

Patriots for Peace
Reverend Elizabeth Stevens
Kitsap UU Fellowship
November 6th, 2005

Opening Words:

We bid you welcome, who come with weary spirit seeking rest,
Who come with troubles that are too much with you,
Who come hurt and afraid.

We bid you welcome, who come with hope in your heart,
Who come with anticipation in your step,
Who come proud and joyous.

We bid you welcome, who are seekers of a new faith,
Who come to probe and explore,
Who come to learn.

We bid you welcome, who enter this hall as a homecoming,
Who have found here room for your spirit,
Who find in this people a family.

We bid you welcome, whoever you are, whatever you are,
Wherever you are on your journey.
In this hour may we create a community that embraces each one,
That we might singly and together
Celebrate the life that is ours this day.

-the Rev. Richard Gilbert

Chalice Lighting

Unitarian Universalists look to the flaming candle as a symbol of faith in the ongoing search for truth and knowledge. And, with others, we light our chalice as a symbol of our hope for peace.

The light from our candle is added to the light from the candles in other places of worship around the world. Light adds to light, building a brighter tomorrow -- a tomorrow when the light of peace shall return to every land, and to all people.

For those who work for peace by going to war, and those who work for peace by protesting it, and in celebration of this community wide enough and deep enough to hold us all, I light our chalice today.

Readings: Apologia pro Poemate Meo by Wilfred Owen (read by Leif and Jim)

I, too, saw God through mud, -
The mud that cracked on cheeks when wretches smiled.
War brought more glory to their eyes than blood,
And gave their laughs more glee than shakes a child.

Merry it was to laugh there -
Where death becomes absurd and life absurder.
For power was on us as we slashed bones bare
Not to feel sickness or remorse of murder.

I, too, have dropped off Fear -
Behind the barrage, dead as my platoon,
And sailed my spirit surging light and clear
Past the entanglement where hopes lay strewn;

And witnessed exultation -
Faces that used to curse me, scowl for scowl,
Shine and lift up with passion of oblation,
Seraphic for an hour; though they were foul.

I have made fellowships -
Untold of happy lovers in old song.
For love is not the binding of fair lips
With the soft silk of eyes that look and long,

By Joy, whose ribbon slips, -
But wound with war's hard wire whose stakes are strong;
Bound with the bandage of the arm that drips;
Knit in the webbing of the rifle-thong.

I have perceived much beauty
In the hoarse oaths that kept our courage straight;
Heard music in the silentness of duty;
Found peace where shell-storms spouted reddest spate.

Nevertheless, except you share
With them in hell the sorrowful dark of hell,
Whose world is but the trembling of a flare
And heaven but as the highway for a shell,

You shall not hear their mirth:
You shall not come to think them well content
By any jest of mine. These men are worth
Your tears. You are not worth their merriment.

Veteran's Day by the Rev. Robert R. Walsh

We are often bewildered as we seek to understand what it means to be alive and human in this world. We know we are capable of great selflessness, of great sacrifice. We may even lay down our lives for our fellow human beings, or for high principles. But we are also capable of great folly. We are capable of paying too great a price in human suffering and lives lost for ends which are too small.

As long as there is evil in this world, good people will be called upon to oppose it as best they can. Sometimes good people will conclude that they must send young men and women to kill, and to be killed. May we find, somehow, in the heat of particular circumstance, the wisdom to know when truly transcendent values are at stake, and the courage never to place precious human life at risk for the sake of pride, or greed, or political advantage.

On this Veteran's Day, we remember the people who have served in the military, from the men who fought at the Battle of Lexington to the men and women who are serving today in Iraq and Afghanistan. May we honor them by making a commitment of our lives, today, toward the creation of a new world—a world of justice and mercy, of forgiveness and reconciliation. A world in which our swords will be beaten into plowshares, our missiles and helicopter gunships made into schoolrooms and subway cars, our soldiers transformed into teachers and nurses and poets. A world in which we will make war no longer.

Sermon: Patriots and Peace

What does it mean to support our troops?

Is it as simple as buying a magnet to stick on your car?

I don't think so.

I think caring about our troops,

Honoring our veterans,

Calls us to do two things:

First, we need to say thank you, to witness and acknowledge their service,

Because our troops "are the sword that cuts."

"They are not the hand that wields it," in the words of Ben Tripp.¹

He continues, "Our time to 'support our troops' is coming.

The war will come home inside {them},

Poisonous as uranium dust,

And the hawks around them will not understand.

We that opposed this war, like every war,

Must reach out to these veterans.

We must learn what it means to live with that pain, and what can be done to relieve it."

I am extremely disturbed by some accounts

That VA hospitals have a major shortage of psychologists, therapists,

And psychiatrists on hand to treat

Existing veterans who have been diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder,

Never mind the folks who are coming home now

And those who will come home in the future.

Now, you might not feel qualified to treat PTSD,

But we can all give our veterans a place to debrief,

To share their experiences,

And in so doing let go of pieces of their pain.

{In the first service}, Leif said that people who have not experienced war
can't really understand it,

like men can't really understand childbirth.

