

read Micah 5:2-5a

read 1 John 4:16-21

## A vision of what can be

*Therefore he shall give them up until the time when she who is in labor has brought forth (Micah 5:3a).*

At this time in our history it is necessary for us to pause and reflect on our race relations. Ideally, the struggle for the rights of each group is a struggle for the well-being of the whole society. Our concern is not just merely to record discords and cases of victimization. There needs to be a flowering of new cultural resources to move us beyond the increasing fragmentation and alienation among groups. The challenge is to move past a culture of distrust, a climate of alienation, to see in the dynamic of human interaction a new vision for human relatedness and community building, and to engage in action toward the creation of a just society in which the dignity of each person is affirmed and respected. Our challenge is not merely to struggle against an unjust society that stifles dignity. The challenge is to recover speech that permits communion with one another, to break bread together, a communion for which people so deeply yearn and we Christians confess to be our deeply held value. . . .

The Christian vision embedded in the history of Christian faith communities is God's sovereignty, justice, and righteousness, which stands against domination and violence in all human relationships. Baptism into Christ and the celebration of Christ's presence at the communion table mark us as members of a faith community whose shared experience of grace is stronger than any dissimilarities or disruption of trust among us. This is the "memory of the future," the vision of the church's essential nature toward which we live. This vision of what can and should be is the measure by which our life as church members is judged.

—Fumitaka Matsuoka

**respond** How can the church help develop authentic relationships across racial, ethnic, and other boundaries?

**pray** Lord God, help us attain the Christian vision that

## To approach the Lord's table

*Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are liars; for those who do not love a brother or sister whom they have seen, cannot love God whom they have not seen (1 John 4:20).*

The Church of the Brethren observes the communion as a part of the larger service which we call the love feast. . . .

The love feast is the supreme worship service of the church. . . .

In the matter of spiritual preparation for the love feast, the church visit has traditionally held a very large place. Where that visit is no longer made, its purpose should still be held before the minds of the people. That purpose was and is that members should be at peace with one another. If there are any differences between members they should be resolved before those members come to the communion. Only then is fellowship with God possible (Matt. 5:23-24; 1 John 4:20). To be right with one's brother or sister, to have love in one's heart toward all men, to be humble and penitent, and to have a sincere faith in God, these are matters of the greatest importance as we approach the Lord's table.

Preparation for this sacramental experience with God must take on a new note of importance and urgency. . . . It involves getting the mind open and receptive to God, open and forgiving toward others, and the kindling of holy aspiration and joyous expectancy.

—Manual of Worship and Polity

**respond** The first Sunday of October is World Communion Sunday. On this day, attend a communion service or love feast with sisters and brothers in Christ.

**pray** God, it is your will that we love one another, labor for the peace of all, and become living sacrifices through the body of Christ for the healing of the world.

## The supreme work of God

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal. 3:28).*

Now the man who makes peace, that is, the man who leads men from the state of war into one of cooperation, is called a child of God, for he is doing the one essential and supreme work of God—integrating, harmonizing the sundered parts of His creation. By nature they are one. They belong together; they were made for harmony. The peacemaker brings all things into that state of harmony and cooperation which is their essential nature.

The doctrine of peace and reconciliation is based on the fundamental truth of the love of God. Love unites. Love brings the scattered parts together into a unity. The long process of growth which lies behind us is one series of higher and higher unities. Isolated parts were brought together. . . . Men, nations, classes, areas of truth, clashing interests—these are some of the parts which must be reconciled and united. . . .

The principle which is the life of this vast process of unification is Love. It is God, for God is Love. And because God is Love all wars must cease. God's love demands the unification and harmony of all that is of value in the universe.

—Robert Henry Miller

**respond** Prayerfully listen to a hymn sung in multi-voiced harmony. What does each part add to the sum of the whole?

**pray** Your all-encompassing Love brings all things together in harmony. God, help me to see the beauty in the different parts.

## Equality under God

*Trust in the LORD, and do good (Psalm 37:3a).*

At the peace church conference in Solo a Mennonite pastor recounted the story of the closing of his Mennonite Church in Indonesia by a Muslim leader. The congregation was forbidden from worshiping within or outside the church building by an angry Muslim group. The congregation's response was two-fold. The first was to begin worshiping with another Christian congregation some distance away.

The second response was to continue to supply water to the whole largely Muslim community from the well on the church property. After six months the Muslim leader reconsidered having closed the church because he came to realize that the Christians were providing life-giving water to his community.

The Christian pastor told him, "The water is not ours. It is given to all of us by God." The Muslim leader thanked him and withdrew his opposition to Christian worship in the church.

This story is an example of a Christian congregation's considering their Muslim neighbor equally worthy of God's water as they themselves were. They treated their oppressive neighbors as recipients of God's blessings, and expressed this sense of equality under God by continuing to provide the one benefit they were most able to give, namely the water from their well.

Their response was not simply nonviolent. It was a belief in the universality of God's love along with an active behavioral expression of their belief. But their faith and their actions belong to one another. The possibilities of such behavioral expressions are limited only by our imagination.

—Donald E. Miller

**respond** What if your church experienced persecution from a neighboring group? Brainstorm ways your community could respond with active love.

