SUNDAY, OCTOBER 20, 1985

"A JUST PEACE IS POSSIBLE"

ISAIAH 2:2-4, 11:6-9; MATTHEW 5:9

WE'VE ALL SEEN THOSE PICTURES IN CHILDREN'S MAGAZINES WHERE YOU ARE ASKED TO "FIND THE HORSE HIDDEN AMONG THE TREES." AT FIRST GLANCE YOU SEE ONLY THE TREES; THE IMAGE OF THE HORSE IS CLEVERLY CONCEALED IN THE LINES OF THE DRAWING. IT IS ONLY WHEN YOU VISUALLY "STEP BACK," SHIFTING YOUR FOCUS AND CONCENTRATION, THAT THE HORSE'S IMAGE SUDDENLY LEAPS OUT AT YOU, MAKING YOU WONDER HOW YOU EVER MISSED SEEING IT.

SOMETIMES TOO IN THE REAL WORLD IT'S DIFFICULT TO GET A NEW PICTURE, A NEW VISION OF REALITY. IT'S THERE ALL THE TIME, BUT WE DON'T SEE IT UNTIL WE STOP AND LOOK AGAIN; UNTIL WE SHIFT OUR FOCUS; OUR POINT OF VIEW, UNTIL WE ARE OPEN TO SEEING SOMETHING NEW.

THAT'S WHAT THE MINISTRY OF JESUS CHRIST WAS ALL ABOUT. HE WANTED PEOPLE, YOU AND ME, TO HAVE A NEW VISION; TO SEE GOD AND THE WORLD IN A NEW WAY; TO SEE THE WHOLE CREATION AS INTER-CONNECTED, AND BEING IN HARMONY. LIKE ISAIAH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT OF THE BIBLE, JESUS COULD SEE THE PURPOSE OF GOD UNFOLDING AND ALL CREATION MOVING

TOWARD SUCH HARMONY, THAT AS ISAIAH PUT IT--
"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 EAT
STRAW LIKE THE OX. THE SUCKING CHILD SHALL
PLAY OVER THE HOLE OF THE ASP, AND THE WEANED
CHILD SHALL PUT HIS HAND ON THE ADDER'S DEN.
THEY SHALL NOT HURT OR DESTROY IN ALL MY HOLY
MOUNTAIN; FOR THE EARTH SHALL BE FULL OF THE
KNOWLEDGE OF GOD AS THE WATERS COVER THE SEA."

IT'S NO WONDER THAT JESUS SAID, "BLESSED ARE
THE PEACEMAKERS FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED
CHILDREN OF GOD." PEACEMAKERS ARE THOSE WHO
HELP THE WORLD MOVE TOWARD HARMONY.

THAT'S ALSO WHY THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
HAS TO BE CONTINUALLY HOLDING UP THE VISION
OF PEACE AS A VISION FOR ALL OF US TO SEE.
THE EVERYDAY WORLD TENDS TO KEEP US LOOKING
IN OTHER DIRECTIONS.

SOMEONE RECENTLY PUT IT THIS WAY--"PEACEMAKING
IS A SPIRITUAL STRUGGLE. IN THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL
SENSE, IT IS A BATTLE FOR THE SOUL OF HUMANITY.
TODAY PEACEMAKING IS A STRUGGLE BETWEEN TWO
FAITHS, EACH VERY REAL, EACH ELUSIVE."

WHAT THE WORLD ACCEPTS AS ITS SOURCE OF

SECURITY IS A FAITH SYSTEM. IT IS BUILT ON THE EXISTENCE OF A WHOLE SERIES OF LETHAL APPARATUS AND WEAPONS--ON SUBMARINES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA, MISSILES IN THE GROUND THAT VERY FEW OF US HAVE EVER SEEN, AND ON PEOPLE GOING TO WORK EVERY DAY PLANNING FOR, ORGANIZING FOR, AND THINKING ABOUT THE CONDUCT OF NUCLEAR WAR. MOST OF US HAVE ONLY A PERIPHERAL CONNECTION WITH ANY OF THIS AND NEVER SEE IT. BUT SOMEHOW AT A VERY DEEP LEVEL, WE BELIEVE IN IT. WE BELIEVE THAT OUR SECURITY IS TO BE DERIVED FROM INTIMIDATING OTHERS, BY ALLOWING THE MASSIVE THREAT OF DEATH TO BE COMMUNICATED IN OUR NAME.

