

Peace Service Sermon: A Dynamic Peace

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"Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord."¹

Some events in human life stand out in striking relief against the background of common things. You remember distinctly the quiet April evening of 1917 when the shrieking blasts of the fire whistle went searching through the homes of the city to call, from the midst of peaceful surroundings and occupations, the men of Company F for service in the Great War. Even though you expected the call, yet with breathless suspense you counted the ten blasts of the whistle. New thoughts were flitting through your mind. New emotions were surging through your whole being. How clear and distinct it all seems, that event of 18 months ago. Yet how remote it seems. Not a year and a half, but an epoch in history seems to us now to have taken place since that evening.

So indelibly was that moment impressed upon me, so frequently have the circumstances been in my mind since, that I recite the incident to you this morning by way of introduction to what I wish to say. I was standing by the window reading that powerful play by Max Ehrmann, "Jesus, A Passion Play."² I was in the midst of the second act. In the first act of the play there is portrayed with remarkable effect the cleansing of the Temple by Jesus. It was a picture of moral passion, naked and unafraid, face-to-face with organized wrong, selfishness and greed. How the guilty ones quailed before the searching gaze, and, rebuked, slunk from the temple in fear.

In the second act, we have the scattered traders taking council together, trying to determine what they will do, how they may re-establish their nefarious traffic. They fear the return of Jesus, and the crowd, and the loss of their unfair and

¹ Zechariah 4:6.

² Max Ehrmann (1872-1945) American writer, poet and attorney. He wrote *Jesus: A Passion Play* in 1915, New York: The Baker and Taylor Co.

unjust privilege. At the very moment that the first blast of the whistle was sounded calling the men of Pittsfield to war, I was reading some lines in the play uttered by one Booz, a leading trader, and leader of the traders of the temple. He was exhorting his fellows. Said this trader, "These men are right. We should drive back the animals and sell as before. But we should be armed with short swords hidden under our cloaks—we and our helpers. The arguments of polished silver are stronger than the arguments of polished words." Hundreds of times has this startling juxtaposition of the council of Booz the trader, over against the shrill blasts of that whistle calling our nation to war been the center of my thoughts.

Company F responded. Likewise the nation. Four million men have been drawn from our civil life. More than two million, and among them Company F, have gone overseas, some to battle, some to labor, some to heroic deaths, many to honorable distinction for courage and bravery in battle.

Now the warfare has been accomplished. An armistice has been signed, stopping the fighting of the greatest war in History. Fondly do we hope that out of this travail and pain there may come a just and lasting peace. Fervently do we pray that out of the broken and shattered remnants of the nations there may yet arise a fair and just civilization. As the nations turned, half-stunned and dazed from the horrible conflicts, the brutality, the strain, the price of war, what have we to say? What have we accomplished? What have we before us? Immediately we utter the word "peace." The wild and tumultuous outburst of the entire world last Monday and Tuesday is but a feeble expression of the relief, physical, moral, and spiritual, that accompanied the signing of the terms of Armistice.

In September 1914 speaking from this pulpit I said that the outbreak of the great war was the natural and inevitable culmination of the industrial and political development of the nineteenth century. During the last half of that century, and the early years of this century how frequent has been the council to nations similar to that of Booz to his fellow traders in the temple, when the nations have been rebuked for their greed and their exploitation. Statesman after statesman might have used a paraphrase of the language of Booz, the trader. "These men are right. We should carry our goods to all parts of the world, and sell as before. But we should be armed with short

swords, hidden under our cloaks of self-defense—we and all our helpers. The arguments of polished silver are stronger than the arguments of the polished words.”

Surrounded by an atmosphere of false patriotism, spurred on by false ambitions, and unworthy rivalry, the governments of the world re-led on in their drunken course until the clash came. What a devastation has been the result? Human lives, human suffering. You dare not try to face the facts even in your imagination.

