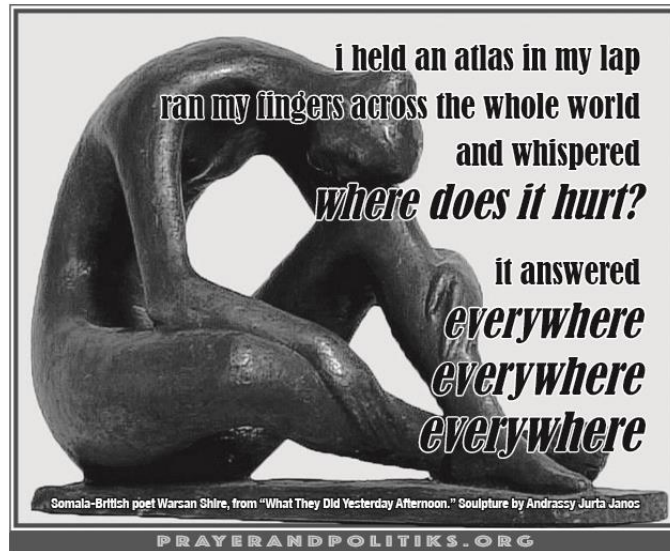


## LMF, Sunday November 5, 2023: Peacemaking Journey with Others

**Wayne:** As always, it is a privilege to share here at LMF a reflection, this time on peace and peacemaking.

To be clear from the outset: as in the title for today's sermon, we only share from a point of being *on a journey*. Which at minimum means we are inconsistent and make many mistakes. We better be *learning* and open to *change our ways* as we go. If not, the journey is inauthentic.

We also acknowledge that we share today against the backdrop of existential brutality, suffering and indescribable anguish for and about what is happening between Russia and Ukraine; Gaza and Israel. And there are so many other places of overwhelming violence and pain. As we see in this sculpture and text:



[Sigmund Freud](#) once wrote, citing a Roman proverb:

Humans are not gentle creatures. . . they are, on the contrary, creatures [with] a powerful share of aggressiveness. . . *Homo homini lupus*. [*Man is wolf to man.*]

In the scripture we heard today, there is a simple story of what living at peace, and peacemaking look like in an Ancient Near East context. Though wealthy and powerful, Isaac refused to take up arms and do violence against enemies who constantly harassed him by stopping up wells, forcing him to relocate repeatedly, and generally conducting themselves like modern-day \_\_\_\_\_. You may fill in that blank, or guess at how we'd fill it in. There are tragically lots of contenders.

It's a beautiful model of peace and peacemaking for the Greater Middle East today.

My first exposure to peace/peacemaking theology was in the context of Restorative Justice. It began in 1974 through joining Man-to-Man/Woman-to-Woman in BC (M2/W2) as a seminary student at Regent College, University of British Columbia. My studies instilled in me a lifelong approach to vocation, namely: *think it through Christianly*. Which I began to do then, and nearly 50 years later am still working at. Theologian **Stanley Hauerwas** argues that this is the only way to do theology—namely through endless discourse about the text with others past and present. In an early Restorative Justice concept, there was to be *persistent palaver!* Restorative Justice involves *constant dialogue towards making peace*. So it should be in one's entire life with God and others.

I am indebted to Professor Clark Pinnock for his first introduction to me of theological “restorative justice,” and for leading this fundamentalist seminary student through two lifelong conversions:

- *One*: that Judeo-Christian revelation actually has to do with *everything social and political—in other words, all of life*;
- *Two*: that the way to do politics faithful to the Judeo-Christian tradition is *the peacemaking way of the cross*.

### Esther:

My involvement with peacemaking and restorative justice came much later than Wayne’s. I was raised in a Christian family and there was lots of peace, but it wasn’t a church topic. So my introduction to Restorative Justice was mainly through Wayne’s involvement to begin with, and that meant working with prisoners and ex-prisoners. Over the years, that has expanded to learning of peace in so many other ways.

I’m going to tell a couple of stories now that have affected me greatly in working towards peacemaking with others.

### The Rwanda Genocide 1994

By far, the most remarkable practice of Restorative Justice was what we witnessed in post-genocide programs, during two-months of volunteering in Rwanda, summer 2018.

The 1994 genocide had been meticulously planned by the Hutu government, but for the first time, the scale became country-wide, and not only the regional anti-Tutsi pogroms breaking out since the 1960s. The goal was elimination of all Tutsis; and the killing was ended only when the **Rwandan Patriotic Front** army stopped it.

In 100 days more than one million victims were murdered!

A new government was formed and all known perpetrators were imprisoned. 132,000 people ended up in prison under terrible conditions.

