

## 2014 Season of Peace

### Path of Peace Daily Reflections

Throughout A Season of Peace (September 7–October 5), subscribe to this daily email of reflections and prayer to guide your journey as a peacemaker, a child of God. This year's *Path of Peace Daily Reflections* were written by Presbyterians who traveled to Israel and Palestine for the 2014 Presbyterian Peacemaking Program conference, "Mosaic of Peace." Each day a Scripture reading from *The Biblical Witness to Peacemaking* is paired with a conference participant's reflection and prayer. A simple action is also suggested to create practical ways to engage daily.

### September 7, 2014

*Isaiah 40:27–31*

*Submitted by Ginna Bairby*

*Reflection:* When I reflect on my time in Israel/Palestine with the "Mosaic of Peace" Conference, I remember two walls.

The first is the Wailing Wall, a Jewish holy site at the only remaining part of the Temple, destroyed in 70 CE. Jewish people come to this wall to pray, to touch the wall and cry, and to wedge their written prayers into its cracks and crevices.

The second is the Separation Wall constructed to isolate Israeli people from Palestinian people, called everything from a "security measure" to an "apartheid wall." This wall inhibits the economic, political, social, and religious well-being of the Palestinian people, and they have responded by inscribing their own prayers—in words, stories, and art—in a mosaic of protest graffiti.

Both walls have seen many hopes, tears, and prayers; but mostly, they've seen waiting. Forty-seven years have passed since the Six-Day War, 66 since the partition and the beginning of violence and displacement. These walls belong to people who have long grown weary of waiting.

So what are we to do with a text like this from Isaiah, one that calls upon us to wait for God's renewal? Sure, God may not faint or grow weary (v. 28), but we in our war-torn world surely have!

It gives me hope to know that these words were written to the Hebrew people in exile, to a community that had also grown weary with waiting. That to fearful and occupied people, whether in the sixth century BC or the twenty-first century AD, God continues to promise renewal.

*Action:* Perhaps this text issues a call to us as well. Where in your community have people waited too long for justice and peace? Begin the conversation with those around you—for what have they been waiting too long? Perhaps you will be the wall upon which others can inscribe their prayers.

*Prayer:* God of hope, we are weary for the waiting. Quench the thirst of our hearts with your renewal. Bring your people peace. Amen.

*Ginna Bairby is the managing editor of Unbound, the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)'s online journal for social justice issues, and the official blogger for "Mosaic of Peace." Ginna is a member of the Presbytery of the James.*

**September 8, 2014**

*Proverbs 10:28-13:12*

*Submitted by Eva Hendrix-Shovlin*

*Reflection:* Proverbs teaches us that righteous people live in hope, gladness, and joy. God is the stronghold, hiding place, support, and comfort to those acting in hope. God will protect us when we share truth and wisdom.

It also teaches us that destruction is evil. People expect to gain from their destructive actions and feel entitled to prosperity, but chase their tails endlessly, begetting only more unrest. Though we may feel insulated and even arrogant because of the privilege many of us experience, destructive acts leave us *vulnerable*. There is no protection from God, because the sin of destruction separates us from God's love. God seeks to bring justice in the midst of our perverted words and deeds by cutting away the desire for death and destruction.

“Some pretend to be rich, yet have nothing,” we read in 13:7. We have developed a talent for pretending, for ignoring the injustice in our own backyards, at the kitchen table, on the daily commute. The words in Proverbs call out to us, whether through a gentle nudging, a whispering Jiminy Cricket-type voice, or by simply smacking us in the head. We are our own worst enemy! There is no security, wall, comfy church pew, or air-conditioned cubicle that can protect us from ourselves and from the truth. The truth is this: we are connected. We are one body in this one Lord, and to give life to the other is to give life to our own, to *ourselves*.

[Phrases like] “There is no peace without justice” and “No one is free while others are oppressed” come to mind when we consider Proverbs 11:11 – “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but an accurate weight is his delight” – and the depth of God's yearning for peace, equality, and healing. God delights in each kind word and just action.

We need to focus on giving life, to rejoice in the life-giving generosity referred to in Proverbs 11:25, saying, “A generous person will be enriched, and one who gives water will get water.” We need to remember that it feels good to give because it draws us closer to God.