I would add that we need to try...

For our own sake, as well as for the sake of our veterans.

We need to hear the stories veterans bring home

Of friendships made, relationships that transcend

Nationality and ideology and language and role—

Of the gifts that they brought home

And of the scars.

We need to learn what it takes

For someone who doesn't like to kill spiders

To learn to kill people,

What it does to the soul

To witness the death and destruction of war.

¹ : Tripp, Ben, "Support Our Troops", Veterans for Common Sense, October 25, 2005.

Just as hearing about the mysteries of childbirth
 Can give us insights into the mysteries of death,
So hearing about waging war
 Can give us insights into how to make peace.
We owe our veterans our open minds,
 Our open ears,
And our open hearts.

The second thing we owe our veterans is more challenging.

As citizens of this country,
 I believe we have a responsibility
To study, think, and form an opinion
 On whether a war is just or unjust,
And then to hold our leaders morally and ethically accountable.

Andrew Fiala puts it this way:

 “Democratic institutions allow, indeed demand,
debate and disagreement among and between the parts of society.
 The responsibility of a citizen in a self-governing democracy is not simply
To acquiesce in light of the expertise of our leaders.
 Rather, our duty is to question and demand proof,
Especially in light of actions that have momentous moral implications,
 Such as the question of whether to support a war.”²

In the current political climate,
 Our questions and demands for proof
Are often met with disdain...
 Accusations of cowardice, treason, or worst of all, being “liberal”,

Dear ones, we need to question.
 And we need our leaders
To answer our questions honestly and directly.
 We must hold our government accountable
For its actions.

As George Weigel reminds us in his article, “The Free and Virtuous Society,”
 “...society is composed of three interlocking parts—
 a democratic political community,
 a free economy,
 and a robust public moral culture.
Democracy and the free economy are not machines that can run by themselves.

It takes a certain kind of people, possessed of certain virtues,
 To run self-governing polities
And free economies
 So that they do not self-destruct.

² : “Citizenship, Epistemology, and the Just War Theory,” Andrew Fiala, Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture, 7:2, Spring 2004.

The task of the moral-cultural sector is to form these habits of heart and mind in people.

Thus the church is not in the business of proposing technical solutions
To questions of governance or economic activity;
The Church is in the business of forming the culture
That can form the kind of people
Who can develop those solutions
Against a transcendent moral horizon.”

My job is not to tell you what to think,
Or what to do,
But to give you a framework
On which to analyze the facts
And come to your own conclusion.

My job is to create the space
For you to listen to the voice in your own heart
And then to support you as you act on the mandate of that voice.

As Unitarian Universalists,
We can draw on wisdom from the world’s traditions
To help us form our opinions and shape our actions.
For example, we could look to the Osage Indians,
Who each year, had a winter count,
Where they recorded the events of that year,
And who created rituals for their warriors
Twelve days of feasting before they left to do battle...
Ensuring that the price of war would always be high...
And a cleansing ritual when they returned,
If even a single person was killed.
Tears had to be shed for each individual life.³

We could learn from the Osage, look at our history,
Trace the line of violence,
Tally up the cost of war,
And offer rituals to help heal our warriors.

But it’s in the territory of Western Philosophy that most people
In our society
Wrestle with questions of war,

There are three main camps.
On one side is absolute pacifism...
People who believe that violence is never justified,
That it only begets more violence.
Groups such as Pax Christi, the Quakers, and the Buddhist Peace Fellowship
Make their home here.
Civil disobedience and non-violent protest are most powerful tools they possess,
Though they also point toward the possibilities
Of economic development, racial justice, and cross-cultural relationship building.

³ : Tink Tinker, “America as Dry Drunk”, keynote address to UUMA, GA 2005.

There was a cartoon in the New Yorker...
A waitress in a diner, taking "New World Orders."
 'A New Era of peace and prosperity throughout the world,
 hold the skepticism!
'A new awareness of the special problems of the third world,
 with a side of baloney,
'a new sensitivity to the ecological consequences of the headlong pursuit of profit,
 on a bed of public relations!
Many but not all Unitarian Universalists
 Feel pretty at home in this camp.
I know I do...
 But the absolute pacifists don't really have an answer
For evil...
 They don't know what to do when faced with genocide.

My college classmate, Samantha Power,
 Reminds me in her Pulitzer prizewinning book,
The Problem From Hell: America in the Age of Genocide,
 "Given the immensity of the harm caused by genocide,
its prevention is a burden that must be shared.
 ...The United States...must respond to genocide."

Peaceful demonstrations
 Have little power to stop tyranny and brutality at this level,
So as much as I'd like to turn a blind eye to the horror,
 And stay here in the New World Diner,
I find myself turning around and setting out again.

On the other end of the earth, we have the Machiavellians,
 Who see war as just another means
To achieve desired ends.
 And yes, there are some UU's in this camp as well.
I'm not one of them.
 I see the eradication of violence
As an absolute good,
 One that must be pursued,
And so want much more stringent safeguards
 Than the Machiavellians would put into place.

