

June 27, 2021 2 Samuel 1:1, 17-27

“War and Peace” Rev. Pat Weatherwax

Introduction

There's a specific struggle I have with biblical narratives, especially Old Testament stories, like the David stories. It's the prevalence and general accepting attitude toward war and violence. War is inevitable. Is it? Maybe, because of the fall of humanity into sin?

The first international war is mentioned in Genesis 14, while the first murder was 10 chapters earlier in Genesis 4, with Cain killing his brother Abel. Indeed, how the mighty have fallen from the ideal world.

Edwin Star had an album, released in 1970, with the same title as this sermon: “War and Peace”. That might not sound at all familiar but if I sang the question, many of you could give the correct answer:

“War, uhh, what is it good for?” “Absolutely nothing”. War. Ugh. What is it good for? In my book, “absolutely nothing”. Of course there's a lot more to say.. About war and peace, David, Saul and Jonathon. Here's where I come from.

My dad was a WW2 vet. He would have been 100 years old this year. Factually, I know that just 12 years before I was born, he landed on Normandy's beach. My mom said he was never the same person after he came home from the war. How could he be? You take a young dad, straight out of the church and small town life where killing is wrong, and give you him weapons and orders to kill. Besides D-Day, with dead peers all around him, It literally once, for my dad was, eye to eye with an enemy soldier, kill or be killed. Since I'm here, you can guess who shot first.

The idea was that war is simply an inevitable part of life, came to me also in part from Sunday School stories like David and Goliath, and patriotic songs with all the victory of “bombs bursting in air”.

But, one day, at church camp when I was a young teen, we were sitting under a tree having a Bible lesson, not sure exactly about what, with one of the counsellors, a college student. He offered to me another way to approach war. We'd pushed him about his probably having to “serve” in Vietnam. No, he said he'd never enlist. And, if you get drafted? He said determinedly he'd move to Canada. That shook my thinking. War could actually be avoided, just like that? Then why didn't everyone just stop going? Could I somehow promote peace instead of just accepting war?

WAR War, with its associated violence and death, *is* seen as an inevitable part of life. Christ followers can follow his general attitude of passive resistance, being instruments of peace, but war is still all around us.

Two weeks ago Pastor Mike presented the story of David becoming the choice God pointed out to Samuel, to be the king after Saul. Last week David and Saul interacted, and David killed Goliath. There's one part of the story we didn't read or mention, that David carried Goliath's head around as his trophy (1Samuel 17:57) and that David was responsible for killing 200 more Philistines as a price to earn the right to marry

Saul's daughter. Saul and David were not on good terms- Saul was jealous of David's battlefield successes against the Philistines and Amelkites. He didn't particularly like the ditty of the time that "the women sang to one another as they made merry, 'Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands.'" (1 Samuel 18:7). The several chapters between David and Goliath and the battlefield deaths of Saul and his son, David's dearest friend Jonathan, are chronicles of war, with not much peace.

We do note that although Saul was not gracious toward David, David did not say awful things about him in the eulogy we heard. David definitely was the "bigger man" in that way. I did wonder if the line that says the ladies would miss his gifts was a praise or a jab at his womanizing?

Saul had fallen from God's favor and stopped being victorious. Saul's battles weren't necessary, in God's eyes. Now we sometimes call necessary war: Just War. What's the "Just War Theory"? It's a largely Christian philosophy that attempts to reconcile three things:

- taking human life is seriously wrong
- states have a duty to defend their citizens, and defend justice
- protecting innocent human life and defending important moral values sometimes requires willingness to use force and violence.

The theory also specifies conditions for judging if it is appropriate to go to war, and the conditions for how the war should be fought as humanely as possible. (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/ethics/war/just/introduction.shtml>)

"Just war" disallows any war executed just because of hate. Probably not all wars our nation has participated in would fit the parameters of being just wars. That's why it's a theoretical concept, it's easier said than done. That's why I'm a pacifist, also in theory. I accept just war.

Saul's trouble was that he hated David, and perhaps he had some emotional health issues going on. Many of Saul's battles were internal personal struggles that resulted in acting out in anger. We all have battles in our personal lives. Jack and Georgann are battling cancer. Jeff is fighting to regain the use of his arm. Several are waging war against aging and dementia.

Socially, too. We battle against poverty and have a war on drugs. Not all wars are international or civil wars. We are also in a battle in this country, against systemic racism.

