

This week I delivered to Officer Wayne Bias at the police department the 18 blankets made by our congregation. The morning I showed up Wayne said, “I could have used these blankets this morning. We had a child who witnessed a murder, and a blanket would have been very comforting to that child.” And then he told me a story of how police officers used to carry stuffed animals in their cars. One girl had been through a traumatic experience, and Wayne asked her to take care of a stuffed animal by protecting it and loving it. A week later her mother called and explained what happened that evening. “My little girl has been through some terrible trauma and has not been able to sleep well at night, but the night she received that stuffed animal was the first night she was able to sleep all night.”

Through the blankets you have created, children in Elkhart experiencing stressful events will find a piece of peace. How comforting to know that the pieces of material you have stitched together will help bring some peace into the lives of children in our area.

I think that’s something we all desire: peace, whether on a global scale or in our personal lives, we long for a piece of peace. That’s something God’s people also hoped for thousands of years ago as the prophet Joel spoke to them. It’s a bit uncertain about when Joel spoke his words, for he doesn’t refer to specific historical events in the three chapters of his writing. One contemporary writer has suggested that “the book seems to be a patchwork of pieces sewn together into the quilt we have today.”<sup>1</sup>

The first piece of the quilt we heard read refers to a locust plague and drought, which leads to a call for repentance, a request by God to “return to me with all your hearts” (2:12). Rather than going about the traditional tearing of clothing as a sign of sorrow, the prophet Joel suggested that the people feel their torn hearts, allowing God to fill them with compassion and faithful love.

The second piece of the quilt we heard read in Joel invited the listeners to prepare for God’s outpouring of the Spirit, a time when “sons and daughters will prophesy, old men and women will

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dream dreams, and young men and women will see visions” (2:28). God promised that the Spirit would come upon even men and women who had very little status, who were considered slaves or servants. Everyone would have a piece of peace when God’s Spirit filled their lives.

I think Joel’s words not only spoke to his people thousands of years ago, but they are timeless words that reach out to us today as we long for a piece of peace.

When we heard this week of a young person driving his car into a group of students on the Ohio State University campus and then attacking them with knives, many of us may have longed for peace to fill our nation as our prayers reached out to the eleven wounded students.

When I heard that hate letters had been written to mosques in California last week, I wrote a letter of support to the mosque in South Bend, letting them know that as a Christian I longed with them for peace and respect.

When I read about a 14-year-old shooting a woman this week here in Elkhart, I prayed that

peace rather than violence could permeate our community.

In the midst of a violent world, peace is often difficult to find, in our personal lives or in our communities. During this Advent season as we wait for the baby Jesus to once again enter our world, we can take small steps to live peaceful lives, as did a soldier [who] was on patrol in an area of occupied Palestine when he felt a rock strike him in the back. Before he had a chance to turn around, another rock had struck him in the shoulder, then another hit his helmet. He whirled around, his rifle ready to fire. In his sights were several Palestinian children. Children. They were picking up more stones to throw at him. The soldier did not want to fire, but he could not allow them to attack him again. Suddenly, he had an idea. He bent down and picked up three of the rocks. He picked them up and began to juggle. Yes, juggle. The children were mesmerized and forgot about their stones. The soldier did a few tricks, and the children laughed. Then he did a grand

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finale, and they applauded. He took a bow and walked away.

No, that soldier did not end the war with his action. But he took what had been hurled as weapons and transformed them into objects of wonder. He took a broken moment and made it whole with the laughter of children.<sup>2</sup>

I wonder what broken moments we might be able to take here at Central Christian and make them whole. What pieces could we weave together to form a quilt of peace?

Peace is woven into our history as Disciples, for Alexander Campbell, one of the founders of our denomination we know as the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), suggested on July 4, 1830 that we strive for peace through the promise of Jesus: “Philosophy as well as religion teaches us that to conquer enemies is not the work of swords, nor lances, nor bows of steel. To conquer an enemy is to convert him into a friend. To do this, all arms and modes of warfare are impotent, save the arms and ammunition of everlasting love.”<sup>3</sup>

I know sometimes we might feel our lives are so broken that we may be unsure of how to offer wholeness or even a small piece of peace. We might feel like Ken Sande, the author who wrote the following prayer:

Oh Lord God,  
Today I am called to be a peacemaker,  
but I am unfit for the task.

By nature I am a peace-faker  
and a peace-breaker,  
so I myself need help.

Others ask me to understand and guide them,  
but my ears are dull, my eyes are dim,  
and I lack the wisdom they need.

But you, Lord, have all they need,  
so I come to you for supply.

Make me fit for your purposes,  
so I might serve them  
and honor you.<sup>4</sup>

I think it’s in those broken moments of our lives that we come to understand the deeper need for peace, not just in our own lives, but in the world

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around us. When we sense our own pains, we somehow are able to reach out and offer healing to those around us. Each of us can make a difference, as a small bird discovered one day while watching the snow fall.

“Tell me the weight of a snowflake,” a [bird] asked a wild dove.

“Nothing more than nothing,” was the answer.

“In that case, I must tell you a marvelous story,” the [bird] said.

“I sat on the branch of a fir, close to its trunk, when it began to snow-not heavily, not in a raging blizzard-no, just like a dream, without a sound and without any violence. Since I did

not have anything better to do, I counted the snowflakes settling on the twigs and needles of my branch. Their number was exactly 3,741,952. When the 3,741,953rd dropped onto the branch, nothing more than nothing, as you say—the branch broke off.”

Having said that, the [bird] flew away.

The dove, since Noah’s time an authority on the matter, thought about the story for a while, and finally said to herself, “Perhaps there is only one person’s voice lacking for peace to come to the world.”<sup>5</sup>

During this season of Advent, as we await the arrival of the baby Jesus, may your small voice speak a piece of peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen B. Reid, [www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=2992](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=2992)

<sup>2</sup> [http://epiphanydc.org/sermons/sermon\\_2006\\_04\\_23\\_Hensley.pdf](http://epiphanydc.org/sermons/sermon_2006_04_23_Hensley.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Campbell, July 4, 1830, [www.discipleshomemissions.org/PDF/PublicWitness/PeaceSunday/2006PeaceSunday.pdf](http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/PDF/PublicWitness/PeaceSunday/2006PeaceSunday.pdf), p. 19

<sup>4</sup> Excerpt of a poem by Ken Sande (Founder of Peacemaker Ministries), A Conciliator’s Prayer, peacemaker.net as quoted on Homileticonline.com.

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Kauter, New Fables – Thus Spoke The Carabou, <https://storiesforpreaching.com/category/sermonillustrations/peace/>