All perpetrators could not possibly be brought to trial through a Western style of justice—an estimated 300 years would be needed!—so instead a pre-colonial traditional court system, the **Gacaca** courts, were resorted to, beginning in 2005. The only alternative was vigilante revenge, since executions were ruled out. *Gacaca* means “go to the grass”: which is what villagers did, palavering in a circle, to resolve conflict.

These trials also served to promote reconciliation by providing a means for victims to learn the truth about the deaths of their family members and relatives. They also gave murderers the opportunity to confess their crimes, show remorse, ask for forgiveness, and make amends in their home communities. Though seriously lacking the many safeguards in Western justice systems, these traditional courts nonetheless overall were widely praised by post-genocide Rwandans, and international observers. More than 12,000 community-based sessions tried about 1.2 million cases throughout the country.

Out of the above, Prison Fellowship Rwanda hatched an idea: to bring together in the same village surviving victims and their families, with perpetrators and their families. They were to be called ‘Reconciliation Villages.’

## Reconciliation Villages: Prison Fellowship Rwanda



We were able to visit the Reconciliation Village pictured, which is one of eight such. What began as an experiment in a pilot project in 2003, today houses over 5,000 persons.

I will retell the stories we heard from a couple of people:

**Frederick**, was 26 when the genocide started. The roads to escape the village were blocked. He found victims hiding in the sorghum fields and killed them.

In his own words: “I was in prison for 9 years. Two pastors came into prison and took us through a journey to know the value of a human, and a journey of repentance. First to God, then to victims’ families, then to the country as a whole. The President released us. Then we went in front of victims and admitted and repented. It was very hard.”

**Jeanette** then told us some of her story:

On April 8th they killed my parents; I was 16. I lost all my relatives. We went into exile for two months to hide. After we were freed I wanted to die. When the President released the prisoners, we were so afraid. Pastor came and told us that the men who had been released would be coming back to our village. When we saw them, we were in great pain—a day of tears. We sat across from each other. The time came when they confessed and showed us where the bodies were. We took time to pray and get close to God. Now I am not afraid. When I have to go away I leave my children with one of the killers. The wives of those who did the killing didn’t believe it. We weave these baskets together and talk. Now they believe. We have come back to life. We are not worried. Please communicate what happened, that it was real.

We heard many such remarkable stories of peace and reconciliation—a lineup as in our series: peace with God, then peace within, and then making peace/peacemaking with others.

## Wayne:

Mennonite scholar and friend Vern Redekop juxtaposes, with reference to post-genocide, a “**Justice of Blessing**” with a “**Justice of Violence**.” He states concerning a “**Justice of Blessing**”:

Expressed simply, a justice of blessing is a structured way in which perpetrators commit themselves to take action [over the long haul] for the well-being of the survivors of their genocidal actions.

. . . when mimetic [imitative] structures of blessing infuse a relational system, people work toward the mutual well-being of one another.

In other words: structures of blessing in Rwanda caught on, and were widely replicated, with a society-wide peace-leavening effect that continues.

In a discussion with Anglican Bishop John Rucyahana, Board Chair of Prison Fellowship Rwanda, I asked him to compare post-genocide reconciliation work in Rwanda with post-apartheid reconciliation work in South Africa. The Bishop responded that he was indeed respectful of the work done in South Africa since the end of apartheid.

However, he said that no new institutions had arisen there since to foster racial integration, apart from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that terminated after three years. By contrast, in Rwanda, government, churches and NGOs established many institutions—*structures of blessing*—through which there has indeed been a widely successful “**Justice of Blessing**” cultural leavening.

Bishop John’s insight is certainly so *à propos* in Canada.

*\*\*\*How might that look here with regard to the Indigenous, immigrants, ethnic minorities, etc.? How might we engage: such as already with the 5 & 2 Program supported by LMF? With our communities? With our workplaces? Within our families and circle of friends?\*\*\**

## Esther:

My second story of ‘peace with others’ is much closer to home.

In 2008 I had three close girlfriends who were in abusive relationships; they were each active in their church and each of their husbands was involved in leadership at that church. This is when I realized I needed to learn about abuse in relationships. So I took the ‘When Love Hurts’ training at MCCBC in 2009, and then started facilitating groups for women experiencing Intimate Partner Violence. The Groups meet at MCC on Tuesday evenings, and women learn about abuse. Then under MCC, since 2014 Kathy, my co-facilitator and I do groups on contract at the Fraser Valley Institute which is a federal prison for women. They are called ‘Respectful Relationships for Survivors of Trauma’. We work with the women, discussing what abuse is first of all, then discussing what they might need to move forward in their lives and gain a renewed sense of self and peace.