*Action:* Be righteous and reject destructive tendencies by engaging in an act of creation today. You are not too old or too young or too anything for finger-paints, for writing a poem or letter, cooking something tasty – almost anything. Create a space to express your reflections on connectedness today.

*Prayer:* Thank you for making us one, for your perfect vision of wholeness. We are learning, we are listening, we are working with you and for you.

*Eva Hendrix-Shovlin is a member of Hunting Ridge Presbyterian Church in Baltimore Presbytery.*

**September 9, 2014**

*Jeremiah 17:5-13*

*Submitted by Cara Bissell*

While I was in Israel and Palestine with the “Mosaic of Peace” Conference, I asked Abuna Father Elias Chacour, “How is boycotting Soda Stream helping Israel and Palestine to get along together?” He answered, “Follow your Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)’s leadership. They have prayed and worked hard on this. Many denominations have taken no action.”

*I the Lord search the heart and examine the mind.* I had bought a Soda Stream machine 1½ years ago and felt the need to bring it with me to the conference. Chacour’s remarks struck me personally. I was asked, “What will you do with the machine?” I answered, “I’ll do as the Spirit moves me,” unsure whether I’d break it or give it to someone in solidarity. I did neither.

*Lord, You are the hope of Israel.* Time for prayer, talking with conference leadership, small group dialogue, and listening to two Palestinians who saw me carrying the machine was helpful in my discernment. One Palestinian told me, “I am against breaking anything that is good.” The other Palestinian simply said, “Soda Stream is one of the best settlement companies for Palestinians, even though it is on occupied Palestinian land.” I also learned that it is against Israeli law to protest against Israeli products and that Palestinians may have been adversely affected by my actions. It was and is more complicated than I had ever imagined.

*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord, whose trust is the Lord. They shall be like a tree planted by the water, sending out its roots by the stream.”*

*Action:* As you are moved by the Spirit to further the cause of justice and peace, write to your congressional representatives and our national leaders about a matter that is close to your heart.

*Prayer:* Dear Lord, make us instruments of your divine will. Remind us that no matter what powers or principalities we are subject to, we are all loved by you. Give the occupied Palestinians hope and inner peace. Allow nonviolent means to bring justice and peace to us all. May we see and act wisely on our local problems, for these decisions also affect people beyond our borders. Amen.

*Cara Bissell is a member of Valley Presbyterian Church in Presbytery de Cristo.*

## September 10, 2014

*Psalm 9*

*Submitted by Andrew Rosencrans*

*Reflection:* Peacemakers often encounter the tension of “the already and the not yet.” The psalmist gratefully recalls God’s *past* victories and offers praise for righteous judgments already rendered. The psalmist describes a *future* in which the transient frailty of enemies whose memories have perished contrasts with the eternal efficacy of the Lord who sits enthroned forever. But the psalmist is equally mindful that the *present* is a time when the needy are routinely forgotten and the poor are habituated to despair.

The tension of the “already and the not yet” recalls a dramatic moment in the struggle against apartheid. Bishop Desmond Tutu was leading a service of worship in St. George’s Cathedral. As the service began, the walls of the cathedral were lined with soldiers and riot police. They were not there to protect the Bishop; they were there to disperse the assembly if it became an embarrassment to the status quo. As Desmond Tutu began to speak, he talked about the injustice of the apartheid system; and then, pointing his finger at the police who were recording his sermon, he said, “You may be powerful — but

you are not God. God cannot be mocked; and you have already lost!”

Then the Bishop came out from behind the pulpit; he smiled; and he said to the police and soldiers, “Since you have already lost, we are inviting you to join the winning side.” The crowd roared its approval; the police left the sanctuary; and the people began to dance in the aisles.

*Action:* Read Daniel 2 and Percy Shelley’s poem “Ozymandius” and prayerfully reflect on the hopeful contrast between human and eternal kingdoms.

*Prayer:* Eternal God, incline your ear to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more. (Psalm 10:18) Amen.

