war. We know well the things that make for war.

As a Christian, I don?t believe in war under any circumstances. But if we cared for democracy or suffering people as President Obama claims, then we would labor more diligently on behalf of the world?s suffering people, such as the people of Darfur, where some people say that four million people have died from war; or challenge the dictatorship of Saudi Arabia; or oppose the dozens of tyrants and dictators we have supported over the last decades.

No, our wars are carefully chosen. They make money; they secure oil; they insure weapons sales; they bring military hegemony; they keep the generals rich and in power. But, as I see it, they guarantee our own further

economic collapse and destruction.

I can imagine Jesus lamenting today:

> *America, America, you who bomb children, execute people, and prepare nuclear warfare, how many times I yearned to gather your children together?but you were unwilling. If this day you only knew the things that make for peace!*

What to do? What is the Christian response? Jerusalem has become the world. At some point, each of us has to lament and weep with Jesus over our inability to learn the things that make for peace.

I recommend spending time this Lent in prayer trying to comfort the nonviolent Jesus. As we approach Holy Week, imagine sitting with Jesus on the Mount of Olives. See him weep. Hear him lament our rejection of the things that make for peace. Listen to him, hold him, comfort him. What does he say to you in that moment? How do you react? Notice whether or not you want to learn the things that make for peace.

The challenge of Lent is to side with this nonviolent Jesus who knows the things that make for peace, and therefore, to side with all the victims of our wars, and all who pursue nonviolent means for peace. As followers of the nonviolent Jesus, we dare learn what others have not learned -- the things that make for peace.

What are the things that make for peace? The Sermon on the Mount catalogues a long to-do list for peace, love and justice. Peace comes through regular prayer and trust in the God of peace. Love for neighbor and enemy. Nonviolent resistance to evil. Compassion for everyone. Forgiveness toward those who have hurt us. Reconciliation with everyone. Justice for the poor. Opening our hearts to God?s loving grace. And radical discipleship to the nonviolent Jesus. As we embark on this life of nonviolence, Jesus offers peace as his personal gift to us, as we read in the Gospel of John.

Last week, I spoke to 2,000 students in a Catholic high school in New Jersey, and a thousand students in a Christian college in Kentucky, and probably another thousand church folk in between. Everywhere I go, I hear the same questions, the same lament -- *Is* peace possible? Can we stop our nation?s wars? How do we change the millions of bishops, priests and ordinary Catholics who are so gung-ho for war? How do we disarm ourselves? Are we doomed to our own violent self-destruction and imperial implosion? Is there any hope?

Certainly we need to spend more time in prayer, more time reading the Gospel, more time with the nonviolent Jesus. We need to be on the look out for any openings, any signs of hope, any breakthroughs of humanity. We need to speak out and take action for peace.

?If you want to be hopeful,? Daniel Berrigan said long ago, ?You have to do hopeful things.? I write this in New York City after visiting with Dan, who will be 90 next month. This week, he stood in Times Square with a handful of Catholic Workers and passed out leaflets to passers-by, urging them not to support the U.S. wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya. Their action coincided with the sentencing of five Plowshares friends in Tacoma, Wash. [1] -- including two Jesuits -- all sent to prison for daring to resist our nuclear arsenal. They show us some of the things that make for peace.

Jesus longs to gather us under his wings, protect us from our violent ways, and help us grow in peace. He grieves over our addiction to violence and war. But he does not sit on his hands and do nothing. He gets up, walks forward, and takes action. His civil disobedience in Jerusalem will cost him his life. He gives himself for us in the hope that we might finally learn the things that make for peace.

This Lent, instead of the things that make for war, let?s try to learn those things that make for peace and teach them far and wide.

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John Dear will speak today at Bucknell University in Pennsylvania and on Thursday at St. Joseph?s in Pacohuge, Long Island, New York. Next week, he will speak at Reed College in Portland, Ore., and then offer a day retreat for Pax Christi in Houston, Texas. He will lead a retreat on the Sermon on the Mount (April 29-May 1) in Los Angeles, and a retreat ?The School of Prophets,? on the prophetic tradition from Isaiah to Jesus, May 20-22 at Kirkridge, near Bangor, Pa. (www.kirkridge.org). To hear a new podcast interview with John, go to www.jesusradicals.com. His latest book, *Daniel Berrigan: Essential Writings* (Orbis), and other recent books, *A Persistent Peace* and *Put Down Your Sword*, as well as Patricia Normile?s *John Dear On Peace*, are available from www.amazon.com. To contribute to Catholic Relief Services? ?Fr. John Dear Haiti Fund,? go to: http://donate.crs.org/goto/fatherjohn. For further information, or to schedule a lecture or retreat, visit: www.johndear.org.

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