

“They say to each of us, black and white alike, that we must substitute courage for caution. They say to us that we must be concerned not merely about who murdered them, but about the system, the way of life, the philosophy which produced the murderers. Their death says to us that we must work passionately and unrelentingly for the realization of the American dream.” The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., speaking at the funeral of 4 little girls killed in the 16<sup>th</sup> Street Baptist Church bombing September 18, 1963

Will you pray with me please?

When I first heard about the massacre at Emmanuel AME Church in Charleston SC Thursday morning when I woke up I was furious, I was angry, I could not believe that ONCE MORE in just a matter of weeks, of days, I had to be in prayer...AGAIN... for more racially motivated murders. I did not want to pray for the families and friends of the murdered, I did not want to pray for the shooter and his family, I did not want pray because I am tired, tired to death of praying. I don't know if I have any more prayer in

me. Why do we have to keep praying prayers of lament for lives taken instead of praying prayers of thanks for peace and lives well lived?

I was angry, boiling, spitting mad angry... and then my anger gave way to grief, which in turn gave way to a spirit of hopelessness. If I'm being completely honest, that hopelessness is standing next to me here today. I struggled about how to address this, if I should address it at all from the pulpit and I realized that I had to, I had to speak because silence is getting us nowhere...but how to talk about something so dark, so awful ...so many questions, so few answers....

I tossed and turned as I lay in bed the last few nights, wrestling with my thoughts... I asked the question that bedevils us all in the face of evil—WHY GOD?

Why God? We are not the first people to cry out to God in the face of tragedy, we search the Scriptures, intently looking for an answer to the problem of evil and the answer eludes us. None the less, we ask “why.”

In the Old Testament, the prophet Habakkuk experienced that bottomless why. As a prophet to the people of Israel who had finally reached the Promise Land he realized that the people living in this land provided by God were supposed to reflect the goodness of God; their lives were to be characterized by justice, mercy, humility, and love for one another. But instead, unfettered violence was the norm and God's intervention was nowhere to be seen. In Habakkuk (1:2-4) he cries out for relief. He struggles to understand why God seems so far and he cries out for justice.

When we look at the problems of gun violence and racial hatred in our country, we could repeat Habakkuk's complaint word for word. How long O Lord must I cry for help and you do not listen?

I do not want to give you words of comfort this week, because I think this is a time that we must sit in our discomfort, we must poke at ourselves and ask the hard questions, we must search in our own hearts and minds

for how; how we will address this issue of national violence, of racial hatred. We have to move beyond hashtags, # Ferguson, # Baltimore #Blacklivesmatter #Alllives matter and CHANGE.

How can we change, Where can we change, WHAT can we change that will make a difference, that will help us to live out Gods gospel of peace, and justice and mercy for all people. ALL people.

I resist the urge to provide a message of comfort this week. Ecclesiastes reminds us that there is a time for every purpose under heaven. This is a time for lament and not for comfort so let us also cry out with the prophet:

**2** How long, O Lord, must I cry for help  
and you do not listen?

Or cry out to you, "Violence!"  
and you do not save?

**3** Why do you let me see wrongdoing  
And look at trouble?

Destruction and violence are before me;

Strife and contention arise.

**4** So the law becomes slack and justice never prevails.

The wicked surround the righteous

Therefore judgment come forth perverted.

And so we call out to God, but I believe that God calls back to us as well. “Why do YOU allow this?” and we have to figure out how to answer that question beyond talk, beyond the doors of our sanctuary. Why DO we allow this?

And so I resist the urge to provide a word of comfort this week, but I will provide a word of hope. But to get that hope I am going to ask you to follow me...

Yesterday our front lawn was filled with little girls, Daisy's, Brownies and Girl Scouts who, while maybe too young to fully understand the implications of their actions provided a glimmer of hope for us , for the world, and that is why I turned our service upside down today.

This Peace Pole standing before you proclaims...May peace prevail on earth

This same message is found on peace poles in hundreds of languages around the world.