*Andrew Rosencrans is a pastor/chaplain in Presbytery of Chicago, and was on the planning team for “Mosaic of Peace.”*

## **September 11, 2014**

*Luke 24:13-35*

*Submitted by Christie Wiersma*

*Reflection:* The walk to Emmaus . . . two disciples of the by then crucified Jesus, are walking and discussing together the recent events of their Lord’s death. They encounter a man thought to be unfamiliar to them; a stranger, so they thought, who seemed to know nothing of this man Jesus. This was a walk that would realize itself as the most important walk of their lives, on a road they had undoubtedly traveled many times before, but this time a walk that would literally change their lives.

As I walked and followed in the footsteps of Jesus with my fellow “Mosaic of Peace” participants, I found this story coming to mind. Here I was walking on ground where the person who was the essence of compassion, the personification of peace, justice, and reconciliation had walked, been exalted, suffered, and ultimately raised in glory. Here I was walking in this land called holy, this land of the Holy One and I was in awe. I was in wonder. I was deeply moved, and I was profoundly disturbed. Then, just like the two disciples, my eyes were opened. They were opened to examples of fellowship, community, compassion, and care for the dignity of the other, regardless of who the “other” might be. People helping others, sharing lives, living what the disciples in Emmaus had learned — that we need not focus on the distinctions that make us different as individuals and as a people. What is important is what the disciples learned that evening in the breaking of the bread with Jesus: that we strive to see Christ in the other and that there be a willingness by all to eat together while worshiping the same God.

*Action:* On this most portentous of days for our country, be mindful of all whose paths you cross and seek the Christ in the other, no matter how difficult or easy this may be.

*Prayer:* Merciful and gracious God: On this most difficult of days for this nation, we ask that, like the two disciples walking to Emmaus we too may move from ignorance to acknowledging and embracing the Christ in others. Empower us with your Holy Spirit to be the hands and feet of Christ, working for peace with justice and reconciliation throughout this troubled yet precious world of yours. In your Son’s name we pray, Amen.

*Christie Wiersma is a ruling elder at Eastminster Presbyterian Church in Lake Michigan Presbytery.*

## **September 12, 2014**

*Romans 12:9-13*

*Submitted by Dick Ruppert*

*Reflection:* These verses from Paul's letter to the Roman church contain many themes: sincere love, despising evil, hard work, devotion, joyful hope, patience in troubles, the importance of prayer and sharing, opening our homes to strangers. Linger awhile on these many important themes.

The day I began reflecting on these verses from Paul, I heard three speakers in Bethlehem as part of the Mosaic of Peace conference. First was an American-born Jewish woman who described working for an Israeli NGO that advocates human rights in occupied Palestine. Next we heard a Jerusalem-born Palestinian businessman who, like Thomas Wolfe, can't go home again, except with a lot of red tape. He emphasized equal justice for Palestinians and Israelis. A Bethlehem Bible College dean mentioned the difficulties he experienced returning to Palestine after studying in the US. So American-born Jews can have a home in Israel, but Palestinians may be denied the right to return to their homeland.

That afternoon, we visited a refugee camp and stopped at the separation wall. Consider the experiences of these speakers, the people in camps, and the wall. Look again at Paul's words to the church in Rome 2,000 years ago. Many of his thoughts then apply to reconciling Israel/Palestine relations now.

*Action:* Today, ask your leaders in Congress to advocate for a peaceful resolution between Israel and Palestine and especially for the "right of return" for Palestinian refugees.

*Prayer:* Help us understand more about the plight of the Palestinians, both those in occupied territories and those in refugee camps. Help us understand Israel's concerns about security. Show us how we can help bring about equal justice. Help our leaders find ways to apply the words from Paul's letter to the conflict between Israel and Palestine.

*Dick Ruppert is a ruling elder at Faith Presbyterian Church in San Diego Presbytery.*

## **September 13, 2014**

*I Peter 3:13-17*

*Submitted by Ann Ruppert*

*Reflection:*

This passage addresses some interpersonal issues, and suggests some peacemaking approaches to handling them. At times we may think we are relating well with people or are taking the right action, and we feel good about that. But it may happen that an acquaintance criticizes or questions our actions or our relationships with others. And we may be hurt by the questions or criticism.

