

*Spiritual Disarmament*  
*Rev. Thomas Cary Kinder*  
*United Church of Strafford, Vermont*  
*May 12, 2024, Seventh Sunday of Easter*  
*Excerpts from Philippians 2 and the Writings of John and*  
*Julia Ward Howe's "Mothers' Day Proclamation" (see below)*

**Welcome** to the United Church of Strafford, Vermont, an Open and Affirming Congregation, on this Seventh Sunday of Easter. Welcome to you who are in the sanctuary and welcome to you online.

We acknowledge that we are on the ancestral and unceded land of the traditional caretakers, the Western Abenaki people. We share the belief that the land and all life are gifts of the Spirit, and our role is to honor and protect the creation, building a loving community that includes all.

Arun Gandhi summed up his grandfather's philosophy with the famous saying, "Be the change you wish to see in the world."

As we create a community of peace by being kind, compassionate and loving within these walls, we are being the change we want outside these walls. As we create a spiritual home to support people through hard times, and teach children what the world can be like when it lives by an ethic of love, we are being the change we want to see everywhere.

After the service today, let us once again extend our care and support to one another for love's sake and for the sake of the world we change by being loving.

**Call to Worship** Julia Ward Howe wrote the Battle Hymn of the Republic early in the Civil War, calling for the abolition of slavery, but eight years later, after seeing the carnage, she wrote her Mother's Day Proclamation calling for the abolition of war (see below).

If we follow the way of the Spirit that filled Jesus, and look at the world through the eyes of universal love and compassion, we can expect the same spiritual disarmament that happened to Julia Ward Howe to happen to us.

It takes courage to open ourselves to that possibility, because it puts us at odds with our government, the military industrial complex, and even family and friends. This is the courage the God who is love, the Spirit of The Prince of Peace, asks us to have, and when we see that courage

to love in Jesus, or Mother Teresa or our own mother or grandmother, its beauty moves us to love, too. So let us worship together with thanks and praise...

### *Spiritual Disarmament*

Julia Ward Howe was not the first famous person to call for disarmament and the abolition of war.

For three hundred years after Jesus every single theologian and member of the church agreed that violence was incompatible with his teachings, and therefore being a soldier or being involved in war in any way was absolutely forbidden. The early churches agreed on almost nothing else, but nonviolence was universal.

Julia Ward Howe was not the first to call for the abolition of war, nor was she the only supporter of a war who changed after witnessing its horrors. World War II is held out today as the model of a necessary and just war, but listen to the words of three Presidents who were active in that war.

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote in his last speech, “The work, my friends, is peace. More than an end of this war—an end to the beginnings of all wars. Yes, an end, forever, to this impractical, unrealistic settlement of the differences between governments by the mass killing of peoples.”

President Dwight Eisenhower, America’s highest commander in the war, wrote, “Disarmament...is a continuing imperative. Together we must learn how to compose differences, not with arms, but with intellect and decent purpose.”

And President John F. Kennedy, who was honored for his heroism, also called for total disarmament, saying, “Mankind must put an end to war or war will put an end to mankind.”

Yet despite these powerful voices, our militarized, weapons-saturated, profiteering culture wants us to believe that violence and war are inevitable, that human nature is inescapably self-interested, aggressive and naturally inclined to conflict.

Theologians at Princeton Theological Seminary and Duke Divinity School, Beverly Roberts Gaventa and Richard B. Hays, wrote that one of the recurring themes among Biblical scholars is the recognition of Jesus as “a disturbing, destabilizing figure.... [who was] executed as a dangerous revolutionary. And it has remained true across time that Jesus’ teachings and

presence have a way of...calling people to radical and costly service.” (Christian Century, November 4, 2008 p 31)

To abide in the Spirit of love that moved Jesus is to undergo a radical reordering of the way we see the world. Where society tells us that materialism is the meaning of life, the Spirit’s love shows us that there is something far deeper and more meaningful and enduring. Where society tells us that violence is the way to peace, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr debunks that myth saying, “Returning violence for violence multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

This is one of the core truths about nonviolence. Another is that there can be no peace without the things that make for peace— what Gandhi called the Constructive Program of his nonviolent movement, giving the disenfranchised access to education, health care and economic opportunity.

Another essential truth is the saying of St. Seraphim of Sarov, “Have peace in yourself and thousands will find salvation around you.” Or as the tradition of Taoism puts it,

No peace in the world without peace in the nation,  
No peace in the nation without peace in the town,  
No peace in the town without peace in the home,  
No peace in the home without peace in the heart.

The world certainly needs people protesting violence, as is happening on college campuses, courageously demanding peace and the justice and social equity that make for peace.

We also need to pick up the torch of those former Presidents and William Sloane Coffin and J. Robert Oppenheimer and Albert Einstein and many others and call for nuclear disarmament, as Russia holds military exercises with tactical nuclear weapons.

