Sunday, May 22, 1983
PEACE AND PENTECOST (100th Monkey Story)
Acts 2:1-13; John 14:25-31

"In 1952, on the island of Koshima, scientists were providing monkeys with sweet potatoes dropped in the sand. The monkeys liked the taste of the raw sweet potatoes, but they found the dirt unpleasant. One day an 18-month-old female named Imo found she could solve the problem by washing the potatoes in a nearby stream. She taught this trick to her mother. Her playmates also learned this new way, and they taught their mothers, too.

"This cultural innovations was gradually picked up by various monkeys before the eyes of the scientists. Between 1952 and 1958, all the young monkeys learned to wash the sandy sweet potatoes to make them more palatable. Only the adults who imitated their children learned this social improvement. Other adults kept eating the dirty sweet potatoes.

"Then something startling took place. In the autumn of 1958, a certain number of Koshima monkeys were washing sweet potatoes — the exact number is not known. Let us suppose that when the sun rose one morning, there were 99 monkeys on Koshima Island who had learned to wash their sweet potatoes.

"Let us further suppose that later that morning, the hundredth monkey learned to wash potatoes. Then it happened! By that evening, almost everyone in the tribe was washing sweet potatoes before eating them. The added energy of this hundredth monkey somehow created an ideological breakthrough!

"But noticed! The most surprising thing observed by these scientists was that the habit of washing sweet potatoes then spontaneously jumped over the sea — colonies of monkeys on other islands and the mainland troop of monkeys began washing their sweet potatoes!" (Quoted from the book, The Hundredth Monkey, by Ken Keyes, Jr.) (Other fascinating details can be found in the book Lifetide by Lyall Watson.)

Thus when a certain critical number achieves an awareness, this new awareness seems to be communicated directly from mind to mind, and it jumps all barriers. No one, of course, knows what the exact critical number is. The idea of the hundredth monkey is used for illustration. But it does mean that when only a limited number of creatures know of a new way, it may remain the conscious property of these people.

But there is a point at which, if only one more person tunes in to a new awareness, the field is strengthened so that this awareness reaches almost everyone!

I think it was something like this that happened that first Pentecost. Remember that after Jesus' resurrection, the disciples didn't know exactly what to do about the experience they had had. During the 50 days between Easter and Pentecost, they had seen the risen Christ at times, and then after a while they saw him no more. But they stayed together. They prayed together. They elected a new disciple to take the place of Judas, who had committed suicide. Probably also during those days they talked about many of the experiences they had with Jesus.

They remembered that Jesus had earlier promised that after he was gone from them in a physical sense, what he called the Holy Spirit would be with them and over a period of time would teach them all things and would bring to their remembrance all that he had taught them.

In other words, after a period of time, this new awareness would kind of soak in, and once this happened to enough of his followers, a whole new kind of spirit and power would be working among them and in them.

Hasn't this happened to you? Let's say you have a series of overwhelming experiences. While you are in the midst of these events, it's often difficult to make any sense out of them. Only after we have a little distance and some time to think and sort things out does it all begin to make sense to us. And it enough people have the same experience and work together, then, like the story of the hundredth monkey and the story of the day of Pentecost, it happened! They were all together in one place, and they began to experience a new awareness and power that was greater than anything they had experience before. The book of Acts has difficulty in describing it. It was like the rush of a mighty wind. It seemed as if tongues as of fire were distributed and resting on each one of them.

This new awareness spread throughout all the crowd that was gathered there. Everyone present could feel the presence of the Spirit that was moving among them. More than anything else, the people present felt a new awareness of unity and harmony among them. And this was all the more remarkable because there were people there from many different countries who spoke many different languages. The barriers of separateness came down.

Not let's see how this hundredth monkey phenomenon and the Pentecost experience apply to our efforts to achieve world peace. I begin with the basic assumption that we all want peace, and a second important assumption is that the Christian faith is, above all, a religion of peace.

In fact, the Christian vision of peace is based on the fact that the central vision of world history in the Bible is that of seeing all creation as one; every creature living in community and peace with every other creature. Our Biblical faith teaches that all persons are children of a single family, members of a single tribe, heirs of a single hope. It's a radical idea!

It is a vision encompassing all of reality. Thus Isaiah envisions a time when:

"The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall feed; their young shall lie down together, and the lion shall set straw like the ox... They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain." (Isaiah 11:6-9a)

At the same time, the Bible is not romantic or naïve about its vision for peace. It never assumes peace will come naturally or automatically. We human beings have many ways of helping or hindering the coming of peace.

