

Rev. Janet R. Doyle
Elmer Presbyterian Church
18th Sunday after Pentecost
Sunday, September 22, 2024
Scripture: James 3:13-17 and James 4:7-10
Sermon: Seeds of Peace

Nothing in this life happens by chance. What we sow we reap. It is an eternal principle. To live in peace, we must sow seeds of peace. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God." Peace doesn't just happen; we have to make it happen.

The events of the Bible take place during times of violence, much like our violent world today. And what is interesting about so many passages across the entire history of the Bible is how consistent is their cry for peace. In a violent world, the ancient people who wrote about the presence of God in their lives, wrote about peace.

Today's reading from the Letter of James says, "A harvest of righteousness is grown from the seed of peace planted by those who make peace." (James 3:18)

The Apostle Paul says, "Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Romans 14:9).

Three times following the Resurrection, when the disciples are in hiding, Jesus comes to them and says, "Peace be with you."

Three of the songs at the beginning of Luke's Gospel speak of peace, including the Song of Zechariah, which says, "By the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79).

The psalms are full of the yearning for peace like Psalm 34:14: "Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it." Another passage appears twice in the Bible, once by the Prophet Isaiah and once by the Prophet Micah. It says:

"God shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into plowshares,

and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

Isaiah 2:4 (also Micah 4:3 with slight variation)

The prophets envision a world in which swords and spears will be unnecessary and can be turned into gardening tools for planting the seeds that will grow into James’s “harvest of righteousness.” Another translation calls these “seeds of justice.” The Greek word translated as “righteousness” or “justice” has a deep meaning of “all things existing as God intends, the harmony of relationships, the balance of creation working in the ways it is supposed to.” In other words, a creation that is at peace within itself.

We use the language of seeds and gardening tools to speak of peace. Peace grows like a seed grows. We tend to growth with trowel, hoe, and plowshare and pruning hook. And we reap the bounty of peace in the harvest so that all may thrive. Peace is not a static, motionless thing. Peace is not passive. Peace is a dynamic force of sustenance and growth that binds us together like the grass binds the soil, keeping it safe from erosion.

There are staggering statistics from the National Institute for Health Care Management (NIHCM) about the violence in our country:

Over 42,000 people died as the result of gun injuries in the U.S. in 2023, NIHCM reports. The number of people killed by firearm violence, a leading cause of premature death, grew by nearly 43% between 2010 and 2020.

For every person killed in a shooting, more than two people survive. In 2023, 35% of gun deaths were homicides, 56% were suicides, nearly 4% were unintentional shootings, 3% were police shootings and less than 2% were mass shootings, according to the report.

The report also delves more deeply into mass shootings. While these events tend to capture the public’s attention the most, mass shootings makeup very few of the annual gun deaths in the U.S. But the annual total of mass shootings has spiked from 414 in 2019 to over 650 in 2023.

The cost of gun violence was more than \$557 billion in 2022. That figure is based on medical and quality-of-life costs, criminal justice costs, the loss of income because of death, disability, incarceration and loss of caregivers, and employers’ loss of revenue.

Gun violence also strains health care systems — survivors increase hospitalizations and spending by 1,449% and 1,713%, respectively.

Mental illness is often unfairly associated with gun violence. While suicide risk is heightened for people with certain mental illnesses, fewer than half of all people who take their own life have a known mental illness diagnosis.

Nearly 80% of children and adolescents who are shot survive, the report states. They often go on to live with a wide range of health problems, including chronic pain, substance abuse and psychiatric disorders.

In 2020, gun violence replaced motor vehicle crashes as the leading cause of death for people under the age of 19. And that trend has continued, according to the report. In 2021, 6.1 deaths per 100,000 people under the age of 19 were related to firearms, and 5.7 of 100,000 were due to car crashes.

Our nation has been through a variety of horrific events surrounding gun violence, and it has brought the issue to the forefront of our conversations.

There is an organization called **RAWtools** based in Colorado Springs. Their mission is to “Disarm hearts, Forge peace and Cultivate Justice.”

They collect guns and weapons and make them into garden tools and other hand tools. They said: “Beating swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks, and guns into garden tools creates a dynamic shift in our investment in time and resources. If we are no longer training for war, what else would we be doing? It doesn’t mean we are all to become gardeners, but it does mean we can invest in providing life sustaining resources for our communities. What if we made a commitment to solve our problems without guns and violence?”

In their book, **Beating Guns**, Shane Claiborne and **RAWtools** founder Michael Martin say, “The prophets knew that with a little holy fire metal can be reshaped – and so can people. They knew weapons that kill can be transformed – and so can people who kill. The prophets of old were not...trying to predict the future. They were trying to change the present. They invite us to dream of the world as it could be and not just accept the world as it is.” RAW is ‘war’ spelled backwards. It is a very interesting organization that sells its garden tools to help reinvest in communities to stop gun violence.

We can all choose peace over violence, when we choose justice over oppression, when we choose to sow seeds in the ground for a harvest of righteousness and peace it is then others will see the face of God. In these tense days, the world desperately needs followers of Christ to be peacemakers. To sow seeds of peace in our relationships, in our communities, in our church and in the world. We are also to be ambassadors of reconciliation in a world that doesn't want to reconcile our differences.

The reason the world isn't very adept at reconciliation and restoration is because it is often using the wisdom of this world to fix what is, in reality, a spiritual problem. Here is what James said on the topic: "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing" (James 3:16).

"But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy, and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace" (James 3:17-18).

So we are to be more than "peace lovers" or even "peaceable," we are to work for peace. Peacemakers are rare because making peace in a sinful world is hard work. Making peace in our relationships and community is hard work. We live in a society and a world that wants to fight rather than reconcile and negotiate and to shoot rather than listen and show love and to want control instead of peace. People are broken in our world, and it is only through giving your pain and brokenness to Christ will you find peace and healing.

Galatians 6:7-8 says: *"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A person reaps what he sows. Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life."*

Be careful what kind of seed you sow because the Word of God promises that you will reap what you sow. The devil will try to get you to sow the wrong kind of seed; but if you do, you'll be in trouble. If you get careless and cut back on your prayer time, study of the Word or worship, you'll plant the wrong kind of seed.

Make it a daily practice to sow seeds of peace and love, and we must all do that in order to reap a wonderful harvest of righteousness and peace.

Love of God is the answer for everything because when you feel the love of God and you know you are a child of God you plant seeds of peace around you.

James said that the wisdom from above is “peaceable,” “reasonable” and “full of mercy.” This sounds like someone who wants to have right relationships with others and with God, who values mercy and wants to be forgiven and at the same time offer and extend forgiveness.

Ask yourself: “What Kind of Seeds Am I Planting? How Can I Plant Seeds of Peace in my family, in other relationships, in my church, in my community and in the world?”

Gardening takes planning and preparation. To plant seeds of peace for a harvest of peaceful relationships, the ground of our hearts needs to be prepared.

Ask the Lord to free you of any biases or prejudices or hurts that are present in your life and to forgive and reconcile and ask for forgiveness, so that the soil of your heart can be open to the transformation that he wants to bring about to make you more like Jesus because it is then that we will all plant the seeds of peace each day.