

Lessons and Carols for Peace and Justice Through the Way of Love

Or an alternative title depending on the social climate and need at the time.

Lessons and Carols for Dignity and Respect Through the Way of Love

The outline of this worship service was originally conceived at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon, during the Christmas season prior to our country's invasion of Iraq in early 2003. It was created as a prayerful response to the immorality of singing "peace on earth" while simultaneously loading bombs on ships and preparing for war. It has subsequently gone through several edits, adaptations, and titles in the parishes I served and as we responded to the challenges of our times. The service requires no sermon and has been used as the primary liturgy for the Sunday after Christmas.

The great message of Christmas is "Peace on Earth." We sing about it, rejoice in it, and at the same time arm ourselves for war. Whether that war is nation against nation, and we arm ourselves militarily or the war is against our neighbors, and we arm ourselves with better arguments to justify our resentments, the outcome is no peace. As I survey our fractious world and contemplate Christmas and a new year, I think before we can contemplate peace, we need to work on a more basic building block: we need to grow in our respect for others and a shared sense of dignity. This is the Way of Love.

The story of the incarnation, of God coming and living as one of us is a radical expression of God's respect for each one of us as individuals and for humanity as a whole. It takes us back to the Garden of Eden, to paradise, to love, where we only knew respect and knew no shame — we had dignity. In Christ's birth we are restored to dignity.

The word 'Namaste' means "The divine light in me sees the divine light in you. This is the foundation of respect. I invite you to use this service on the Sunday after Christmas as a time of reflection, prayer, and inspiration as to how we can be provocateurs of love and agents of transformation in a world increasingly filled with hate speech, fear mongering, bigotry, and violence. Rather than engaging in blame for the current state of affairs, this service is an invitation to set aside the futility of blame and in the light of the incarnation take personal responsibility for how we live and how we personally can become part of a loving solution. My hope is that our common prayer will inspire and empower us all to Live the Way of Love and that, united in the newborn Christ, we will become the change we desire to see in our country and our world.

Please feel free to cut, copy, paste, and adapt this service to your setting and needs. As noted, no sermon is anticipated, nor a final blessing or dismissal other than the Song of Simeon. This version does not include a Eucharist, which LessonsAndCarolsForWayofLove.docx does. Hymn numbers refer to the Episcopal Hymnal 1982 available from The Church Hymnal Corporation, New York.

*Rob Voyle
Christmas 2023*

Lessons and Carols for Peace and Justice Through the Way of Love

A Liturgy of Word and Carol

Hymn 83

O come all ye faithful

Adeste fideles

The Gathering of the People and Bidding Prayer

Celebrant Beloved in Christ, at this Christmas-tide let it be our joy and delight to hear again the message of the angels, and in heart and mind to go to Bethlehem and behold this thing that God has done in giving us God's son, born as a baby in a manger.

Let us listen and reflect on the mystery of God's love for us, that despite our disobedience, peace has come to us through this Holy Child.

Let us join our voices with the angels and sing hymns of praise to the newborn King.

Let us join, in the name of this King and his way of love, with the poor and helpless, the cold and hungry, the sick and lonely, the oppressed and victims of injustice.

And let us pray for ourselves that God would grow in us hearts of love and respect.

People **Jesus Christ is good news for the poor, release for the captives,
recovery of sight for the blind and liberty for those who are oppressed.**

Hymn 96

Angels we have heard on high

Gloria

The Readings

The First Reading

Isaiah 9:2-7

Reader A reading from the prophet Isaiah

The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who lived in a land of deep darkness--on them light has shined. You have multiplied the nation, you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as people exult when dividing plunder. For the yoke of their burden, and the bar across their shoulders, the rod of their oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire. For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders; and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His authority shall grow continually, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

People **Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.**

Hymn 105

God rest you, merry gentlemen

God rest you merry gentleman

The Second Reading

Omar Bradley and Dwight Eisenhower

Reader A reading from Two Generals: Omar Bradley and Dwight Eisenhower

Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living. We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. — *Omar N. Bradley*

Every gun that is made, every warship launched, every rocket fired signifies in the final sense, a theft from those who hunger and are not fed, those who are cold and are not clothed. This world in arms is not spending money alone. It is spending the sweat of its laborers, the genius of its scientists, the hopes of its children. This is not a way of life at all in any true sense. Under the clouds of war, it is humanity hanging on a cross of iron. — *Dwight Eisenhower*

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

People Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.

