

read 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11

Christianity was on trial

Let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation (1 Thess. 5:8).

Pearl Harbor Day—Sunday, December 7, 1941—is a day many of us remember in detail, including exactly where we were and what we were doing. At the time, Ralph and I were teaching school and living in East Los Angeles. For us, it marked the beginning of our interest and activity in the plight of Japanese Americans on the West Coast during World War II. Very soon public and military pressure began to mount “to do something about the ‘Japs’ on the Coast” . . . Demands for evacuation grew, encouraged by the Hearst press, Caucasian vegetable and nursery growers, and Lt. General John B. Dewitt, West Coast military commander. National security then became the pretext for the evacuation of the 110,000 Japanese Americans living on the West Coast. . . .

The first Japanese Americans to be evacuated were those living on Terminal Island, a fishing colony located in San Pedro—the Los Angeles harbor. They were given a forty-eight-hour notice in February, 1942, to dispose of their possessions and move out. Ralph took a day off from school to help. He had already been demoted from a regular to a substitute teacher in the Los Angeles schools because he expressed his conscientious objection to selling defense stamps. He was shocked at seeing army jeeps with machine guns patrolling the streets while looters were raiding houses from the alleys. . . . Within a few weeks all Japanese Americans in the Los Angeles area were evacuated, usually early in the mornings. We helped serve them breakfast at the train and bus stations, getting up at five o’clock, helping at the stations, then hurrying off to school.

First stop for evacuees was an “assembly center” such as Santa Anita Race Track, Arcadia, or the Los Angeles County Fair Grounds in Pomona. Horse stalls and hastily-built barracks were used to house them. . . .

Whereas the evacuees were taken from the metropolitan areas in the spring of 1942, those in rural areas were moved in the summer. While we were directing a summer work camp in Farmersville near Lindsay in the San Joaquin Valley, Japanese Americans were taken from that inland area now classified as Zone 2. Some Japanese-American farmers from the Coast had relocated there earlier expecting to be safe from evacuation. We organized efforts to provide food and transportation to the train station in order to make the leaving a little easier for the evacuees. Although the military leaders welcomed our help, veterans, legionnaires, and local police harassed us and even threatened our lives. The situation was so serious that all helpers were called together early on evacuation day to reconsider our plans and have a prayer meeting. We decided that Christianity was on trial in Lindsay that day, and we must go ahead. Our tormentors surrounded us at the train station, shook their fists, and hurled derogatory remarks, but did not harm us.

Gradually all West-Coast Japanese Americans were put into ten War Relocation Centers in out-of-the-way places east of the Sierras, in California, Arizona, Utah, Colorado, Idaho, Wyoming, and Arkansas. We decided to apply to teach school at the Manzanar Center northeast of Mt. Whitney near Lone Pine, California.

—Mary Blocher Smeltze

respond Read a story of internment, such as *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James D. Houston.

pray How easily are societies infected by prejudice and fear, when war or violence threatens! I am saddened, God, by how few stay “sober” by relying on faith love, and the hope of your salvation.

read Amos 5:14-15, 21-24

How is this about peace?

But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream (Amos 5:24).

Can peace be absent even if we aren't engaged in war?

Jualynne brought the issue of equality close to home with her Christmas story.

Her teenaged son had been out doing preliminary browsing as Christmas drew closer. He had gone to the mall to check out products and prices—turns out, he was the one who got checked out.

*“Why are you looking so troubled, son?”
“Mom, you wouldn't believe what happened to me today. I was looking around in different stores, and I was stopped three times and checked for shop-lifting. Twice they even searched me. I've never felt so humiliated! All I was doing was looking!”*

What was this young man's crime? He was a black teenager wearing a baggy jacket. That was enough to make him a suspect and to trigger accusations of criminal activity.

A few months later, Jualynne said that her son had begun talking about never having a fair chance in this world. He was losing hope of being treated as a decent person with the same opportunities as a person of a different skin color.

What does this story have to do with “peace”?

—“*Peacemaking: The Calling of God's People in History,*”
youth edition study guide

respond Take time to contemplate this question: What does this story have to do with peace? Write down your answers.

pray God, it's hard to understand injustices that others suffer when we don't share their experience of the world. Help me perceive and repair injustices that may be happening around me.

read Ruth 1:

We grieve for those killed

Your people shall be my people, and your God my God (Ruth 1:16b).

