



Ramallah Friends Meeting (Quakers)

A Season of Peace...
when there is no peace
by Jean Zaru



Advent has begun, and the season of peace is upon us.

During this season in Palestine, we greet one another with a blessing: *"May every year bring you peace, wholeness and good health."*

Regardless of the hardships our people face and the turmoil the region endures, we continue to reach out to one another as a daily act of faith and offer this blessing of holistic peace.

To live one's life as an expression of peace is a beautiful act of courage. And so it is today that, with courage and faith, we hold strong to our vision of a peaceful world and a **peaceful Jerusalem** - an open and inclusive city that welcomes all people, religions and cultures.

Friends, the dire circumstances of today require of us a measure of courage and faith like no time before. And whether we consider ourselves ready or not, the "season of peace...when there is no peace" is upon us.

The Bible begins and ends with a promise of peace.

In the book of Genesis, it is written that God created a garden of peace. In that garden, God gave life to humankind and offered them all that was good –an abode of peace, with order and beauty. It was all that they required for a good life (Genesis 2).

In the final book of the New Testament, another peaceable community appears. It is here that God dwells on earth in a city of peace, with security and healing (Revelations 21:1-4).

Meanwhile, in between, through the prophets Isaiah and Micah, there is word of a peaceful era. One in which swords are hammered into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 24; Micah 4:3).

The promise of peace is central to the biblical tradition. At the birth of Jesus, the angel's song proclaims, "Glory to God, Peace on earth!". While the presence of Christ in our midst is understood to bring forth that peace—a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:7). As central as it might be, there is no one, single understanding of peace; indeed, the Christian tradition has, over the ages, held a wide range of views about peace.

We can, of course, spend much time debating these different views, as well as the split some see between spiritual peace and historical peace. However, the question that continues to rise within myself is this: "If we say there is that of God in every person, why is it so difficult to see God in others? If we say there is that of (a peaceful) God in every person, why is there so much evil and suffering in the world today?"

Where is the season of peace for which we so long?

There are many understandings of the word 'peace' and many misuses of it. For too long, Palestinians, women and many other marginalized groups have been told to be peaceful in the sense of being passive, calm, conciliatory or "nice". This definition of peace creates the false notion that working for a just change to the status quo, or struggling for human and civil rights is disruptive to the peaceable order of things.

For decades, really for lifetimes, those of us on the margins have been "talked to" about a peace that is achieved by pounding the opposition into submission. A peace maintained by undermining and shutting down protests including and, sometimes especially, non-violent protests that call out the underlying systems of injustice, militarism, racism and greed. "Peace" for the rulers and "peace" for the occupiers; never peace for the occupied and subjugated.

Today, more clearly than ever, I hear the words of Jeremiah ring in my ears: "'Peace, peace' they say when there is no peace." (6:14)

In Christianity, the season of Advent focuses on journeying, waiting and hoping. The Christmas story of peace on earth and goodwill to all is retold and held tenderly in our hearts (Luke 1:14). We long for a new creation—one that is redeemed, forgiven and reconciled.

And, yet, given the turmoil and despair in the world today, we wonder if our hope for world peace rings hollow? Can we even envision peace in the Middle East, in Palestine and Jerusalem? And what about the peace we all long for within our homes and personal lives?

The struggles abound, whether they have to do with: poverty and making ends meet; our physical and mental health; daily discrimination and oppression; grief and unexpected life changes; and the inevitable diminishment that comes with aging and disease. Moreover, and especially in this region of the world, many of our friends and neighbors are refugees, seeking asylum and respite from circumstances beyond their control. Whether that be newly or more than 70 years on.

Liberation as peace.

If there is one word that could be used to describe the desires and hopes of every person today, it is liberation. Liberation from whatever limits our self-fulfillment. Liberation from the barriers that prevent us from exercising our freedoms. Yes, we all want to be free and at peace in a free land.

May we be mindful that both freedom and liberation involve responsibility, as well as action, to build God's realm on earth, as it is in heaven. Are we ready?

I have been waiting and working for a better world, a more peaceful world all my life. I am tired. Or perhaps, I notice myself becoming impatient after all these long years.

Regardless, I hold strong to the deep knowledge that nothing will separate me from the love of God. Nothing can separate us for we are meant to be refreshed and renewed to carry on, together and in community, to seek transformation for everyone and all creation.

In the light of advent that shines in the darkness, we sing and pray "Emmanuel, O come, and we will rejoice". May we do so through our actions, priorities and service.

And may the season bring you joy and peace!

+ Jean Zaru

