



**ALL SAINTS CHURCH**  
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

**Peace With Our Adversaries; Peace In Our Hearts**  
A sermon preached by the Rev. J. Edwin Bacon, Jr.  
September 24, 2006

A rare confluence of religious observances this weekend brings to mind a deep belief I have. I believe that to be religious in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is to be interreligious. Yesterday was the first day of Rosh Hashanah for our Jewish sisters and brothers. Yesterday also was the first day of fasting during the Holy Month of Ramadan for our Muslim siblings. Yesterday, therefore, I began my fifth fast since 9-11 as a way of being in solidarity with Muslims throughout the world and learning more about that religion which holds so many core values in common with Christianity. Also I attended Rosh Hashanah services at the Pasadena Temple and Jewish Center where my dear friend and teacher, Joshua Levine-Grater is rabbi.

I was told as I left the temple yesterday that one of the things that had transpired and which I want to share was quite unusual. At the beginning of his sermon, Rabbi Levine-Grater mentioned that I had accepted an invitation once again to be in the congregation on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, which I've done for many years. A few handclaps responded to that announcement. Then a few more tentatively joined that applause. Then more, then more and then people began to stand and applaud. I then stood and acknowledged what was a generous and warm affirmation and then Rabbi Levine-Grater preached a very fine sermon that began the year 5767 for Jews throughout the world. As I was exiting some friends of mine who are congregants there interpreted what had happened. They said that it is their tradition not to applaud during services at their temple and that a standing ovation is rare indeed, if it had ever happened before. They were dealing with their resistance and then they broke through it, and I simply wanted you all to know of this because that applause was for you not just for me. Several congregants told me, "We are with you. Let us know what you need us to do and we will be there." I want you to know from that experience and from now more than 500 e-mails that I have received that there are people throughout the world who are supporting us.

I must admit that there is a big part of me that wants to get on to business as usual here while the IRS contemplates their next move. We are quite ready to supply everything requested of us by a court of law after we have our day in court, and we have informed the IRS of that. But all of that is in others' hands today after last week of carefully and prayerfully discerning as a community what our strategy would be. So now we at All Saints can be about receiving all the additional graces God's Spirit has for us as a gathered community this morning as we do our work of being a community of faith rooted in spirituality and healing and care and peace and justice.

There couldn't be better passages of scripture than the appointed ones (James 3:13-4:3, 7-8a; Mark 9:30-37) for getting us oriented to our work as we kick off this year as a

church – people called to serve God’s dream of peace, shalom, salaam, shanti for all the world, not just for ourselves. The passage from James informs us that every conflict that there ever was began and begins in some person’s heart and mind before it ever erupts into harmful words or deeds. Wars do not begin on battlefields. Wars begin in a person’s mind. Torture and murder do not begin with a water board or electrodes or a gun. Torture and murder begin when one of us thinks another person is less human than we are or less deserving of human rights than we are and, therefore, we begin to shred the values and principles of the Geneva Convention in our mind before we shred them in reality.

The letter of James reads, “Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not get it; so you are prepared to kill for it. You have ambitions that you cannot satisfy, so you fight to get your way by force. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your own pleasures. You have to learn how to pray and the way you pray is to pray not only for yourself but for the whole human family and that’s the way you pray and that’s the way God answers your prayers. (James 4: 1-3)

And Jesus, observing the conflicts and disputes among his disciples, reminds them that a “who is greatest” mentality instead of a childlike servant mentality will always result in conflict. As Lamar Williamson puts it, “The disciples are struck dumb with embarrassment”, for they begin to experience and recognize (the light comes on) that there is a discrepancy between Jesus’ giving himself for the whole human family and their own desire (8:31-34) for self-aggrandizement as they argue about who is the greatest. “Their misunderstanding is not simply intellectual; it is existential. Their following of Jesus is outward only. He challenges them at a key point: the nature of true greatness.” (Williamson, Lamar, *Interpretation, Mark*, p. 169) True greatness is felt in the human heart. Being a child-like servant is experienced, the joy of giving your life away for the whole human family is experiential.