At times we may be misunderstood. If so, it is important to talk with those who question us and listen carefully to them "with gentleness and respect." It may even be that we are the ones who have misunderstood the situation. Our response may be difficult to handle if the situation involves confidential or private matters. In such times, it is important to respect privacy issues and maintain appropriate boundaries, even in the face of criticism.

*Action:* When you face criticism for doing what you believe is right, read this passage from 1 Peter.

Pray for God's grace, that you might relate to your critic with "gentleness and reverence."

*Prayer:* Lord, help us work with others and relate to them. Give us the patience to approach situations of conflict as peacemakers. When our good intentions are misunderstood, show us how to explain ourselves. When our good intentions are done in error, help us find ways to make amends. Amen.

*Ann Ruppert is a ruling elder at Faith Presbyterian Church in San Diego Presbytery.*

## **September 14, 2014**

*Isaiah 60:17-22*

*Submitted by Ellen Brantley*

*Reflection:* A key to a front door — an image that symbolizes the paradox of the Israel-Palestine conflict for me. When we visited Yad Vashem, ("*Memorial to a Name*"), the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, I noticed a glass case displaying several keys. I stopped to read the description and learned that many of the Jews who fled Poland kept their house keys in hopes that they would return home someday. Of course, they never did.

In the West Bank, we visited the Dheisheh Refugee Camp. Dheisheh was established in 1949 as a temporary refuge for Palestinians who fled during the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Many of the residents here have also kept the keys to their homes. Will they ever be able to return?

The prophet Isaiah proclaims, "I will appoint Peace as your overseer and Righteousness as your taskmaster. Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders. You shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise." (Is. 60:17b-18) These words are addressed to **all** the inhabitants of the land called Zion. God will be glorified as, "The least of them . . . become a clan, and the smallest one a mighty nation." (v. 22a)

Peace and righteousness are incumbent upon all who consider themselves God's people. Those who share the scars of oppression and devastation are the *key*. May they join hands to become agents of peace and restoration, for the glory of God!

*Action:* Let us learn to listen and look for the hurt and pain beneath angry words and destructive actions, so that we might respond with compassion and understanding.

*Prayer:* God of peace and righteousness, move in our hearts and in our world. Free us from greed and division. Turn our scars into ties that bind us to one another as your children, that we may be one in Christ. Remind us of your priority that we love one another as you have loved us. We pray in the name of the Prince of Peace. Amen.

*Ellen Brantley is a teaching elder at Westminster Presbyterian Church in John Calvin Presbytery.*

## **September 15, 2014**

*Hosea 11:1-4*

*Submitted by Gordon Edwards*

*Reflection:* In one of the most intimate laments of God's heart, we hear God's parental love wondering what more could have been done to keep Israel from wandering away from the joy, peace, and security

of divine love. God's heart is broken whenever we reject our divine heritage in exchange for the glitz and enticements of the world around us.

In the complexities of our world, it appears that often our first reaction is a violent one. We are driven by the evil powers of fear, hate, suspicion, and control. Rather than approaching each other as persons created in God's image, we build walls, armed borders, checkpoints and gated communities to separate us from each other. Our reaction is to dominate and suppress rather than reconcile and celebrate. Our society's idolatry of guns must be a source of pain causing God's heart to lament today.

Jesus reminded those who listen: *the children of God are peacemakers*. Being peacemakers challenges us not to react (knee-jerk); we are challenged to respond (faith decision) alive in Christ. Jesus refused to react to the violence of the world around him; he responded offering redemptive grace, reconciling love, and enduring peace. Too often we do not even realize how our words and actions subtly reflect violence rather than Christ's transforming love.

*Action:* Hear God's lament over our lives – individually, communally, and internationally. Let us be intentional in using words that encourage, offer hope, and celebrate community. Let us commit ourselves to examining the systems that perpetuate the violence of oppression and actively pursue being peacemakers.

*Prayer:* Gracious, loving God, forgive us for breaking your heart. You have redeemed us in Christ. By your Spirit, you send us into your world to make peace. Grant us courage for this task. Amen.