But what we need even more than nuclear disarmament is spiritual disarmament, because it is absolutely true that there can be no peace in the world without peace in the heart.

Jesus says in the Gospel of John, “Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” He says, “My peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives.”

The world gives us the irrational idea that peace will come to us through the rush and pressure and bombardment of violent images in our lives, but they do violence to our heart, and the disturbance of our heart’s peace can spread to our home and town and beyond. Violence

inherent in our society's way of life can lead to addiction, fear, anger, hopelessness, physical and mental illness, and can diminish our capacity for compassion, kindness and love.

I have talked many times about the four steps of the traditional spiritual path with their ancient Greek names, but I am not sure I have ever described it as a path of spiritual disarmament, a path to true and lasting peace, from the inside out.

The first step is kenosis, self-emptying, what Gandhi called reducing ourselves to zero. Kenosis is the disarmament of the ego's selfishness and attachment to material things. That self-emptying leads to metanoia, which means literally to move beyond where our heart and mind are now to a greater heart and mind.

Metanoia leads to agape. Every time you heard the word love in today's scriptures it was the Greek word agape. The expanding vision of our heart sees ever more clearly that we are one with all people and all life on earth and the earth itself. We see that everyone is the neighbor we are called to love.

With that vision and love comes the final step of the four, koinonia, which means the creation of the beloved community where all the things that make for peace are provided as a natural outcome of the love flowing through us.

Love leads to the logic of a world without weapons and without war. Imagine what a nation abiding in love would do after an attack like that of September 11, 2001 or October 7, 2024. Love would try to have compassion and forgive those who attacked us, and find ways to change the conditions that led them to hate us. But then, if we are constantly looking for ways to lay down our national self-interest in order to serve the interest of the less fortunate peoples in the world, if loving our enemy as our self is our foreign policy, we will be far less likely ever to be attacked.

Is this way of love reasonable or practical? It certainly is the only way we will ever disarm and end the unreasonable, impractical scourge of war. But Jesus did not call us to seek the most reasonable and practical way to live. He called us to be extremists for love, as Dr. King put it.

So the last fundamental truth is: "There is no way to peace; peace is the way."

If you have seen the film *Oppenheimer*, this is the truth he learned from the use of the atomic bombs he built. He thought they would be so terrible that the world would wake up and

realize that the only way humanity can survive is to live in peace, but instead, as always, violence led to greater violence.

There is no way to disarmament; disarmament is the way, and it has to begin with the spiritual disarmament of our heart.

Gandhi said the greatest weapon of nonviolence is silent, contemplative prayer, like what we practice in our Heartfulness Circle meditations. It silences the part of our mind that is driven by self-interest. It attempts to empty us of all but the Spirit and its flow of love.

The more we undergo this spiritual disarmament, the more powerful we become, because the Spirit of the universe rises to fill our emptiness and flow through us and make us instruments of God's peace.

Let us practice self-emptying now, praying by letting go of thoughts as they arise, opening to let the Spirit fill us with its vision of oneness and its all-powerful love. Let us pray in silence...

### **Haiku by Mel Goertz**

Green grass sprouting up.  
What a treat for young chickens  
pecking at the leaves.

### *Excerpts from Philippians 2 and the Writings of John*

Be of the same mind, having the same love... Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself...

Jesus said, "Those who love me will keep my word, and the one who sent me will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.... Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid."

Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.

No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God lives in us, and love is perfected in us.

God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear.

Those who say, "I love God," and hate their brothers or sisters, are not telling the truth... Those who love God will love their brothers and sisters also.

**Mother's Day Proclamation, 1870 Julia Ward Howe**

Arise then...women of this day!

Arise, all women who have hearts!

Whether your baptism be of water or of tears!

Say firmly:

"We will not have questions answered by irrelevant agencies,  
our husbands will not come to us, reeking with carnage,  
for caresses and applause.

Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn  
all that we have been able to teach them  
of charity, mercy and patience.

We, the women of one country,  
will be too tender of those of another country  
to allow our sons to be trained to injure theirs."

From the bosom of a devastated Earth a voice goes up  
with our own. It says: "Disarm! Disarm!

The sword of murder is not the balance of justice."

Blood does not wipe out dishonor,  
nor violence indicate possession.

As men have often forsaken the plough and the anvil  
at the summons of war,

let women now leave all that may be left of home  
for a great and earnest day of counsel.

Let them meet first, as women, to bewail and commemorate the dead.

Let them solemnly take counsel with each other as to the means  
whereby the great human family can live in peace...

Each bearing after his own time the sacred impress, not of Caesar,  
but of God—

In the name of womanhood and humanity, I earnestly ask  
that a general congress of women without limit of nationality,  
may be appointed and held at someplace deemed most convenient  
and at the earliest period consistent with its objects,  
to promote the alliance of the different nationalities,  
the amicable settlement of international questions,  
the great and general interests of peace.