And in the middle is the highly variable and sometimes confusing territory
 Of the Just War Theorists, or practical pacifists.
Like the absolute pacifists,
 They see the elimination of war
As the ultimate goal,
 But they also see a need for using war
To build peace.

The Just War Theory originated with Thomas Aquinas,
 Who set forth in his "Summa Theologicae"
The first map toward determining whether a war is 'just' or 'unjust.'

He had three main requirements for a just war.

First, it must be declared by a legitimate authority.
Conflicts initiated by people or groups lower down on the food chain
Who have recourse to civil authority
Cannot be just and must be treated as criminal.

Second, a just cause is required.

The people being attacked should be attacked
Because they have done some wrong—
Killing innocents,
Or annexing territory that rightfully belongs to another nation.

And third, the people going to war must possess a right intent,
A desire to advance good, prevent evil,
And promote peace.

Over the years, Just War has become more detailed and complex,
Most ethicists identify two main areas of consideration.
The first are “jus ad bellae” principles, principles of justice to war,
Prerequisites that must be met before a country can legitimately go to war.
In addition to the three that Aquinas first laid out...
Again, war must be declared by a proper authority,
Have a just cause,
And grow out of right intention,
There are two more:
A just war must have a reasonable chance of success...
A viable exit strategy, if you will.
And the end must be proportional to the means used.

In addition, two more considerations have been added
To govern conduct during war...the principles of Jus In Bello,
Justice in war.
They are the principle of discrimination...
Which concerns who are legitimate targets in war
(to be a just war, there must be an intent to either avoid
or severely limit civilian casualties, depending on which school you follow)
and the principle of proportionality...
which concerns how much force is morally appropriate.

In considering the Iraq War within this framework,
There is much room for interpretation.

Michael Novak, in an address to the Catholic’s Holy See in 2003,
Made the case for the War in Iraq being a Just War this way:
When Al-Quaeda attacked the World Trade Center,
War was launched against the United States.
Suddenly, the danger posed by Saddam Hussein
(a known tyrant suspected to have stores of chemical, biological,
and possibly even nuclear weapons)
was greatly enhanced.
With his continued refusal to cooperate with U.N. inspectors,

Hussein reneged, in spirit even if not in fact,
On his promise at the end of the Gulf War
 To disarm and to show proof of disarming.
Because the U.N. was not effective
 In forcing Hussein to comply,
The U.S. invaded Iraq out of a responsibility
 To protect U.S. citizens
From terrorist acts
 Perpetrated with arms Hussein had not properly disposed of.⁴

Keith Pavlischek, a former Marine and veteran of the Gulf War,
 And a fellow for the Center for Public Justice
Tells us that the key point to consider is the one of authority.
 In his view,
There's a reason why Aquinas listed authority as the first criteria.
 "the judgment as to whether a military operation
will be successful (the criterion of reasonable chance for success)
 or will result in greater good than harm
(the principle of proportionality)
 rests with those who have the competence to render such judgments.
Put bluntly,
 It resides with those who know what they are talking about.
In almost every instance,
 That does not include bishops, theologians, and professors."⁵

But, oh, I don't agree with that.
 The judgment and the responsibility
Rests with every citizen of every country that goes to war.
 That would be us, folks.

And when I run this war against the just war criteria,
 I wind up with questions on almost every point.

To be completely honest, I don't know what to do.
 Our president won't even talk to Cindy Sheehan.
There is still no proof that Saddam actually had Weapons of Mass Destruction.
 There is no end in sight,
And no publicly articulated exit strategy more detailed than "we have to stay the course."
 Over 2000 of our soldiers have died,
And over 200 BILLION of our tax dollars have gone to the war—
 Not to mention the Iraqi civilians who have died...
Estimates range from 25,000 to 30,000 dead innocents,
 But Tommy Franks says, "We don't do body counts."

I don't know what to do.

But I do know that just as I am proud of the veterans in this congregation,
 I am proud of the conscientious objectors,

⁴ : Novak, Michael, "Asymmetrical Warfare and Just War," address to the Holy See, February 10, 2003.

⁵ : Pavlischek, Keith, "Just and Unjust War in the Terrorist Age," The Intercollegiate Review, Spring 2002.

And the people who stand vigil week after week.

I am proud that this is a place
Where people from all sides of the issue
With all different sources of information and opinion
Can sit down and talk honestly about what's going on.

I am proud that when a serviceman or woman or a civilian employee
Who is also a member of this congregation
drives onto base

And sees someone standing with a sign at the gate,

He or she thinks "I am proud of my friend for standing up for his or her beliefs,"
Not, "Lousy Liberal Protester!"

I am proud that dedicated activists
Who have devoted their lives to opposing war
Can come to church, put their arms around a veteran
And think, "This is my brother, this is my sister,
And we are both home here."

So thank you...thank you, veterans,
Thank you, citizens,

Thank you spirit of life and of peace
That moves in every heart
If we but find the courage to listen.

Please, please help us find a path
Away from this war
And all wars
To a world with peace and justice for all.

So be it, and so may it be.