*Gordon Edwards is a retired pastor and teaching elder at First Presbyterian Church in Stillwater, Oklahoma, in Cimarron Presbytery.*

## **September 16, 2014**

*Song of Songs 1:8-17*

*Submitted by Christine Caton*

*Reflection:* The writer of the Song of Songs uses beautiful imagery of green firs and cedars and lush lands, combined with the beauty of the woman and the man who extol their love for one another.

I cannot help but think about the beauty of much of Israel when I read this passage, as well as the stark contrast in much of that land. On our last day of the "Mosaic of Peace" Conference, we took a trip to the city of Haifa. While there, we visited the largest Baha'i temple in the world. This temple was set on the side of a mountain overlooking the sparkling Mediterranean Sea. On this mountain, surrounding the temple, were the most incredibly beautiful hanging gardens and trees I have ever seen. It was breathtaking.

To get all that greenery requires a great deal of water. Water is a hot commodity in Israel and Palestine. The Israeli government controls the water in both areas and there is a constant water shortage throughout much of Palestine. There is no room for beautiful hanging gardens and greenery in Palestine, because the people there need it to drink, to water their plants and crops, to wash, to live.

So while I was overwhelmed with the beauty of the land in Haifa, I couldn't help but think of the stark contrasts in this land where water is used freely on the one hand and is so precious and rare on the other.

*Action:* Take some time to explore what water means in our world. Study the contrasts of water inequity in places like Israel and Palestine. And then educate your congregation on ways to help alleviate this inequity and save precious, life-giving water.

*Prayer:* O God, we thank you for life, for the green land, for precious water. We pray that you would be with those who have little or no water, that they may be blessed with the gift of life-giving water. Continue to open our eyes to the world's inequities and spur us to action. In Christ's name. Amen.

*Christine Caton is a teaching elder at Crossroads Presbyterian Church in Southern New England Presbytery.*

### **September 17, 2014**

*Psalm 120*

*Submitted by Connie Cochran*

*Reflection:* The key to the house, wrapped in a scrap of cloth, is carefully stored in a drawer. Here is the symbol of a life that once was, but that now exists only in memories of the old folks and stories told to children of the next generation. Such is the life of millions of people displaced from their homes or surviving in refugee camps all around the world. The key to the former home, from which the family was driven in a panic of fear and violence, represents all that was lost and all that is hoped for. The effects of 6 months (Central African Republicans), 20 years (Nepalese), 50 years (Colombians) or 75 years (Palestinians) of living in refugee camps takes a harsh toll on generations of people struggling, like this psalmist, to manage the deprivation and keep alive the hope of return.

“For too long I have lived among those who hate peace. I am for peace,” the refrain of the psalmist is all too familiar to these key-keepers. Their guards mistreat and humiliate them. The host country regulates access to basic needs like food, water, work. An ongoing challenge for both is not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good.

*Action:* May we, who hold keys to our own homes, pray daily for justice and peace for refugees and displaced persons of the world. May we stand in solidarity with their right of return to their homes and encourage our elected officials to legislate policy directing our tax dollars toward humanitarian aid.

*Prayer:* God of comfort and security, hold victims of violence and displacement from their homes in your tender care. Equally love those occupying the land of others and turn their hearts toward justice. We ask that our actions support peace in your world. In the name of the Prince of Peace, Amen.

*Connie Cochran is a ruling elder at Paxton Presbyterian Church in Presbytery of Carlisle.*

### **September 18, 2014**

*Luke 2:1-12*

*Submitted by Barbara Clark*

*Reflection:* More than 100 Presbyterians have returned from a “working tour” of the Holy Lands, where we visited the town of David called Bethlehem and went out to the Shepherd’s Field. A small group of us gathered in the chapel there and sang Christmas hymns...”Angels We Have Heard on High,” “O



Little Town of Bethlehem,” “Silent Night”. The design of the chapel was such that the acoustics magnified, amplified, and beautified our voices!