There is no doubt in my mind that one of the most direct routes to misery is to compare yourself to somebody else. And there are only a few steps from interior misery to making life miserable for someone else or making life miserable for your entire family, business, faith community, nation and world. I must say here that the holy Islamic concept of jihad is not in its genesis a word of violence, of holy war. The prophet used the word, “jihad” in the same way as the writer James and our leader, Jesus, used the word. It is an inner struggle to make one’s interior hygiene that of peace in order to be used as an instrument of external peace. That is the ultimate interest in fasting during the month of Ramadan – that interior struggle to become existentially, experientially a person of peace and justice. That is what Yom Kippur next Monday communicates to Jews – to turn around, *teshuvah* —from oppression and violence and inhumanity, to atone for any harm so that God’s dream of peace for the entire world can be achieved. At the center of our common life is the Clarion call of Psalm 34, “seek peace and pursue it.” This calls for interior transformation.

If you and I are going to continue to be stewards of what we have been given as a religion of peace and if we are going to continue to be stewards of what All Saints Church has

been given as a peace church. If you and I are going to be used by God to make a world of peace, we must always understand that there can never be an increase of peace around us if there is not an increase of peace within us. And in the words of Israeli general Moshe Dayan: “We don’t make peace with our friends. We make peace with our enemies.” Peacemaking is not about making peace with people with whom it is easy to get along; we are talking about Jesus-peace, God-peace, peace with our adversaries, peace with our enemies, peace with people we would like to slap and go to war with—that is God’s peace.

At the center of my reading this past summer was the collected works of James Carroll, one of the finest thinkers in the world today. And I wish that I had the attention that Hugo Chavez had this past week so that I could hold up Jim Carroll’s books and then check Amazon.com this afternoon and see how they were doing. [laughter] Jim’s seminal work is *Constantine’s Sword*. I think it’s a page-turner but it is 675 pages long. I enthusiastically recommend it as one of the most important books I have ever read. If you would like to go to a thinner volume called *Crusade* you can read there his chronicles of what has happened in this land since 9/11; he writes every Monday for the Boston Globe. In his description of Crusader mentality there is some meat I’d like to share with you briefly about the internal work Christians have to do because we need to understand that Christianity the way it has been practiced has been part of the problem, if not **the** problem in war-making and rattling of sabers.

1. The Crusader mentality “sees evil outside the self. In the devil. In the hated other.” We saw that on dangerous display last week with President Hugo Chavez when in referring to President Bush he called him the Devil and made a joke about how he still smelled sulfur in the UN gathering room. He showed himself to have the same mentality as President George W. Bush himself when he speaks of the axis of evil and destroying evil in Iraq and destroying evil in Iran and destroying evil in the Middle East and destroying evil in the terrorists. The uncomfortable truth is that when you and I or our president or anybody else posits evil outside ourselves, we never grow up into a maturity that takes responsibility for the evil in the world which we caused or which we contributed to. We never have to reflect on our role in the increase in terrorism by our contributions to the escalating cycle of violence in the world, and we don’t have to grow up and see that if there is violence in the world and in our families and often in the Church, we have some responsibility.

2. The second part of Crusader mentality which we need to ask God to help us get rid of is our unilateralism and individualism instead of community. Unilateralism never works. The Crusader mentality expresses itself in our profoundly American Protestant strain of individualism... “it is my way that counts.” Unilateralism and individualism celebrates not “grace” mediated by a community, but willpower exercised alone. Show me a spouse or partner who has unilaterally assessed what’s wrong with the family and then imposed his or her solution on the entire family and I’ll show you a dysfunctional family. Life is about community and that is about accountability and that is about checks and balances. Every time at my house I act presidential, imperialistic, or unilateral my wife tells me to get off my horse and let’s have a real conversation. I wish President Bush, the Senate and the House of

Representatives would come live with me for awhile to learn about checks and balances.  
[laughter]