Brethren leaders have joined others in the American Christian community in expressing sorrow and calling for prayer following shootings at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin this past Sunday. At least seven Sikh worshippers were killed and three others injured. The gunman, who had connections with radical right racist groups, committed suicide after being wounded by police gunfire. . . .

Brethren minister and past Annual Conference moderator Belita Mitchell was quoted this week in a press release from Heeding God Call. She pastors First Church of the Brethren in Harrisburg, Pa., and coordinates the Heeding God's Call chapter there.

Heeding God's Call has been working against gun violence on the streets of America's cities since its beginnings at a meeting of the Historic Peace Churches (Brethren, Mennonites, and Quakers) in Philadelphia some years ago.

“We at Heeding God's Call grieve for those killed and injured and their families, friends, neighbors, and co-religionists,” Mitchell said. “Americans believe that houses of worship should be places of safe and refuge, not places of carnage and terror. But, as long as we allow people intent on mayhem to gain guns with ease, often illegally, houses of worship will be as dangerous as so many neighborhoods and communities are now in our country.”

—*Newsline, August 9, 2012*

respond One way to break down suspicion and fear in our community is to get to know neighbors from other religions. Find a house of worship of another religion in your area and stop by to say a friendly hello.

pray Just as Ruth found a welcome in Naomi's community, let people of other religions find a welcome in my community.

read Exodus 32:1-14

I stood condemned

Turn from your fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people (Exodus 32:12b).

My interest in [racial tensions] had taken me to Trumbull Park Homes, where whites had instituted a reign of terror against Negro move-ins to the Chicago Housing Authority project.

Visiting the project was like crossing the border into an occupied country. Police were everywhere, and only their utterly neutral pressure prevented actual bloodshed. The threat of violence was ever constant. Hoodlums, incited by racist agitators, roamed the streets, exploded firecrackers and aerial bombs, threw bricks through windows, and otherwise destroyed property.

Ironically, the churches in the Trumbull Park community still stood in all their majesty, their stained glass windows unbroken.

But not so the saloon of one Chicagoan. On August 28, 1953, says the *New York Post*, . . . “The worst of several fires was set in the Square Deal Tavern, a saloon near the far side housing development which was reported to have served drinks to Negro patrons. The interior of the tavern was gutted, and police estimated the damage at more than \$15,000.”

I first met the owner of this tavern—we shall call him Charles Smith—in his bomb-torn place of business. Broken bottles and furniture were scattered in every direction. The floor was water-soaked, Charlie’s collection of books on rare wines ruined. Now and then people came in to buy the remnants of his stock at bargain prices. . . .

As I was talking to Charlie, a stoop-shouldered man came in to buy some Scotch.

“Was all this worth it?” said the man. “Don’t they know everybody dies anyway?”

Charlie Smith drew himself up with fierce dignity. He handed the man his Scotch. “It has been my experience,” he said, “that all men

come to die, and that no man’s violence betters the process of living, dying very much.”

The stoop-shouldered man drew up his coat collar as if he were shrinking inside himself away from something. “Wars are like that,” he commented.

“In my opinion, yes,” said Smith.

. . . “Well,” I asked, “was it worth it?”

“Was what worth it?”

“Having your store burned. You could have stopped selling to Negroes, couldn’t you? Why did you keep on?”

. . . “Listen. I am a Jew, and as a Jew I would look like a fool if I started kicking Negroes around. Does that answer your question?”

“You see,” continued Smith, “I think I know what you want me to say. That people down underneath are really *good*. But I don’t believe that. Not any more. Do you know the reason I don’t? Because the night the mob was howling outside of my store none of the good people were here. None of the nice people, who want everybody to be happy and none of the solid citizens who always call for law and order. Do you know what a mob sounds like outside—when you’re inside? Like wolves. Those weren’t human voices I heard, but something else.”

As Smith spoke, I stood condemned. For wasn’t I one of the do-gooders he damned by implication?

—Kermit

respond How does the inaction of good people facilitate racism, and the destruction and hurt that it causes?

pray Sometimes hearing someone’s honest story feels like condemnation. God, help me to hear them with compassion, and move me to change.

Pyramid of Hate

The *Pyramid* shows biased behaviors, growing in complexity from the bottom to the top. Although the behaviors at each level negatively impact individuals and groups, as one moves up the pyramid, the behaviors have more life-threatening consequences. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or “normal,” it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted. In response to the questions of the world community about where the hate of genocide comes from, the *Pyramid of Hate* demonstrates that the hate of genocide is built upon the acceptance of behaviors described in the lower levels of the pyramid.