Our spontaneous singing time was a special pause, a holy calm, in the midst of our tour of riding and walking, listening and learning, seeing and tasting a complex mosaic land where history, politics, religions, conflict, and struggle have met over and over again through the centuries. It was the one time that we sang about a baby born in that region long ago who grew to bring a message of God about peace and love for a world that needed then to hear voices for justice . . . *just as it does today.*

*Action:* Pause in this day, sing or recite the words of your favorite hymn, and rejoice in the blessings of the baby who grew to inspire the world with lasting messages of hope, love, and peace.

*Prayer:* Loving God, thank you, thank you for the birth in a manger and life of the teacher and role model who guides my journey. Amen.

**Barbara Clark** is a ruling elder at First Presbyterian Church of Pendleton in Eastern Oregon Presbytery.

## September 19, 2014

*Mark 10:13-16*

*Submitted by Margery Rossi*

*Reflection – Access to Blessing:* We gratefully passed through the checkpoint without incident into the West Bank, and soon proceeded to the extremely crowded Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the basilica that houses the “Grotto of the Nativity” – the very spot on which Jesus was born, according to Christian tradition. Our tour guide suggested that we come back early in the morning to visit the grotto, as we did not have time to wait in line that afternoon.

My new friend Lorraine and I took his advice, only to discover a worship service taking place in the grotto. A clergyman stood in the door and blocked our entrance.

“You cannot go there now. We are praying.”

“*May we join you in prayer?*”

“No. You cannot go in there now,” he insisted.

“*But we’d like to join in the prayers.*”

“One minute only,” he relented, and then turned his back on us, continuing to block the door.

We stood behind him and began to pray. One minute later, he turned back to say: “Now you leave.”

Disappointed, we did.

I returned with another friend even earlier the next morning. A different group was holding worship. This time, people stepped aside and made room for us. We were welcomed into worship and offered an opportunity to venerate the sacred site of Jesus’ birth, just like all the other worshipers present. It was a beautiful moment of hospitality and blessing after being rebuked and hindered the day before.

*Action:* Lay your hands on a child of God today and bless him/her.

*Prayer:* Welcoming Savior, we confess that we deny your beloved children access to blessings every day, among them human rights, clean water, equality, and space in our church buildings and in our hearts. Forgive us when we claim the blessings of your kingdom only for ourselves and deny them to others. May we open our arms to others in blessing as willingly as you do for us. Amen.

*Margery Rossi is a ruling elder at Stony Point Presbyterian Church in Hudson River Presbytery.*

**September 20, 2014**

*Hebrews 12:12-24*

*Submitted by Leah Johnson*

*Reflection:*

*Don't sit around on your hands. No more dragging your feet. Clear the path for long-distance runners so no one will trip and fall, so no one will step in a hole and sprain an ankle. Help each other out. Work at getting along with each other and with God. Make sure no one gets left out of God's generosity.*

—Eugene Peterson's The Message

We are exhorted in this passage to be active players and participants, not bystanders, in this world. We have work to do. We are called in clear terms to prepare the way with and for others. We are responsible for each other. We are to be doers, not hearers of the word alone. It is not enough to talk about peace. The message is clear: we are called to action.

During our journey this spring in the Holy Land, we experienced the evidence of those who are living for peace day in, day out, for the long haul. We witnessed the evidence in the faces of children at play that teachers have modeled peaceful patterns of interaction and communication. We witnessed in the singing and the praying in different languages in Sunday worship the intentional dedication to a commitment of worship and prayer life amidst a landscape where the path is not straight nor without obstacles in the road.

*Action:* Commit to telling the stories of those without a voice. Share these stories with your friends, your congregations, your lawmakers. Commit to keeping silence no more.

*Prayer:* Holy One, hear our prayers for your children, for those with whom we share a name, child of God. Guide our steps that we might be active, faithful workers for building the community you desire for all your children. In the name of the risen Christ. Amen.

*Leah Johnson is session clerk at Westminster Presbyterian Church, moderator in Donegal Presbytery, and was on the planning team for "Mosaic of Peace."*

**September 21, 2014**

*2 Chronicles 5:1-14*

*Submitted by Matthew Dimick*

*Reflection:* Finally, the work of building the temple was complete: dimensions executed to the king's liking; skilled laborers had finished their work down to the last excruciating detail, while thousands of lesser skilled laborers had finished their work in the quarries. Ornaments that adorned the temple had been crafted with the finest skill and the finest of gold and silver. Now was the time for celebration—all were assembled, the priest came forward, sacrifices were made, and voices were lifted. Blessed with wisdom in addition to wealth and plenty, the king's finest project was complete—a monument to God, but also a monument to his own greatness as successor to King David.