THE OTHER FAITH IS A FAITH IN GOD; A FAITH THAT IS INSEPARABLE FROM A FAITH IN HUMAN BEINGS, BECAUSE THE TWO FAITHS WORK TOGETHER. THE POSSIBILITIES OF PEACE, OTHER THAN THROUGH INTIMIDATION, STEM FROM A FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF THAT IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT IS THE SOURCE OF ALL TRUE PEACE AND THAT BECAUSE OF THIS--WE HUMAN BEINGS CAN COME TO LOVE EACH OTHER, AND THAT EVEN NATIONS CAN LEARN TO LIVE TOGETHER IN PEACE.

SO THE STRUGGLE IS BETWEEN TWO VISIONS, A FEAR SYSTEM AND A SYSTEM BASED ON LOVE.

TODAY CHRISTIAN CHURCHES THROUGHOUT OUR NATION ARE OBSERVING "NATIONAL PEACE WITH JUSTICE DAY." THE OVERALL PURPOSE IS TO LISTEN AND LOOK AGAIN AT THE PROMISE OF OUR

RELIGIOUS FAITH WHICH IS THAT A JUST PEACE IS POSSIBLE. AND A SECOND AND RELATED PURPOSE IS TO COME TO UNDERSTAND AGAIN THAT PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE IS NOT THE KIND OF PEACE OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH IS TALKING ABOUT.

LET'S LOOK AT THE SECOND PURPOSE FIRST--THE IDEA THAT PEACE AND JUSTICE GO TOGETHER.

1. IN THE BIBLE, THERE IS NO PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE. IN OTHER WORDS, ACCORDING TO OUR CHRISTIAN FAITH, WITH ITS JEWISH TRADITION, THE ABSENCE OF WAR IS NOT AN ADEQUATE DEFINITION OF PEACE. THIS IS TRUE ON A PERSONAL LEVEL, AS WELL AS ON A NATIONAL OR WORLD-WIDE LEVEL.

FOR EXAMPLE, I KNOW HOMES WHERE THERE IS NO FIGHTING GOING ON--NO ONE IS PHYSICALLY ABUSING ANOTHER PERSON--BUT TO CALL THESE HOMES "PEACEFUL" WOULD NOT BE TELLING THE TRUTH. SOMETIMES THERE'S AN ARMED TRUCE WHICH IS BETTER OF COURSE THAN NO TRUCE AT ALL, BUT IT'S NOT THE SAME AS PEACE. THE TENSION IN SUCH PLACES CAN BE SO STRONG THAT IT'S UNHEALTHY TO LIVE THERE.

SOME PEOPLE USED TO SAY AND STILL SAY "THERE WAS PEACE BETWEEN BLACKS AND WHITES IN THIS COUNTRY UNTIL THE AGITATORS AND OUTSIDERS BEGAN TO STIR THINGS UP." BUT THAT'S SIMPLY NOT TRUE. ON THE SURFACE, THE SITUATION

LOOKED PEACEFUL, BUT UNDERNEATH THERE WAS NO PEACE. OPPRESSSION WAS SIMPLY BEING COVERED UP IN MANY INSTANCES. IT IS NOT PEACE, ACCORDING TO THE BIBLE'S DEFINITION, WHEN ONE GROUP OF PEOPLE DISCRIMINATES AGAINST ANOTHER, NO MATTER HOW POLITELY OR LEGALLY OR SUBTELY OR NON-VIOLENTLY THAT DISCRIMINATION IS CARRIED OUT. THE BIBLE WARNS US TO BEWARE OF THOSE WHO CRY, "PEACE, PEACE WHEN THERE IS NO PEACE."

PEACE IS ALWAYS THREATENED WHEN THERE ARE HUMAN BEINGS STARVING AND DYING OF MALNUTRITION. IN NATURE IF TOO MANY OF THE LIVING SPECIES IN OUR WORLD DIE OUT, THE OVER-ALL ENVIRONMENT AND ITS BALANCE IS THREATENED. UNEVEN USE AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE WORLD'S RESOURCES HAVE OFTEN BEEN THE CAUSE OF WAR. AND IF OUR ECONOMIC SYSTEMS FAIL US, THEN TOO, PEACE AMONG PEOPLE AND NATIONS IS DISRUPTED. SO PEACE AND JUSTICE GO TOGETHER.