Today scientific philosophers like Lewis Thomas see this overall harmony and unity built into creation and see that we human beings have a part to play in it. Thomas recently wrote:

"The life of the Earth is, in a sense, all one single huge life, made up of innumerable discrete working parts that interact with each other in continual, complicated maneuvers so that the whole being maintains a wonderful kind of stability for itself over the 3.5 billion years of life's existence on the planet, catastrophes of one sort or another have occurred; continents have

split and drifted away from each other on the crustal plates that comprise the earth's cracked shall, volcanoes have clouded the atmosphere and shut off the sunlight, meteorites have crashed into the surface, ice ages have come and gone, countless species have emerged and then become extinct, but the life of the whole organism goes on."

The Lewis goes on to say,

"Now humanity is here, a very recent development. We have the power to become a new kind of endangerment to the earth's life, outmatching any of the natural catastrophes before our time. It is possible, but not necessarily probable. We might, if we use our brains, and act together as a species, turn out to be relatively harmless, even, with brains and luck, useful. It's up to us."

It is up to us! Peace is not something that just happens. Peace is produced by people of good will who set out deliberately to work for peace. It was General and then President Eisenhower who said in 1959, after he had retired, "I like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than are governments." And he went on to say, "Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of their way and let them have it."

What, then, can people like us do?

1. First of all, we can begin to believe that world peace is possible. This does not mean that we are to have a naïve point of view or think that obtaining and maintain peace is easy, but it is possible!

Remember the story of the hundredth monkey, and remember that first Pentecost. Before Pentecost, the disciples never thought it possible that they would be able to spread the good news of God's love as it had been shown in Jesus Christ. But once they began to believe and act as if it were possible, a new force came into their lives.

Many ideas in this world, both negative and positive, become self-fulfilling prophecies. George Kennan said, "Let us remember what history teaches us: nothing so contributes to the real inevitability of armed conflict as the very belief in that inevitability. People who allow themselves to be persuaded that armed conflict is inevitable begin to act in ways that make it unavoidable, whether or not it was originally the case."

We must use the power of our collective consciousness, the power of prayed, the power of the Christian vision which sees all people as one family, and then envisions a world in peace.

Ultimately the true strength of any nation or any group of people is not its destructive force, not in its armaments, but in its positive force, in the inner strength of the people, in the vision we carry.

But it's so easy to forget all this and place our ultimate trust in armaments and destructive weapons. It's not a new problem. Isaiah the prophet in the Old Testament had to warn his nation and its leaders that their complete trust in their defenses was the opposite of genuine faith. It's the worship of a false god.

What we need more than anything else today is more and more people working together to create a world consciousness of our common humanity. That's what the Christian faith is all

about. Certainly a large part of the meaning of Pentecost is that we are all one family under God — Americans, Russians, Iranians, Chinese, Koreans, Vietnamese, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Arabs, Buddhists, and whatever else we like to call ourselves. We've got to stop seeing the world as divided between them and us.

We are all too ready to treat as important all the different that our minds notice: skin color, ethnic background, social status, religious affiliation, political loyalty, our differing ideas and opinions, and on and on. When we continually magnify these outward signs, we create the experience that others are really different from us. Then we forget that we are far more alike than we are different. It's all a matter of emphasis. Let's instead emphasize that we don't live is isolation. We are all interconnected. We all live in one world. We are affected by a lack of harmony of any type anywhere on the planet, even when we are not consciously aware of it.

What we say and do can affect the well being of all of us. We know that our health may be affected if we live among diseased people. What we are now beginning to learn is that our peace of mind may be affected if we live among disturbed people. Our happiness may be affected if we live among unhappy people. Our love may be affected if we live among unloving people.

The point is, each one of us can work for peace right where we are, and the effect it will have for the overall good is immense. World peace will come when we begin to replace the illusions of separateness with the truth of our togetherness. Instead of us versus them, it must become all of us together on this planet.

That's what Pentecost is all about, and that' what true peace is all about. Of course this does not mean that all of us will always agree, but we can learn to disagree without throwing bombs or missiles at each other.

God calls us all to be peacemakers, and when we begin to work as peacemakers, God's peace which passes all understanding comes along with us. This morning as you leave this worship service, the youth of the church will give each one of you a small ribbon as a symbol of peace. You are also invited to take a copy of the book The Hundredth Monkey on the condition that you will read it, and when you have finished reading it, you will pass it on to someone else to read. And I hope you will also each take as a gift a small card on which is printed the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Amen.