And yet—Solomon would be remembered by those who served him for his excessive way of living that made them suffer.

Most of Solomon’s subjects existed in severe poverty, living out of hovels—yet the king felt not an ounce of concern for their social welfare. How could a man bestowed with such wisdom fail to find a better use for his treasure?

*Action:* A greater temple is that where God is worshiped through social justice. God delights in that worship even more than in temples of gold or silver. For many of us, the “temple” becomes the land or property upon which our churches are built. We become consumed with the preservation of property without understanding how it can fully be used in service. Instead, let us worship God, not through monuments of stone and mortar, but of service and justice. What are some ways we can use the buildings and land we have to enact social justice—rather than remain empty buildings during the week?

**Prayer:** Creator God,  
We have built monuments and temples in your name—  
but we have overlooked those  
who cry out for their burden to be lightened.  
In our efforts to worship you,  
let us better serve the communities near and abroad.  
May our temple to you be that of justice,  
And may it be pleasing to you. Amen.

*Matthew Dimick is a pastoral intern at First Presbyterian Palo Alto in San Jose Presbytery.*

**September 22, 2014**

*Isaiah 54:11-13*

*Submitted by Jim Zazzera*

*Reflection:* *There are no jeweled gates in refugee camps.* Places like this are a picture of impermanence and waiting. Perhaps there are tents, maybe there are small blocks of housing units, or there might even be well developed neighborhoods. But nobody intends to stay here permanently. All are waiting to return to a home, a land, a place that has been lost. As time goes by, community organizations, sports teams, and health services are developed, but no one is ready to accept this situation as normal. This is not the existence that God wants for any people.

Foundations made of sapphire, roofs made of rubies, walls built of precious stones are not simply symbols of wealth, but signs of permanence. People only imagine building like this in secure societies. *To envision jeweled cities is to yearn for something lasting.* Isaiah was offering this word of hope to those who had been exiled from their homes. Through the prophet, God offers a future of security and hope for those who have not seen it in a long time, perhaps in a lifetime.

*Action:* Search the web and find pictures of people and homes in refugee camps—in the Middle East, in Africa, anywhere in the world. Imagine what it might look like for these people to have a permanent, safe, secure home. Learn more about refugees through the UN Refugee Agency (<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home>) and discover some small way you might work or pray

for one particular community. Perhaps use a photo from a refugee camp as an icon of God's presence as you pray.

*Prayer:* O God, who make a home for each of us, grant all your children prosperity, permanence, and security. Help us all trust that these things only come as gifts from you. Release us from violence and desperation, and give us joy and peace in your presence. Amen.

*Jim Zazzera is a teaching elder at Faith Presbyterian Church in Sacramento Presbytery.*

**September 23, 2014**

*Song of Songs 8:5b-7*

*Submitted by Laura Cheifetz*

*Reflection:* "Set me as a seal upon your heart,  
as a seal upon your arm..." (v. 6)

A seal is a sign of love's permanence. Seals in the ancient world were worn on a cord around a person's neck or arm, and were used as a signature for legal documents.

The "seal was identified with a person's commitments and integrity; it marked one's words as binding," states Ellen F. Davis in the *Westminster Bible Companion* (p. 296). The words of love between the woman and the man are binding.

*Song of Songs* is a dialogue about love. Voices of the woman, the man, and the women of Jerusalem speak. These lovers represent all lovers, and in verses six and seven, speak on behalf of love itself. Love is as powerful as death, a force that claims us all.

Love in the Scriptures is real. It is manifested here between lovers. It is manifested between Naomi and Ruth, David and Jonathan. Between God and God's people, God and creation, God and the world, a love extended through Jesus Christ.

This poem has no real beginning and no end, or closure, as J. Cheryl Exum points out in her *Song of Songs Old Testament Library* commentary (p. 245). The poem, and love, go on forever.