But day-by-day the character of the war has been changing. The war which was begun in 1914 was not the same as the war upon which we hope the final curtain fell last Monday Morning. Wars never end as they begin. Human life is fluid, and changing. The great social unrest that was shaking the world before the war began has been going on steadily beneath the surface. The great Russian Revolution, has been a tremendous factor in changing the character of the war. The publishing of the secret treaties of the allies, the forcing of a new statement of purposes, the gradual emergence of the war beneath the war, all these have served to make possible a clearer definition of issues. Most important of all, to me at least, has been the rugged bold leadership of the President of the United States. From the first moment when his great appeal to the nation was laid before Congress and the world, the whole character of the war was changed. Revenge and imperialistic ambitions and even national self-defense were forced to give place to a conflict between the two great political and social principles that have been struggling for supremacy in the western world for more than five hundred years. Let us be frank and honest, publicans and not pharisees. We exponents of democracy or republicanism, we have not been, and are not now, beyond reproach. We have serious misgivings for much that is now history, but we may still stand forth as the most stable, and the most democratic of the nations of the world. By the masterful insight and leadership of the President, responded to by a nation that has proved itself more truly great than many dared to believe, this war has been brought to a consummation that may mean much for the future of the world. As events have proved, our President has been a real leader in a great international revolution that is over throwing the autocratic dynasties of the world, and paving the way for a more far-reaching application of the principles of democratic society than has heretofore existed in the world. The onslaught

of a lustful and ambitious click of a great people has been stopped, the autocratic rulers of central Empires have melted away into oblivion, we hope. People are coming to their own. Today we watch with anxious hearts the clearing away of the last remnants of the ancient regime, the ancient lusts and ambitions, a look for the moment when the peoples of this western European and American world may begin the real task of building a new and grander civilization.

What have we learned from these four years, and especially from the last 18 months? We have used force to the limit of our ability. We have marshaled the greatest armies we could gather. We have backed them by the entire industrial and economic powers of the nation. The brains of great men have planned and executed. The onrush of force has been stopped—by force, unlimited force. It has been a terrible grapple. As I look back upon it now, I see no alternative but force, military force, powerful and invincible, given the situation we faced. But great as have been the victories of force and arms, these victories have done nothing but to stop force and that which depended upon force. Let us not deceive ourselves here. Booz, the trader may believe that steel is more powerful than the polished word, but the fact must not be overlooked, that the cleaving instrument that was driven between the forces of autocracy and democracy was not the sword of an autocrat depending upon the mailed fist for support, but the voice and pen of the heart and soul of the twentieth century, wielded now by this statesman and now that statesman, among whom by no means least important is the voice of Woodrow Wilson. Greater than the sword of Booz the Trader, or the junkers of all lands, is the wisdom of the old prophet, Zechariah, 2³ "Not by might or by power, but by my spirit" saith the Lord. Force may stop force. Moral power, mental power may use force. But force cannot be transformed into a moral value. Said Sebastian Castellio,⁴ that forgotten prophet of the 16th century, "To burn a heretic is not to defend a doctrine, it is to burn a heretic."⁵ The moral values of human life are not

³ The text in the manuscript is clear, "Zechariah, 2" but the quote is from Zechariah 4:6.

⁴ Sebastian Castellio (1515-1563) was a French theologian, an early proponent of religious toleration and freedom of conscience and thought.

⁵ From the Preface of the French edition of *De Haereticis an Sint Persequendi*, etc. 1554. This was an argument for toleration with

achieved by the club, the sword, or the bayonet, but by the weapons of the mind, by thought, by study by the indomitable will. Said the German Chancellor on November 9th, speaking to "the Germans abroad," "The victory for which many had hoped has not been granted to us. But the German people has won this still greater victory over itself, and its belief in the right of might."⁶ If that is true, and if we of the rest of the world still cling to our faith in right, then a great future opens before us. The armistice becomes a peace, and peace becomes a great living force in building a new world.

But there is something more to be said. We recall even yet the strange subtle emotion that spread even to us here in the Berkshires when the war broke in Europe. The tension was broken. The grind of industry, the dull monotony of a nation living for bread alone, the sordid scandals of peace seemed driven out by a greater life and passion, a greater adventure than peace had ever known. What was tending a machine compared to going over the top? What was the endless round of pink teas, bridge, weekend parties compared to working for that mysterious life "over there." At least something real, gripping, exacting, commanding, had come into life. I wonder if we shall ever recall the low-ebb of life's standards before the year 1914. As we look back upon the money-lust peace, the apathy, the intellectual shoddiness, we almost shiver lest the word peace means a return to that same negation. Drudgery for the many, artificial excitement and loafing for the few, and monotony for all. The peace before us can never mean the peace that is behind us. It must be alive, vital, worthwhile. Not the least service to the men and women who read his books has been the contribution made by Mr. H. G. Wells in his book *Joan and Peter*.⁷ Says Peter who has been through the way,

contributions by Luther, Erasmus, Sebastian Franck and others. The Preface bore the name "Marinus Bellius," but was written by Sebastian Castellio.

