

**Homily**  
**Community United Methodist Church of Coeur d'Alene**  
**Sunday, September 11, 2022**  
**10am**

Text: Isaiah 52:7-10 (NRSVUE)

[prayer]

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace.”

I love this line from Scripture. I grew up hiking in the mountains. Mountains are holy, both in the Bible and in my personal experience. They are one of the places on this beautiful earth that I feel closest God – like with every step I gain in altitude I am one step closer to the gates of heaven.

These days my hiking boots are starting to look a little worse for wear. They're dusty and muddy and the threads are beginning to fray. But they've been some incredible places. I bought them for a backpacking trip in China eleven years ago. Some of the dust comes from the mountains of Manchuria – a place at once beautiful and scarred by foreign occupation and civil unrest. I think about the feet that marched through those mountains in the last century, feet that came bearing a message of war, not peace.

To the far west, China shares 47 miles of border with Afghanistan, another country whose mountains have long been tread by war. It was just one year ago that our military withdrew from Afghanistan after twenty years of fighting a terrorist insurgency. The news has been full of reports this past month on the state of Afghanistan. We invaded with the goal of rooting out the terrorists that attacked us on this day twenty-one years ago. We invaded in the name of justice. We thought we would bring the freedom of peace to Afghanistan. But twenty years on, our hurried withdrawal and the people's suffering proves otherwise.

I have listened to several longform stories about Afghan refugees who sought asylum in the U.S. this last year. Stories of their harrowing journeys, and stories about the people they left behind. And as I have listened to those stories, I have

felt sad and a little defeated. I was eleven years old when the Twin Towers fell and the Pentagon burned. We were at war in Afghanistan for two-thirds of my life. It was my generation's war and I wanted it to end. But just because a war ends does not mean peace automatically takes its place. Peace is not simply the absence of violence. It is not passive. Peace is a discipline. It must be cultivated through the intentional practice of nonviolence.

Jesus famously preached nonviolence – “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt 5:9). But more importantly, Jesus lived nonviolence. He understood that violence always begets violence. Though he was God in human form, he did not retaliate when the violence of humanity whipped him and beat him and nailed him to a cross. He demonstrated the discipline of peace with his very body.

But despite this incredible witness, Christians have struggled mightily to practice peace. We've fought holy wars. We've allied ourselves with some of the most violent political regimes in history. Too often we have been the feet bearing war, not peace. I am not a total pacifist, although I deeply admire those who are. I acknowledge that we live in a fallen world where war is sometimes an unfortunate necessity. But whether we believe a war is just or not, we still worship a God of peace. God does not condone our violence, no matter how righteous our cause. God tells us that if we call ourselves God's children, we must be peacemakers. And peacemaking is a verb. Peacemaking is the choice to trade violence for nonviolence. To break the cycle of violent beliefs begetting violent actions. To beat our literal weapons, or the weapons of our words and thoughts, into gardening tools and sow seeds of peace that future generations will reap.

As we reflect on twenty-one years since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, I imagine many of us remember how we felt on that day. Helpless is the foremost feeling in my mind. Violence is so ubiquitous it can feel inevitable. But we are never truly helpless in the face of violence, because peace is a discipline that starts in our hearts. It is a spiritual posture and a spiritual practice. Today in worship we are going to cultivate the discipline of peace in our own hearts with an extended time of prayer. After the prayers of the people, you will have the opportunity to visit four prayer stations that are set up around periphery of the room. Each station invites you into a different way of praying for peace. May our prayers today rise like incense to God and hasten the coming of His peaceable kingdom.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace.”

Let us pray:

Lord, make us instruments of your peace.  
Where there is hatred, let us bring love.  
Where there is offence, let us bring pardon.  
Where there is discord, let us bring union.  
Where there is error, let us bring truth.  
Where there is doubt, let us bring faith.  
Where there is despair, let us bring hope.  
Where there is darkness, let us bring your light.  
Where there is sadness, let us bring joy.  
O Master, let us not seek as much  
to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,  
to be loved as to love,  
for it is in giving that one receives,  
it is in self-forgetting that one finds,  
it is in pardoning that one is pardoned,  
it is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.

Amen.