Ijoma Oluo (E-joe-moe O-loo-oh) has a book that was recommended by Amber who assisted with the dialogues we had in the spring, and is recommended to our congregation: "So You Want to Talk About Race". Oluo says this about racial tension:

We will never be free until we are all seen and valued for our unique culture, history, talents, and challenges. We cannot win this battle against racism if we do not realize that there is no set of racial or ethnic stereotypes that will set us free, no matter how appealing they seem to be on the surface.
(Oluo p 200)

So yes, we have wars that are for social good, and wars that are international political governmental power struggles. War is a part of cultural sociology along with family and faith, government and rules.

Our Bible varies on the treatment of war and peace. When a person talks to me about personal trouble with someone else, I usually pull out Romans 12:17-18:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

We know it's a two-way street. Rev. Craig M. Watts, a Disciples of Christ pastor, says it this way:

... while Christian peaceableness is essential, it still does not guarantee a peaceful existence.

Christians have no promise of peace in this world. The peaceableness of Jesus did not dissuade his enemies from abusing and killing him.

I shouldn't say a two lane street. That implies either or. It's more like a aroundabout. War. And. Peace.

AND And so here's an easy question. What's the third most common word in our language, after THE and OF? **AND!** I think the word has way more power than we realize. War and peace. Black and white. Love and hate. Good and evil. Republicans and Democrats. Muslims and Christians and Hindus and Jews and none of the above.

"And" rates right up there with more! **And:** It gives us opportunity, options. It reminds us of our humanity. We are never perfect. We always have more than one way of being. In her book (p. 216) Oluo asks:

Who are you?

You are, at times, kind and mean, generous and selfish, witty and dull.

Sometimes you are all of these things at once.

And when there is war it harms both sides. **AND** when there is peace it benefits both sides. *And* means so much more than either /or! **And** peace!

Thankfully, there's also

PEACE My NIV Study Bible defines peace as "wholeness and well-being in all areas of life". We all would choose peace over war. Peace is such a Godly word. David had a special loving relationship with his dear friend Jonathan. David also cared deeply, out of respect for the office and devotion to his friend, about the well-being of Saul, Jonathan's father the king. Shortly after this David became the king. His story of wars continue.

I'm pretty sure King David got weary of all the danger of war, and wanted some respite from it. Battle fatigue. In chapter 11 it's hinted at this way:

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel with him; they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11:1). Unfortunately this begins the story of David taking Bathsheba, and ends up causing more trouble in his life. And the unfolding situation, stemming from inappropriate love lead to murder. Infidelity isn't what it means when our God gives us the imperative to "Love one another".

Shalom wholeness. That's peaceful love. Wanting others to know shalom. And Jesus made it clear that loving others includes loving your enemies! Jesus said it this way:

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,
 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.
 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also;
 and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.
 Do to others as you would have them do to you.
 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return.
 Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High;
 for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.

Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful (Luke 6:27-29,31,35-36).

My favorite anti-war, pro-peace Bumper sticker says: "when Jesus said Love your enemies he probably didn't mean kill them". I know, none of this is easy! Promoting peace is an internal attitude. Peace and love go together and similarly war stems from hate.

And as Ijoma Oluo (E-joe-moe O-loo-oh) writes

"Love is action, not words. Love is not just understanding another point of view. "Talk. Please talk and talk and talk some more. But also act. " Oluo p 230?

We Choose peace. The previously mentioned Rev. Craig M. Watts writes it this was:

"Nowhere in scripture are Christians called to emulate the glorified Christ in ways of judgment, power or punishment. Instead Christians are urged to follow the self-giving way of the incarnate One, "Who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant ...(Phil. 2:6-8)." Watts also writes about political hate, demonstrated by the desire for power over others-:

"this kind of hatred is that it is the flipside of love. In the words of a great prophet, "Hate evil and love good, and establish justice in the gate" (Amos 5:15a). Some hate should be embraced because is the consequence of a passion for a more just, healthy, and harmonious world. If we love rightly we will inevitably recognize that there is, indeed, "a time to hate."

The balance of loving what is good, loving others, like God loves us. Oh, this stuff is complicated. As the Psalmist said Psalm 139: 6 "That kind of knowledge is too much for me; it's so high above me that I can't reach it".

And we know that spiritual peace is a different animal than worldly peace. So let's go with this, as much as we can: Jesus said:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid. John 14:27

Rising above an inclination to hate. Living with faith that God prefers love. In the middle of Mike's sermon last we I made this note: 1 Sam 17:47

"Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD's."

And. Although I found that there are many translations to the final verse of our lectionary text today, I prefer our NRSV's translation. And it's my prayer for our world:

"the weapons of war perished.

Friends: In times of war, and in times of peace, Jesus is Lord. In the name of the one called the Prince of Peace.