3. The third problem with Crusader mentality is (this is Jim Carroll's phrase) that it insists on "univocal orthodoxy" – everybody must believe the same thing the same way about truth, democracy, God, 9/11 and Iraq. Either you are with us or you're against us. I'm going to stay connected to and protect only "us" not "them". I've rarely been so angry as I was this past week when the leader of Iran was in the same building as the President of the United States and the President of the United States could not take that as an opportunity to talk with the leader of a country we are talking about going to war with. He refused to talk because "He knows what he has to do and he refuses to do it." Subtext, therefore he is not worthy of a conversation. That is univocal orthodoxy insisting on everyone else in the world seeing things my way. Whenever throughout history there has been insecurity about the issues of power and a leader wanted to galvanize as much support as possible the tactic always has been to identify a common enemy, isolate that enemy and call him evil. We see the play of univocal – one voice – orthodoxy not only in international relations but in the church as well. Either you see Jesus, God, Church, theology, orthodoxy my way or you are not a true Anglican or Episcopalian or Christian. We saw plenty of that this past summer at General Convention.

4. The fourth item about Crusader mentality is the notion that God is a violent God and that violence is sacred. The Crusader mentality sees God as the enforcer of my way of seeing the world. God is a killer God. This theology became established in Christian history with Pope Urban II who launched the First Crusade in 1095 using the battle cry, "God wills it!" I am sorry that Pope Benedict has conveniently forgotten that we Christians cornered the market on sacred violence long before the prophet Mohammed even came into existence. He did not introduce violence to the religious stage; Christians were there first.

What is even worse, in order for us to portray God as a killer God we developed our own sacred violence theology. A theology of the atonement whereby an angry God insisted that the only way God could deal with God's disgust with us would be for God to become man and go up on the cross to die a Mel Gibson form of atonement.

5. Lastly, you and I have to figure out what Jesus means to us. Was Jesus about coming to be the bridge, the bridge of the gulf between us and God because we are so bad or did God take care of our separation when we were created and God called us good? Just imagine, every one of us when you were created God looked at you and smiled and said, "You're good." Even though we sin—even though we ourselves do evil, we are never not loved by God. And I believe that Jesus was about gathering people together in healing circles around a table like this or a basin of water and a towel and said to them, "No matter what the religious authorities say to you and no matter what the Roman Empire says to you, you are good and God loves you and everything in your life that is broken, that is alienated is already being healed. God looks upon us, even the most miserable sinner, with love and acceptance of our being and the reason God looks at you and me that way is because God wants you to look at everybody else that way. This week your eyes may convey the only look of divine

love from God that somebody else can see. It's a great and joyful and energizing responsibility that you and I have. Let me illustrate in closing.

One morning in 1958, my spiritual hero Thomas Merton, a Cistercian Monk in a monastery near Louisville, Kentucky put on a black suit to go to Louisville to see his doctor. There, outside an old hotel on a crowded street (the corner of Fourth and Walnut in downtown Louisville) he said,

“I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that all these people who were on the street, that I loved them. They were mine and I was theirs and that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking up from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world of the monastery, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness.

“The whole illusion of a monastic separate holy existence is a dream, an artifice. Not that I question the reality of my vocation as a priest, or of my monastic life as a monk, but the conception of "separation from the world" that we have in the monastery too easily presents itself as a complete illusion .... We are in the same world as everybody else, the world of the bomb, the world of race hatred, the world of technology, the world of mass media, big business, revolution, and all the rest. This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud in the middle of Louisville. To think that for sixteen or seventeen years I have been taking seriously this pure illusion that is implicit in so much of our monastic thinking. I have the immense joy of being a human being, a member of a race in which God became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now I realize what we all are.” And he concludes by saying, “And if only everybody could realize this!” But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun. (Thomas Merton, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966) pp. 140-41.)

My friends, it may not be able to be explained but I'm here to tell you it can be experienced. I guarantee every one of you that if you want to be a walking witness of God's divine, inclusive, unconditional, unkillable love in the life of every human being you see, you can be that. All you have to do is during communion today open yourself and say “God—I'm down for being one of your lovers in the world. I'm here to love my enemies, I'm here to love my adversaries, I'm here to love my neighbors, I'm here to love myself and I'm here to love you, God, the way you love me.” And if we open ourselves to that transformation, we will be peacemakers.

Amen.