WHEN THE BIBLE SPEAKS OF PEACE AND JUSTICE GOING TOGETHER, IT ALSO KNOWS THAT THERE WILL, FROM TIME TO TIME, BE DISAGREEMENTS AND CONFLICTS AMONG US. NON-VIOLENT CONFLICT IS A NORMAL AND HEALTHY REFLECTION OF DIVERSITY. AND WHEN WE LEARN TO WORK THROUGH CONFLICT CONSTRUCTIVELY, IT LEADS TO GROWTH OF BOTH INDIVIDUALS AND NATIONS. AS CHRISTIANS, WE BELIEVE THAT VIOLENCE CAN AND MUST BE MINIMIZED, EVEN ELIMINATED, IN MOST SITUATIONS.

WE ALSO KNOW AS CHRISTIANS THAT WHEREVER THERE IS INJUSTICE, VIOLENCE TENDS TO BREAK OUT--THAT'S WHY THERE IS NO TRUE PEACE WITHOUT JUSTICE.

2. SECONDLY, IN ADDITION TO KNOWING THAT JUSTICE AND PEACE GO HAND IN HAND, AS CHRISTIANS WE ALSO BELIEVE THAT A JUST PEACE IS POSSIBLE. AND THIS IS A VISION WE KEEP HOLDING UP FOR OURSELVES AND FOR THE WORLD.

WHY DO CHRISTIANS BELIEVE A JUST PEACE IS POSSIBLE?

A. BECAUSE IT IS GOD'S WILL THAT PEACE AND JUSTICE PREVAIL, AND GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE LONG RUN WILL NOT BE THWARTED. IN THE BEGINNING GOD CREATED THE WORLD AND MADE IT GOOD AND IT IS GOD'S CONTINUING DESIRE TO SUSTAIN THE WORLD AND NOT DESTROY. AS HUMAN BEINGS, WE SOMETIMES MAY SLOW DOWN OR TEMPORARILY FRUSTRATE GOD'S WILL, BUT WE CANNOT IN THE LONG RUN OVERCOME GOD'S INTENTION.

B. THE COMING OF JESUS CHRIST AS RECONCILER IS THE SUPREME REVELATION THAT GOD WANTS TO BRING PEOPLE TOGETHER WITH EACH OTHER AND WITH GOD, AND GOD'S CREATION.

THROUGH GOD'S SUFFERING LOVE IN JESUS, THE POWER OF THE FORCES THAT MAKE FOR WAR AND DISHARMONY HAVE ULTIMATELY BEEN BROKEN, AND

THE POSSIBILITY FOR RELATIONSHIP, FOR PEACE AND HARMONY, RESTORED.

THUS OUR HOPE FOR A JUST PEACE DOES NOT REST ON HUMAN EFFORTS ALONE, BUT ON GOD'S PROMISE THAT WE WILL HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY, AND THEREIN LIES OUR HOPE!

WHAT THEN CAN WE DO TO INCREASE THE POSSIBILITY OF A JUST PEACE?

1. FIRST OF ALL, IT'S A MATTER OF FAITH AND OF HAVING A VISION THAT A JUST PEACE WORLD WIDE IS POSSIBLE. WE ALL ARE ACQUAINTED WITH THE NOTION OF SELF-FULFILLING PROPHECIES. WHAT WE DEEPLY BELIEVE HELPS IT HAPPEN.

ONE PERSON PUT IT THIS WAY: "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 DECIDE, OR ALLOW THEMSELVES TO BE PERSUADED, THAT ARMED CONFLICT IS INEVITABLE, BEGIN TO ACT IN WAYS THAT MAKE IT UNAVOIDABLE, WHETHER OR NOT THIS WAS ORIGINALLY THE CASE."

THE SAME THING CAN BE SAID OF PEACE. NOTHING SO CONTRIBUTES TO THE POSSIBILITY OF A JUST PEACE AS THE VERY BELIEF IN THE FACT THAT IT IS POSSIBLE. WHEN WE BEGIN TO BELIEVE IN THE POSSIBILITY OF PEACE, WE BEGIN TO ACT IN WAYS THAT HELP IT TO HAPPEN.