Hymn 112

In the bleak mid winter

Granham

The Third Reading

Joan Chittister

Reader A reading from Joan Chittister.

Where did we lose the idea that freedom of speech is the right to have our speech protected, no matter what our opinion might be? That does not, however, include the right to libel, slander, and now bully people into submission. It does not include a license to abuse someone—meaning to call names or threaten harm or talk or harass those who are different than we are. Physically, socially, or politically.

Obviously, given the increase in the amount of outright lies or veiled insults in the public airways now, the threat of the law does not much restrain an anonymous population, let alone educate it to a more civilized kind of communication. But now we have struck a new low. A gutter talk so bad that we don't want children even to watch the news. Now it's our national leaders who are leading the pack. The valiant types who purport to be the role models of the country.

And we, for our part, ask ourselves what has happened to us. How has compassion—the ability to really feel for the other, to care for the others as well as ourselves, to be different than others but never destructive of others—disappeared?

So now we're split as a country, as a body politic, as a generation. Why? Because we ignored this malignancy and let it spread. Has it helped us expand ourselves? Has it helped us to make our points any better, any more effectively? Has it brought us to the point of effective political discourse? Has it made us any happier? The Dalai Lama's statement says it all: "If you want others to be happy, practice compassion. If you want to be happy, practice compassion."

From where I stand, it seems to me that to be compassionate in this environment, we can't say "It's awful," anymore. We need to say, "It stops here. In front of me. Always."

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

People Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.

Hymn 99

Go tell it on the mountain

Go tell it on the mountain

The Fourth Reading

Nelson Mandela

Reader A reading from Nelson Mandela

I always knew that deep down in every human heart, there is mercy and generosity. No one is born hating another person because of the color of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite. Even in the grimmest times in prison, when my comrades and I were pushed to our limits, I would see a glimmer of humanity in one of the guards, perhaps just for a second, but it was enough to reassure me and keep me going. Man's goodness is a flame that can be hidden but never extinguished. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

People Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.

Hymn 115

What child is this

Greensleaves

The Fifth Reading

HH the Dalai Lama

Reader A reading from His Holiness the Dalai Lama

In today's interconnected and globalized world, it is now commonplace for people of dissimilar world views, faiths and races to live side by side. It is a matter of great urgency, therefore, that we find ways to cooperate with one another in a spirit of mutual acceptance and respect... Whether one is rich or poor, educated or illiterate, religious or nonbelieving, man or woman, black, white, or brown, we are all the same. Physically, emotionally, and mentally, we are all equal. We all share basic needs for food, shelter, safety, and love. We all aspire to happiness and we all shun suffering. Each of us has hopes, worries, fears, and dreams. Each of us wants the best for our family and loved ones. We all experience pain when we suffer loss and joy when we achieve what we seek. On this fundamental level, religion, ethnicity, culture, and language make no difference.

Responsibility does not only lie with the leaders of our countries or with those who have been appointed or elected to do a particular job. It lies with each of us individually. Peace, for example, starts within each one of us. When we have inner peace, we can be at peace with those around us. When our community is in a state of peace, it can share that peace with neighboring communities, and so on. When we feel love and kindness towards others, it not only makes others feel loved and cared for, but it helps us also to develop inner happiness and peace. And there are ways in which we can consciously work to develop feelings of love and kindness. For some of us, the most effective way to do so is through religious practice. For others it may be nonreligious practices. What is important is that we each make a sincere effort to take our responsibility for each other and for the natural environment we live in seriously.

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

People Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.

Hymn 110

The snow lay on the ground

Venite adoremus

The Sixth Reading

Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Reader A reading from Archbishop Desmond Tutu.

We must embrace our differences, even celebrate our diversity. We must glory in the fact that God created each of us as unique human beings. God created us different, but God did not create us for separation. God created us different that we might recognize our need for one another. We must reverence our uniqueness, reverence everything that makes us what we are: our language, our culture, our religious tradition.