⁶ This quote is from "Proclamations of Chancellor Maximilian to Germans Abroad and at Home," November 7, 1918. It can be found in James Brown Scott, general editor, *Official Statements of War Aims and Peace Proposals, December 1916 to November 1918*, Washington: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, p. 466.

⁷ H. G. Wells (1866-1946) published *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education* in 1918: London: Cassell and Co.

No, peace as we have known peace hitherto offers such opportunities for good inventive work as war does. That's my point, [Nobby.] There's no comparison between the excitement and the endless problems of making a real live, efficient submarine, for example, that has to meet and escape the intensest risks, and the occupation of designing a great, big, safe, upholstered liner in which fat swindlers can cross the Atlantic without being seasick. War tempts imaginative, restless people, and a stagnant peace bores them. And you've got to reckon with intelligence and imagination in this world, [Nobby,] more than anything. They aren't strong enough to control perhaps, but they will certainly upset. ... and they won't stand for a stagnant peace. ... [Life] is an exploration. It will take man to the center of the earth; it will take him to the ends of space, between the atoms and among the stars. How can we tell before hand? You must have faith. But of one thing I am sure, that man cannot stagnate. It is forbidden. It is the uttermost sin. ... I have been in the world [now, Nobby, for] five and twenty years, and I am only beginning to suspect the wonder and beauty of the things we men might know and do. If only we could get our eyes and hands free of the old inheritance. What has mankind done to boast of? I despise human history—because I believe in God. Not the God you don't approve of, [Nobby,] but my Old Experimenter, who I confess I don't begin to understand, and in the far-off eternal scheme of things he hides from us and which he means us to develop age-by-age. ... [And] instead of just muddling over the surface of his universe, we have to get into the understanding of it to the very limits of our ability, to live our utmost and do the intensest best we can.⁸

Here we stand. The struggle is past. Already the wounded are returning from the field of battle. Soon the soldiers will be coming. You will honor them with parade and sonorous rhetoric. But what use will we make of the opportunity that now lies before us. Will we fall back into the old strife, and the old money grabbing, intensified by the period of war? Will we leave our common interests to poltroon politicians? Shall we still drift on from season to season to the same old prejudices,

⁸ H. G. Wells, *Joan and Peter: The Story of an Education*, London: Cassell and Co., 1918, P. 724.

unconscious that the world we lived in four years ago has gone forever. Or shall we face the new life, the new problems, the new questions, the new sacrifices with that same resolution, determination, and spirit that we have seen manifested during the past few years. We have to build a new social order. We have to forget many regrettable incidents in the past eighteen months. We have to develop new standards of measurement, in industry, in conduct, in religion, in life's values. What have we not to do? The whole world lies before us like plastic clay, to be molded as we wish. The war has passed. Peace has come, but it cannot be, it must not be, it will not be a stagnant peace.

Four years ago last September I spoke upon the new Era. It was the first sermon that I preached after the outbreak of the war in Europe. In closing today I quote the passage with which I closed that sermon. I see no reason for changing it. Many times more true does it seem to me today, the first Sunday after the signing of the Armistice.

Above all and most difficult is to follow and extend the methods of democracy. Not force, not authority, not bombardment, but the methods which science has adopted applied to all the relations of life, applied in politics, applied in religion, education, and art. The method of patient experiment and careful demonstration with the mind open to every new fact, ready for each new development, with a mind always forward looking, proving all things and holding fast to those that experience show to be true. Duly grateful for all that the past has done, entirely acknowledging all that we have inherited, but never idolizing the products of the past, whether they be graven images, printed books, or great souls. Great as the past has been, it is incomparable with what the future will be. The great things both in art and religion, both in men and institutions for men, are ahead of us, not behind us. And at this moment we are trimming ourselves for the most enriching era in history. I bid you to have confidence in the integrity of your own souls, in the integrity of your universe in which you live. The dreams of justice, the conceptions of an exalted manhood and womanhood have developed in your minds and are surviving there, because the universal environment demands them, because it nurtures them and is establishing them. The passing drama of the death

struggles of the worked out principles of an industrial imperialism are as nothing compared to the quiet, persistent spread of the principles and methods of democracy. The former is with the past, the latter lies unfulfilled at your very feet, calling you to a life and a task without parallel in the history of man.