<p style="text-align:center">Being Present with Peace
Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1: 1-8</p>

Myth of Redemptive Violence

I will list names of movies and you count how many of them you have watched. The Terminator, Commando, Die Hard, Star Wars, Aliens, Indiana Jones, Goldfinger, Dr. Strange, Dirty Harry… are you good? Sitting Bull, The Dirty Dozen, RoboCop, the incredible Hulk, the Way of the Dragon, Avatar, John Wick, Rambo, Spider-Man, Rio Bravo, Ironman, The Good, the Bad and the Ugly, the Lord of the Rings, Fistful of Dollars… how many have you seen? I like movies so I have seen many of them. I have just named about twenty movies. Can you find the commonality among them? They are all adventure action movies. Each movie is unique in its contents but the basic structure and plot of the movies are similar to one another. There are good guys and bad guys. Good guys fight against bad guys and eventually prevail against them through their might and violence, and law and order are restored.

[ppt] Walter Wink, a theologian, traces the origin of this dominant structure of stories back to the Babylonian creation myth. This myth tells the story of a god, Marduk and how he created the world and human beings. In a cosmic battle, Marduk, the god of order, killed a goddess, Tiamat, who was the 5-headed dragon of chaos, and Marduk created the world from her cadaver and humans from her blood mixed with clay. Cosmic order is established and sustained through violence. He calls it the myth of redemptive violence and "it is one of the oldest continuously repeated stories in the world."[1] [ppt] Think of old wild west movies. Good guys always fight against bandits and save a town with their guns! Ironman defeated the enemy with a plasma gun and mini rockets. The Hulk smashed the enemy with his big green fist. Violence saves and war brings peace. It's redemptive violence. Wink points out that the myth of redemptive violence is still pervasive in Western culture and we have already seen how the myth of redemptive violence is played out in the structure of action movies.

Unfortunately, the myth of redemptive violence has shaped many people's worldview and is played out even in our reality. Whenever we hear about wars breaking out, what do we do first? We tend to take a side. Who is on the good side? My side is always good and the other side is evil. Film producer, Robert Evan said, "There are three sides to every story: your side, my side, and the truth." However, instead of seeing an event or issue from different angles, people tend to simplify the complex realities into good and evil and paint the other side as evil. [ppt] Let me show you an image. Shortly after the Hamas-Israel war broke out, this image spread through social media. What do you see in this picture? Whoever created this image, the person would like you to see that Hamas uses children as human shields and Israel defends children. So, who is the bad guy in this picture? Hamas. But the reality is not so simple. Of course, Hamas should be blamed for using children and women as human shields. However, what this picture did not say is that the Israeli Defense Forces actually shot them all, Hamas, women, and children. Using children and women as human shields cannot be justified and neither can indiscriminate killing of children, women and civilians in the name of war. Since the Ukraine war broke out in 2022, 535 children have been killed in Ukraine. Do you know how many children have been killed in Gaza in the past two months? More than 6,600! See this image again. "There are three sides to every story: my side, your side, and the truth." The danger of the myth of redemptive violence is that it oversimplifies the reality we live in and instills a false belief that violence saves and war brings peace. It justifies violence as an essential and necessary means for keeping peace.

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[1] The Myth of Redemptive Violence by Walter Wink, The Bible in Transmission, Spring, 1999, 1.

However, violence doesn't save; it only destroys. We, Christians, are called to live not by the myth of redemptive violence but by a different story, the story of Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace.

The King of Peace Is Coming!

Jesus was born during the period of so called, Pax Romana, the Peace of Rome. However, the Pax Romana is a peace maintained by lethal military force and violence. The Roman Empire often demonstrated their terrifying force by hanging rebels on crosses and letting them slowly dye in agony. In some sense, the Peace of Rome was a peace made possible by the cross. Can we really call it peace? Not really.

Today is the second Sunday of Advent and the theme for this week is 'peace.' We hope for peace. We wait for peace. But the peace we are waiting for is not like the Peace of Rome.

A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
   the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert
   a highway for our God.
4 Every valley shall be raised up,
   every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
   the rugged places a plain.

Yes. We are called to make "paths straight" for the Prince of Peace. The first step to do this is 'repentance.' The messenger, John the baptizer, proclaimed a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. To repent means to turn away from. We need to turn away from our reliance on the myth of redemptive violence. We need to repent from the sin of confirming the worldly belief that peace is only possible when we destroy our enemies and that violence is essential for peace leading us to believe we need to have the strongest army and most advanced weapons for peace.