As much as the world has an instinct for evil and is a breeding ground for genocide, holocaust, slavery, racism, war, oppression, and injustice, the world has an even greater instinct for goodness, rebirth, mercy, beauty, truth, freedom and love... There's no way in which you can ever win a war against terror as long as there are conditions in many parts of the world that make people desperate: poverty, disease, ignorance, etc. True peace must be anchored in justice and an unwavering commitment to universal rights for all humans, regardless of ethnicity, religion, gender, national origin or any other identity attribute.

We are made for goodness. We are made for love. We are made for friendliness. We are made for togetherness. We are made for all of the beautiful things that you and I know. We are made to tell the world that there are no outsiders. All are welcome: black, white, red, yellow, rich, poor, educated, not educated, male, female, gay, straight, all, all, all. We all belong to this family, this human family, God's family... Our maturity will be judged by how well we are able to agree to disagree and yet continue to love one another, to care for one another, and cherish one another and seek the greater good of the other.

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

***People* Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.**

Hymn 107

Good Christian friends, rejoice

In dulci jubilo

The Seventh Reading

Thomas Merton

It is true that we live in an epoch of revolution, and that the breakup and re-formation of society is inevitable. But Christians must see that our mission is not to contribute to the blind forces of annihilation which tend to destroy civilization and mankind together. We must seek to build rather than to destroy. We must orient our efforts towards world unity and not towards world division. Anyone who promotes policies of hatred and of war is working for the division and destruction of civilized humanity... where there is a deep, simple, all-embracing love of people, of the created world of living and inanimate things, then there will be respect for life, for freedom, for truth, for justice and there will be humble love of God. But where there is no love of people no love of life, then make all the laws you want, all the edicts and treaties, issue all the anathemas; set up all the safeguards and inspections, fill the air with spying satellites, and hang cameras on the moon. As long as you see your fellow man as a being essentially to be feared, mistrusted, hated, and destroyed, there cannot be peace on earth.

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

***People* Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.**

Hymn 87

Hark! the herald angels sing

Mendelssohn

The Eighth Reading

Valerie Kaur

Revolutionary love is a well-spring of care, an awakening to the inherent dignity and beauty of others and the earth, a quieting of the ego, a way of moving through the world in relationship, asking: ‘What is your story? What is at stake? What is my part in your flourishing?’ Loving others, even our opponents, in this way has the power to sustain political, social and moral transformation. This is how love changes the world.

Love calls us to look upon the faces of those different from us as brothers and sisters. Love calls us to weep when their bodies are outcast, broken or destroyed. Love calls us to speak even when our voice trembles, stand even when hate spins out of control, and stay even when the blood is fresh on the ground. Love makes us brave. The world needs your love: the only social, political and moral force that can dismantle injustice to remake the world around us – and within us. To pursue a life of revolutionary love is to walk boldly into the hot winds of the world with a saint’s eyes and a warrior’s heart – and pour our body, breath, and blood into others.

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

People Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.

Hymn 89

It came upon the midnight clear

Carol

The Holy Gospel

Matthew 25:34-45

Reader A reading from the Gospel of Matthew.

Jesus said, “The king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?’ And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.’ Then he will say to those at his left hand, ‘You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.’ Then they also will answer, ‘Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?’ Then he will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’”

Reader Hear what Love is saying to the People of God.

People Amen! All that Love has said, we will do.

Hymn 84

Love came down at Christmas

Gartan

Litany for the Way Love

Intercessor O God of love, keep us from a casual repetition of a comfortable Christmas story.
Awaken us to see and live your Son our Savior's Way of Love;

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command.**

Intercessor When the decree went out from Caesar, Joseph and Mary were forced to set out from their home even as some now set out on journeys not of their choosing.

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command; to seek the lost and lonely, the homeless and hungry, those afraid and adrift.**

Intercessor That the peace proclaimed by angels in the shepherds' field might be realized on every field of war and on every street of violence.

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command; to strive for peace and not for war.**

Intercessor That the angel's message of goodwill will come to the places of hatred, bigotry, and callous apathy.