**pray** We humans want to live in peace, God. Excite our imaginations with ideas for creative peacemaking.

read Romans 13:8-10

## Two fundamental convictions

*Love does no wrong to a neighbor (Romans 13:10a).*

Love for the neighbor and the call for unity formed the two central demands that Pietists dealt with often and in detail in their written works. . . . [There] arose certain groups within the Pietist stream who recognized their unmistakable character in these themes. Active brotherly love and the unity of the membership are still today the two fundamental convictions of the Brethren churches . . . . It is remarkable that, in all later branches of the Brethren movement that began here in Schwarzenau, [Germany,] the expression “Brethren” appears in their self-designations.

—*Marcus Meier*

**respond** Research Pietism and Anabaptism, two movements that influenced the first Brethren. How are they similar, how are they different?

**pray** Dear God, I never want to lose sight of these convictions—loving my neighbor and working for unity.

read Acts 1:1-11

## God’s power vs. world power

*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses . . . to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8a).*

Cultures have changed through the centuries, but one issue is the same from the beginning: the tension between the kingdoms of the world and the kingdom of God. It is all basically a question of power and how that power is used. God’s power is *for* people, and world power is *over* others. That use of world power is the frightening situation in the world today. This is why Jesus had to come before Pentecost power could be poured out. Jesus said when the Holy Spirit came his people would be filled with power. (In Acts 1:8 he used the same Greek word from which we get dynamo and dynamite.) The power by which Jesus lived was *servanthood*, the very opposite of world thinking. For this reason, Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, and this is the reason we have observed foot-washing in our communion service from the beginning of our church.

The issue now is, which kind of power do we use in the church and in all our relationships? Young people often ask me what I think about the church. I ask them, “Are you talking about the institutional church or the church that is the Body of Christ?” . . .

I thank God for the renewed emphasis in our church on the Holy Spirit. It is only through the Holy Spirit that Christ lives in our hearts and in the church as his body. This is an integral part of our identity as Brethren. We cannot know our identity in peacemaking except through the Holy Spirit.

—*Anna B. Mow*

**respond** Find artistic renderings of the Trinity—God, Christ, Holy Spirit. What does the Spirit look like? What does the Spirit look like in your imagination?

**pray** Lord, when will you restore the kingdom? With the disciples, I also am eager to hear your word of holy power that extends to the ends of the earth.

**read** Exodus 3:1-12

## The embers of a fire

*The place on which you are standing is holy ground (Exodus 3:5b).*

In those latter days [of Civilian Public Service during World War II] we [conscientious objectors] often fought fire in the company of state prisoners and servicemen either not yet sent overseas or back here pending discharge. One bleak and frosty night three of us sat hunched over a tiny campfire on a ridge above the fire line. I asked the wearer of the purple heart how he had received it; he said it was for the wounds he received while accounting for the lives of some vast number of Japanese—fifty-three, I think.

Our companion was a prisoner, a Filipino doing the fifteenth year of a life term. He scratched his head, kicked disconsolately at the fire, and said,

“I killed a Jap too, but I guess it was out of season.”

The decorated one looked at him with a sad expression and said,

“No fooling, is that what you’re up for?”

“That’s what I’m up for,” said the little fellow. “But if you think that’s funny—here’s a guy,” and he indicated me, “who’s up because he refused to kill Japs.”

—William E. Stafford

**respond** Explore stories and images of the lives of Civilian Public Service workers and conscientious objectors at [www.civilianpublicservice.org](http://www.civilianpublicservice.org).

**pray** Today I remember in prayer World War II and all those affected by its violence: the injured and dead, the victims and their families, the soldiers and their commanders, all of the people around the world who bore the grief and hurt of war, those who said no to war and worked for peace. God, grant your mercy.

**read** speakpeace

**read** Ephesians 2:1

## What is the weight of a snowflake

*For we are what [God] has made us (Eph. 2:10a).*

When it comes to war, from the perspective of the early Brethren, the only war to which the church calls its people is a war on poverty, disease, hunger, and injustice. But today, in a world addicted to violence, how can the church confront what seems to be an overwhelm system of terror and counter-terror?

Consider this German parable. It’s a conversation between two birds. One is a dove, the other is a sparrow:

The sparrow speaks first and says to the dove, “What is the weight of a snowflake?” The dove thinks for a moment and responds, “The snowflake weighs nothing, even less than nothing.” The sparrow replies, “In that case, let me tell you a story. Not long ago I happened to be sitting on the branch of a fir tree when it began to snow. The snow did not come in a blizzard fashion with wind and raging. Rather, it fell gently and heavily in large flakes. Since I didn’t have anything to do I decided I would count the flakes that fell on my branch. I had counted 1,357,452 snowflakes, all of which weighed nothing or less than nothing as you said. However, when the 1,357,453rd snowflake fell on my branch, the branch collapsed and dumped me onto the ground.” Having said that the sparrow flew away. The dove has been an authority on peace ever since Noah’s time. The dove sat and thought awhile and finally said to herself, “Perhaps we need only one more voice to speak for peace, and we can bring peace about.”

—Bill Kidv

**respond** What concrete—albeit small—thing can you do today to help bring about peace?

**pray** What difference can I make in the world for the sake of Christ, and for peace? God, help me to be faithful.

# confession

**“How lamentable, that a spirit of resistance and retaliation should have so many advocates among the professors of Christianity.”**

*—Peter Nead*

# hope

**“I am only one. But with you . . . we are many. Let us go forth together with the Spirit of our God upon us all and fulfill our dreams.”**

*—Ruby Rhoades*