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 CREATION LIVING IN COMMUNITY AND PEACE WITH EVERY OTHER CREATURE. OUR BIBLICAL FAITH TEACHES US 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 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."

2. SECONDLY, WE CAN INCREASE THE POSSIBILITY FOR A JUST PEACE BY PRAYING FOR AND LOVING OUR ENEMIES. THAT'S WHAT JESUS ASKS US TO DO. HE SAID, "YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AND HATE YOUR ENEMY.' BUT I SAY TO YOU, LOVE YOUR ENEMIES AND PRAY FOR THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU, SO THAT YOU MAY BE CHILDREN OF GOD." THAT'S PART OF THE NEW WAY OF SEEING AND ACTING IN THIS WORLD.

JESUS KNEW THAT IN THIS LESS THAN PERFECT WORLD, WE ALL HAVE ENEMIES. THUS JESUS DID

NOT SAY, "LOVE PEOPLE AND YOU WILL HAVE NO ENEMIES." AND TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES DOES NOT MEAN THAT WE REFRAIN FROM OPPOSING AND RESISTING OUR OPPONENTS WHEN WE TRULY BELIEVE IT IS THE RIGHT THING TO DO.

WHAT IT MEANS TO LOVE OUR ENEMIES IS THAT NO MATTER WHAT WE FEEL ABOUT ANOTHER PERSON, OR GROUP, OR NATION, OR WHETHER OR NOT WE OPPOSE THEIR BELIEFS, THERE MUST, AT THE SAME TIME, BE SOME ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT WHAT BINDS US TOGETHER IS GREATER THAN WHAT DIVIDES US.

3. THIRDLY, WE CAN INCREASE THE POSSIBILITY FOR A JUST PEACE BY BECOMING PEACEMAKERS IN THE LITTLE THINGS OF LIFE, AS WELL AS THE BIG. "BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS," SAID JESUS, "FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED CHILDREN OF GOD."

TO UNDERSTAND JESUS' STATEMENT A LITTLE BETTER, LET'S LOOK AT THIS WORD "PEACE." IN THE OLD AND NEW TESTAMENTS OF THE BIBLE, THE WORD "PEACE" IS USED OVER AND OVER AGAIN, IN FACT IT IS FOUND THREE-HUNDRED NINETY-THREE TIMES. SO WHEN JESUS USED THE TERM "PEACEMAKER," HE WAS BACKED UP BY A LONG AND RICH HERITAGE.

IN HEBREW, THE WORD PEACE IS "SHALOM," AND IT MEANS, AS I MENTIONED EARLIER, A LOT MORE

THAN THE CESSATION OF WAR, OR THE ABSENCE OF VIOLENCE. IT'S A POSITIVE WORD MEANING WHOLENESS, COMPLETENESS, HEALTH AND HARMONY AMONG LIVING THINGS. IT MEANS EVERYTHING WHICH MAKES FOR A PERSON'S HIGHEST GOOD.

PEACEMAKING BEGINS WITH YOU AND ME. JESUS SAID THAT WE BEGIN TO BECOME PEACEMAKERS WHEN WE INVITE THE PEACE OF GOD INTO OUR OWN LIVES AND THEN WE IN TURN REACH OUT TO OTHERS. BUT ONE DOES NOT ALWAYS HAPPEN BEFORE THE OTHER. IT'S ALSO TRUE THAT WHEN WE BEGIN TO WORK AS PEACEMAKERS, GOD'S PEACE WHICH PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING COMES ALONG WITH US.

THIS MORNING AS YOU LEAVE THIS SERVICE OF WORSHIP, MEMBERS OF OUR PEACE COMMITTEE INVITE YOU TO TAKE ONE OF THE BALLOONS WITH YOU AND WHEN YOU ARE OUTSIDE THE BUILDING TO LET IT GO ALONG WITH YOUR PRAYERS FOR PEACE AND YOUR PRAYERS FOR YOUR ENEMIES--THEN GO AND BE A PEACEMAKER WHEREVER YOU ARE. AMEN.