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command; to see the presence of Christ in all people and treasure one another as you treasure us.**

Intercessor That the Magi's wisdom in the face of Herod's trickery would bring light and truth to the dark places of deception in our world.

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command; and not be distracted nor deceived by temporal authority.**

Intercessor That a true understanding of justice would come to the hearts of the Herods of this world who would slaughter and imprison children to maintain their own power, control and prestige.

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command; to be resolute against tyranny and welcome those who flee from terror.**

Intercessor We hold in the Light that has come into the world those in need of healing and those on our hearts this day (*The names of those in need of healing will be read followed by a moment of silence to add those on your hearts*) and we pray:

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command; to be your healing presence for those in distress.**

Intercessor We hold in the Light that has come into the world the deployed military members of our church family. (*The names will be added followed by a moment of silence for you to add, silently or aloud, the names of your loved ones*); and we pray:

People **Disturb our slumber and awaken us to love as you command; to care for their families as they await their safe return and for all veterans and their families who carry the scars of war.**

Celebrant And now, as our Savior Christ has taught us, we are bold to say,

Rev. Jim Cotter

**Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:
The hallowing of your name echo through the universe!
The way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!
Your heavenly will be done by all created beings!
Your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come on earth.
With the bread we need for today, feed us.
In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.
In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.
From trials too great to endure, spare us.
From the grip of all that is evil, free us.
For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and forever. Amen.**

Confession and Absolution

Celebrant God of Light, you have pierced the darkness of our world by the coming of your son our savior, Jesus Christ, making us your children of light to be your love in the world.

As we awaken to your way of love, help us recognize and transform our failure to care for those in need, and for the powerless, and least among us.

The people kneel and silence is kept.

Celebrant We will confess our sins to the Lord. We will not conceal our wrongdoing.

People **We need your healing, merciful God; give us true repentance.**
Some sins are plain to us: our greed, disrespect, hate, apathy, and lack of charity.
Some sins are less clear: our allegiance to economic and political systems
that oppress, demean, enslave, and pollute,
destroying human dignity and the beauty of your creation.
For the evil we see and do, for the evil we see yet are silent to,
and for the evil we do not see yet share in we pray:
Forgive us, transform us, and renew us
to be your way of love in the world. Amen.

Celebrant God forgives you. Forgive others. Forgive yourself.

Silence is kept

Celebrant God the Creator loves you,
God the Son heals and restores you,
God the Spirit gives you new life.
Enfold yourself in Christ and approach your God in peace.

People **Amen.**

The Peace *The people stand for the peace*

Celebrant The light in me greets the light in you.

People **The light in us greets the light in you.**

Celebrant The peace of Christ be always with you.

People **And also with you.**

Offertory Sentence

Celebrant Like the Wise Ones long ago, offer your gifts from your hearts to the newborn King.

Offertory Hymn 109

The First Nowell

The First Nowell

Prayer of Reflection *(the people stand)*

Celebrant Let us pray.

People **O God, the Creator,**

O Christ, the Incarnate Word,

O Holy Spirit, the Giver of Life,

Our blessed Trinity of love,

you have enfolded us in your love,

and here we commit ourselves to live your way of love.

Set the incarnate light of Christ, as your inspiration in our lives,

and send us out into the world as your provocateurs of grace and justice,

to serve one another, with your love in our hearts,

your truth in our minds, your strength in our wills,

until with all creation, we know the joy of our homecoming

and the welcome of your embrace, in Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Hymn 100

Joy to the World

The Last Gospel

The people remain standing

John 1:1-14

In the beginning was Love, and Love was with God, and Love was God. Love was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Love, and without Love not one thing came into being. What has come into being in Love was life, and this life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And Love became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen Love's glory, the glory as of God's beloved son, full of grace and truth.

The Song of Simeon

The people respond with the Song of Simeon

Luke 2:29-32

People **Lord, you now have set your servant free to go in peace as you have promised;
For these eyes of mine have seen the Savior,
whom you have prepared for all the world to see:
A light to enlighten the nations, and the glory of your people Israel.
All Glory to the Loving One,
Source of our Being, Eternal Word and Life-Giving Spirit:
as it was in the beginning, is now, and will be forever. Amen! Amen!**

Postlude