The peace pole has become an internationally recognized symbol displaying its message of “May Peace Prevail on Earth”, the message of the hopes and dreams of the entire human family. The Peace Pole project is the official project of the World Peace Society, a nondenominational organization whose sole mission is to unite people across the world through the universal peace message. It started in Japan in 1955 by Masahisa Goi, (1916-1980), a Japanese philosopher and humanist who decided to dedicate his life to spreading the message, “May Peace Prevail on Earth” in response to the destruction from the bombings on Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

Mr. Goi believed that peace begins in the heart and mind of each individual and that we all share a common responsibility for the future of our planet. He started a

peace movement as a way of uniting the hearts of humanity, transcending all boundaries of race, religion or politics. Over 200,000 peace poles are planted around the world in over 200 countries, in places including the North Pole in Canada, pyramids in Egypt, the Allenby Bridge over the Jordan River on the border between Israel and Jordan, Hiroshima, Japan, Angkor Wat in Cambodia and now here we add a second peace pole in Greenbelt.

This pole brings us into a global community of all faiths and nationalities who are working to make a better, more positive world. This peace pole represents our wish for the future. A future that sees us becoming a more tolerant country, and a place where the ultimate goal is working with other countries for lasting peace throughout the world. I would, add that I pray that it adds the additional goal of lasting peace within our own country, between our own people

The work towards bringing about world peace begins with inner peace. Take a moment to think what our world would be like if all people offered a handshake instead of a

clenched fist, if people considered friendship instead of hatred. As war begins with thoughts of war, peace begins with thoughts of peace. The Peace Pole reminds us to keep peace ever present in our thoughts. Take this opportunity to look at where we are and where we are heading. Imagine peace starting with peace in our hearts, peace in our own relationships as well as peace seeping into the larger conflicts of our time.

With the dedication of this Peace Pole, we express that fundamental human desire to have peace, to avoid violence, to see fellow human beings – not as our enemies – but as our brothers and sisters, to stimulate that global trend toward a culture of peace. When people walk by this monument to peace, we hope it causes them to think about its message of peace within their own heart, with their family, their community and carry that message: May peace prevail on earth. May this pole stand as a reminder for you to take the path of peace. May it raise awareness and inspire a new generation of peace makers!

**May Peace Prevail on Earth**



**Leader:** We dedicate now this Peace Pole and ourselves to the cause of peace. If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other. (Mother Teresa)

**All :*May we recall and embrace our connection.***

Leader: The single clenched fist lifted and ready, or the open hand held out and waiting. Choose: For we meet by one or the other. (Carl Sandburg)

**All: *May we have the wisdom and the courage to choose the open hand.***

If you want to make peace, you don't talk to your friends. You talk to your enemies. (Moshe Dayan)

**All: *Together may we learn to talk to our enemies, and to listen to them.***

**Leader:** Peace is not something you wish for; it's something you make, something you do, something you are, and something you give away. (Robert Fulghum)

**All: *May this day mark the beginning anew of our resolve to make peace, do peace, be peace, give peace.***

**Leader:** Peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal. (Martin Luther King, Jr.)

**All:** *May we be granted the patience, faith and wisdom that nonviolence demands.*

**Leader:** The pursuit of peace resembles the building of a great cathedral. It is the work of a generation. In concept it requires a master-architect; in execution, the labors of many. (Hubert Humphrey)

**All:** *May an architect of peace emerge sooner rather than later, and may we, each in our way, willingly, hopefully, prayerfully take up the labor of peace.*

**Leader:** Let us strive for peace within ourselves and within our world; to actively work in nonviolent ways to abolish war and injustices from our own hearts and from the face of the earth. We pray for our world leaders that they will reject the violence of war and work for conflict resolution and justice through negotiation and diplomacy. May our Peace Pole be a reminder to us and a witness to our community of our commitment to work for a just and peaceful world.

**All: May it be so, and amen.**

Adapted from Fox Valley Jewish Neighbors dedication.  
September 17, 2011

Let there be peace on earth  
And let it begin with me.  
Let there be peace on earth  
The peace that was meant to be.  
With God as our Father  
Brothers all are we.  
Let me walk with my brother  
In perfect harmony.

Let peace begin with me  
Let this be the moment now.  
With every step I take  
Let this be my solemn vow.  
To take each moment  
And live each moment  
With peace eternally.  
Let there be peace on earth,  
And let it begin with me.