

PEACE IS PRIZELESS

A Sermon Delivered

by

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Years ago this date, November 11, was called Armistice Day. I remember that at school we all stopped what we were doing at 11:00 o'clock for a minute of silence. I recall those quiet moments always affected me deeply. It was a sombre and eerie mood with the unusual silence broken only by the shuffling of feet. The teacher said we were honoring all those who died that we might live. I believed it. I believed then that the end of World War I would be the end of war. After all, the teacher said so!

Many years and many wars since then we find ourselves tonight living in a world where war, in one form or another, rages all over the globe. And once again young men from our home towns are going to far places to battle and die in the most controversial and unpopular conflict ever recorded in American history.

If there is one issue that overrides everything else in modern life here and everywhere it is the issue of peace. Even though we know that war is obsolete with the possibility of being carried to the full extension of its awesome power of atomic destruction, men still fight. Men collectively exhibit a group insanity that would justify putting any individual in a mental hospital. Nations still play at the game of war like Russian roulette gambling that the conflict will be kept within bounds that will save our entire planet from incineration.

In this kind of world, a world in which the only guarantee of the survival of life as we know it is the attainment of alternatives to war and the peaceful settlement of disputes, there was no individual this year who in the opinion of the judges merited receiving the Nobel Prize for Peace! This year "Peace is Prizeless."

Why? Why is it that when most needed, when the spectre of war looms large in every heart on earth, no dramatic cause of peace has been served this year?

History has, I think, some light to shed on the problem even if it has no answer to offer. There have been other times when crisis was the mood of the hour. And almost invariably men of vision rose to speak. Leadership came forward. Great minds and souls from the prophets of ancient Israel to Dag Hammarskjold and U Thant of our own time captured the imagination of men. Sometimes the tide was turned back. At other times, when battle could not be stemmed, there was at least the rationalization and justification of righteousness that made the horror of war appear as it really was -- a horror.

But today those voices are gone. Where are the successors to Ghandi, Albert Schweitzer and Dag Hammarskjold? Where indeed are

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the successors to Franklin Roosevelt and Winston Churchill who even though captains in war were listened to by a world yearning for peace because their words supported the faltering spirits of battle weary nations. The phenomenon of silence is even more amazing now when our entire world could, through modern technology, listen from one end to the other -- if only there were those to speak.

When Pope Paul visited New York City and the United Nations in behalf of peace there was a brief flurry of hope, enthusiasm and commitment. But now even his voice falters and is paid no heed. "Peace is Prizeless."

Every Friday night in this sanctuary we pray as did our fathers before us for generations: "Grant us peace!" as if this alone would move the Almighty to give us what we really do not want sufficiently to earn it.

For this, I feel, is the answer. Peace is prizeless because enough of us do not really want peace. The voices of peace are silent because we will not listen. These words are harsh but the fact appears to me self evident. Men do what they want to do. Rationalize, explain, argue as you will, men ultimately do what they want to do. And right now the majority of men see war as a solution not a problem. Not the victims, not the peasants in Viet Nam, not the soldiers dragging through the fields and forests -- not they, even if once they did. But the armchair generals, the majority of citizens support war. We say we don't, but we do. For in the argument as between war and a so-called communist victory in Viet Nam, our nation opts for war. How else explain the division of Americans into the majority of "hawks" and the few "doves" with the contempt which any who dissent from war receive. "Peace is Prizeless."

War in most minds is honor & glory. Victory is described as the reward of struggle for "Freedom and Democracy". But it also spells unmerited death and unspeakable suffering.

Do you really doubt that men admire war? The other night I went to listen to a candidate for the United States Senate from Nebraska. No, not Morrison and not Curtis. I went to hear a Methodist minister who takes his religion so seriously that he applies its teachings to his political and social views. Tom Rehorn, as a write-in candidate, was of course defeated. But in his defeat there is also the implied defeat of the importance of the issue of peace.

Because his stance was not the popular line, his information was information which people do not like to hear, the issues he debates involve analyzing the truth of what we are told is happening in Viet Nam and elsewhere where Americans are committed to military ventures.

It is not my purpose here to agree or to disagree with what Tom Rehorn said beyond telling you that I feel he and those like-minded serve a vital and determinative purpose in American life.

What I do find overwhelmingly important is that amidst a spirited campaign, and in times that try men's souls and kill their bodies, at a time when the issue of war and peace is the one primary problem of mankind, only 35 people were present to hear a man talk about that problem! War is now taken for granted. "Peace is Prizeless!"

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On the other hand I heard another speaker address himself to the subject of patriotism before a room jammed to the walls with listeners hanging on every word as he described how indebted we are to the men who, in his words, "were dying at that very moment in order that we might be free". I wonder if any in that room felt as I did. For I confess to not one shred of indebtedness. I feel only a sense of shame and guilt and remorse for every life snuffed out be it American soldier, a humble peasant or a helpless child of North or South Viet Nam or anywhere else. Every soldier has my unqualified respect as a human being, my compassion for his heart, my homage as a victim of the senseless resort to violence in today's world. But in our time Peace is Prizeless. There are no accolades to peace, only to war; no attention to peace, only to war; no glory to peace, only to war.

The Norwegian Nobel Committee which announced that no Peace Prize would be given this year gave no reason for their decision. The nearly \$60,000.00 prize reverts to the Fund and may be granted another time. Ten times the prize has gone unawarded. This year was one of them. This year Peace was Prizeless.

As the Committee gave no reason, neither shall I. Only how can we fail to recall the prophet's cry of anguish:

"They lead my people astray, saying:
Peace, and there is no peace!"

Today is now called Veterans' Day. And I am wont to honor the veterans of war. I am eager to honor them if there be included among them not only soldiers in the ranks, but the civilians in the streets, the parentless crippled children, the maimed and the hurt and the dead who belong not to "us" or to "them" but to the family of man.

Our Torah tonight in telling the story of mankind says: "These are the generations of Israel".

Will there be more generations? If so I would honor all generations past and present and future with a struggle for a world where Peace is not Prizeless, but where Peace is the theme of liberty and faith and the prize of peace is human life. Amen.

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On the other hand I heard another speaker address himself to the subject of patriotism before a room jammed to the walls with listeners hanging on every word as he described how indeed we are to the men who, in his words, "were dying at that very moment in order that we might be free". I wonder if any in that room felt as I did. For I confess to not one shred of indebtment. I feel only a sense of shame and guilt and remorse for every life snuffed out by an American soldier, a humble peasant or a helpless child of North or South Viet Nam or anywhere else. Every soldier has my undivided respect as a human being, my compassion for his heart, my honor as a victim of the senseless, resort to violence in today's world. But in our time Peace is priceless. There are no accolades to peace, only to war; no attention to peace, only to war; no glory to peace, only to war.

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