The peace of Christ came not through redemptive violence but through redemptive suffering. Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest, wrote, "Violence doesn't save; it only destroys in both the short and long term. Jesus replaced the myth of redemptive violence with the truth of redemptive suffering. He showed us on the cross how to hold the pain and let it transform us, rather than pass it on to others around us." Jesus Christ, the Prince of Peace, achieves peace not by shedding the blood of enemies but shedding his own blood and loving them unto death. The cross was a way of demonstrating the Roman Empire's violence and power but in his redemptive suffering, Jesus transformed the cross to a symbol of God's self-giving love for all. This is the peace we are waiting for and we are called to make 'paths straight' for the peace of Jesus Christ.

What do we need to repent of to prepare the way for the Lord? [ppt] Let us see this image again. What do you see? When we see wars over there, we tend to take a side or criticize both, but we, Christians, are partially responsible for what is happening in Israel and Gaza. Zionism is "a form of Jewish nationalism, and is the primary ideology that drove the establishment of Israel."[2] The rise of Zionism relates to Jewish people's experience of violent antisemitism over centuries. As we all know, Christianity is responsible for antisemitism. Christians accused the

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[2] https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/zionism/

Jews of killing Christ and Christian Europe during the medieval period laid down many restrictions on the Jews. Generations of persecution and antisemitism have turned to a generational trauma for Jewish people and has given rise to Zionism that ended up with oppression and domination against Palestinians. The United States has supported the state of Israel over many decades and sends bombs and military supplies that are being used to kill Palestinians in Gaza. Let us look at this picture carefully. What do you see now? We need to repent for our ignorance and indifference while we are collectively responsible for what happens in Gaza. We must repent that we always assumed that we are on good side. We should turn away from our acceptance of the myth of redemptive violence.

Being Present with Peace
        The good news is that God does not leave us alone forever. God saves us and sent Jesus, the Prince of Peace who rewrote the storyline of human history. Through his love and redemptive suffering, Jesus Christ changed the meaning of the cross from the symbol of violence to the symbol of divine love. We are the people who believe in the power of this love and walk on this narrow path of salvation. We are called to make the paths straight for peace. We've got streets to level and curves to straighten. How can we do this? Like John the baptizer, we share the good news about God's love and proclaim a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. Say 'no to wars.' If you like, you can take action by emailing Congress to call for a cease fire.[3] But most of all, never give up hope for peace. Keep praying and singing for peace. Be present with peace. This is the gift of peace we can share.
        Of course, it sounds daunting, this making every mountain and hill low and leveling uneven ground. Can we do it? Does it sound impossible? Then, remember an old Chinese fable. "The Foolish Old Man Removes the Mountains." Do you remember this story?
        According to the myth, an old man, despite his advanced age of ninety, set out to remove two mountains that obstructed his family's path. Undeterred by the seemingly impossible task, he diligently dug at the mountains with his hoe and basket. His friend said, "You are 90 years old. You are too old to do this. You will be dead before you finish your task." The foolish old man replied, "you may be right. I may not finish this task in my lifetime. But through this hard work of mine, my children and their children and so on through the generations, someday, the mountains will be removed." He didn't give up and persevered. God in Heaven was impressed with his hard work and perseverance and ordered the mountains separated.[4]
        The difference between our faith and this story is that the foolish old man didn't know that the god in Heaven would remove the mountains, but we know that our Christ, the Prince of Peace is coming for our salvation. So, my friends, don't give up, but keep up your good work for peace. Be present with peace. Peace be with you. Amen.

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[3] I am attaching two links for sign up for ceasing fire: https://www.jewishvoiceforpeace.org/resource/ceasefire/
https://act.uscpr.org/a/stop-funding-israels-massacres?contactdata=m1eWT11qrHCLNAv6hTdHzcp+x8sbwCv4XZELeWMsbCvOYgJh4cDJgMkjlh7bJnwhxI2ENIC5khND4fUKA247Lccv%2ftq5pfXxuOFYAW9clVJsymqfW8t6KWLlKkNrIY5jdoB51QwNsH9fZjIACv3wbVYPk1vYCg8CkUpb08g8YBg%3d&emci=900e296c-a693-ee11-8925-002248223f36&emdi=08892b3f-ad93-ee11-8925-002248223f36&ceid=11106888

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Foolish_Old_Man_Removes_the_Mountains