The groups for women in prison have been eye-opening experiences for us. *We have learned* so much. We have learned that every woman in prison whom we have met, has experienced abuse and trauma from Day One in their lives. *We have learned* that most women believe abuse is just a part of all relationships—they can’t imagine a relationship without it. *We have learned* that most women feel they are the abusers as much as their partners. We say to ourselves many times as we leave: “If we had had the abuse happen to us that they have endured, we would be in prison with them.” It has been a humbling and rich experience.



Then in 2017, MCC asked Wayne and myself if we would facilitate groups for men who have been abusive in their relationships, in a program creatively dubbed by MCC: **Home Improvement**. I wasn't sure if I could do this work as I had some pretty strong feelings about men who abuse in their relationships. But we decided to give it a try since, if men who are abusive don't learn different ways of being in relationship, abuse will just continue. So we are now facilitating our 13<sup>th</sup> group of men in fifteen Monday evening sessions, and I have to say it is a real privilege. *Respect* and *no blame* are important in our approach and we know “*change*” is very difficult for men who have developed patterns of abuse. But we also know change is possible, because we've seen it happen and hear from some of the partners that their man has changed. And we've seen both men and women gaining a sense of peace with themselves and with others.

**Wayne:** When Mark Twain once was asked if he believed in infant baptism, he responded:

*Hell yes! I've seen it!*

When we're asked if we believe men can change, we say:

*Hell yes! We've seen it!*

\*\*\**In that abuse happens in a great variety of settings—at home, at work, on campus, how might we become or be peacemakers to help bring about peaceful change and lasting peace?\*\*\**

Now hear what Jesus says about *peace*—and about another word in close biblical association: *justice*. We see this in *The Beatitudes*, Matthew 5:6 to 10:

*God blesses those who hunger and thirst for justice,  
for they will be satisfied.  
God blesses those who are merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
God blesses those whose hearts are pure,  
for they will see God.  
God blesses those who work for peace,  
for they will be called the children of God.  
God blesses those who are persecuted for doing [justice],  
for the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs.*

There is a close association of *peace* and *justice* in scripture. One Psalm beautifully states the Old Testament case:

*Mercy and truth have met each other: justice and peace have kissed (85:10, Douay-Rheims Bible).*

James in the New Testament puts it this way:

*Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of [justice] (3:18).*

In the finest (and massive) New Testament study on *peace* published in 2007, entitled *Covenant of Peace*, Mennonite theologian **Willard Swartley** concludes that *peace is the heart of the gospel message and the ground of the New Testament's unity*.

*Second*, two words are used in English to translate just one single Greek term, *dikaiosynē*, with consequent confusion for us English-speaking readers.

Why is this significant? To be *righteous* or *just* in a *dikaiosynē* way is *not* to be *pious* or *religious*, but to actively work at bringing about peace, harmony and well-being in *all* one's relationships; and especially by defending the poor and the oppressed. Such righteousness/justice above all is centrally concerned with *right relationships*—as much towards others as with God—and the Good Creation.

So pulling together some observations from the above texts:

*First*: the idea of “*original sin*” is all about *broken relationships profoundly in need of healing*—and **not** about *humanity's being born bad or evil—or sinners destined to hell from an act of such overwhelming vengeance by God, that makes “the revolt of atheism an act of pure Religion”*—as New Testament scholar Walter Wink puts it! One might summarize the kinds of brokenness, as in our current LMF series, by four “*logical*” words:

- towards God—***theological***
- towards ourselves—***psychological***
- towards others—***sociological***
- towards the Good Creation—***ecological/cosmological***

*Second*, Paul contrasts the “*original brokenness*” of humanity with “*the new Creation*” represented by Christ, the ***Second Adam*** and *first fruits* of the “*Re-Creation*.” This is why Paul triumphantly asserts in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation! . . .*”

And *third*, it is precisely this *new* or “*re-creation*” that begins *to heal, to restore and transform, to work towards reconciliation*, over against all four areas of humanity's broken relationships: ***towards God; self; others; the Good Creation and Cosmos.***

Now that's incredibly **Good News!** And we're all invited to join in!

\*\*\**So how are we doing this kind of reconciliation work in our homes, work, communities, etc.?*\*\*\*

And yet there persists the pressing horror of “*everywhere, everywhere, everywhere!*”

Last century, the brilliant so-called American Ghandi, A. J. Muste, said often:

*There is no way to peace. Peace is the way.*

**Esther**

Mother Theresa may have the last word:

*We may wonder, whom can I love and serve? Where is the face of God to whom I can pray? The answer is simple. That naked one. That lonely one. That Unwanted one is my brother and my sister. If we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other.*

Amen!