As people of faith, we are called to love in tangible ways. Peacemaking is an expression of love, a reflection of the love that knows no end.

*Action:* Choose an act of love. Work to end deportations of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S., many of whom leave behind family members. Support the actions of DREAMers, participate in an action in your state, or with your church consider joining the New Sanctuary Movement.

*Prayer:* God, teach us to love anew each day. May we work for peace so that love might flourish, at home, in our communities, and in the world. Amen.

*Laura Cheifetz is the executive director of church and public relations with the Presbyterian Publishing Company, and was a member of the leadership team for "Mosaic of Peace." Laura is a member of Greater Atlanta Presbytery.*

**September 24, 2014**

*Psalm 34*

*Submitted by Patricia Brown*

*Reflection:* God is good. I know that because I know the blessings of my life can only come from my God. I can be happy because God met me more than halfway and freed me from grievous anxiety. God got me out of many tight life spots and I am here to taste and to see the wonders of all creation.  
HALLELUJAH!

Yet I am troubled by the harshness of judgment, by the selfishness of acquisition, by the cruelty of privilege, and the disregard for respect. In the very place we call the Holy Land, where love and righteousness could flourish in a garden of many faiths, our Lord must listen to every moan and groan, weeping still and yet again. When children cry out for help, when women ache with imprisoned hearts, when teens inflict pain without conscience, when the self-esteem of men suffers kicks to the gut, surely God will come to the rescue. But how long? How long must people of the creation wait for the peace of the lion and the lamb?

"Where is the peaceful kingdom? When will this new day start?  
We long for peace and comfort to reign within each heart.  
Yet not in our lives only, nor simply in our home:  
We pray that all creation will one day find shalom.

We wait the peaceful kingdom, when wolf and lamb shall lie  
In gentleness and friendship without a fear or sigh,  
When lion shall be grazing, when snake shall never strike;  
A little child shall lead us both strong and weak alike."

"We Wait the Peaceful Kingdom" by Kathleen R. Moore  
*Glory to God, Hymn #378*

*Action:* Demand and support media that present news that is factual and balanced. Petition political leaders to be open to compromise for the good of all.

*Prayer:* Omnipotent God, stop the dizziness of social and political spins, so we may see what is real and respond as faithful disciples of Christ.

*Patricia Brown is a ruling elder at Norwood Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati Presbytery.*

**September 25, 2014**

*Luke 2:13,14*

*Submitted by Sam and Will Massey*

*Reflection:* The Shepherd's Field site in Palestine is located on a hillside surrounded by other hillsides. The location begs an obvious question: How does anybody know that this hill was actually the hill, the field? The guide was prepared to answer. "OK, it really doesn't matter where the shepherds were. What they saw was for everyone everywhere."

Really? For everyone? Everywhere? The contention might be made that the sharing of this good news

is primarily for Christians. Surely Christians have the best claim to being the people who enjoy God's peace through Jesus Christ! Aren't they the ones whom God favors? Some ancient manuscripts lend themselves to this interpretation by suggesting the angels' wish was only for those of good will, a more select population than envisioned by universalists.

This distinction between persons — the favored and the unfavored — is not demanded by the text. It is far more elegant to profess that God, who is no respecter of persons, wishes peace for all people: shepherds and wise men, young women and old prophetesses, male and female, gay and straight, Jew and Palestinian. God's peace is God's glory. If human beings do not yet enjoy God's peace, the failing does not lie in God's generosity but in human stewardship. Like rain, God's peace falls on the just and the unjust: As is true of water in the Holy Land, it is greedy humans who siphon off peace for themselves and deny it to others. God's peace is for everyone.

*Action:* Go find someone — preferably a stranger — who appears less blessed than you are, and do something that expresses God's gracious peace for that person. Perhaps give a smile and greeting, share a compliment, buy a meal, or do a chore.

*Prayer:* God who favors all, we pray that your abundant peace will flow through us to all creation. Amen.

*Sam Massey is pastor at First Presbyterian Church, Iowa City, in the East Iowa Presbytery. Will Massey is a full-time college student and also a member of First Presbyterian Church, Iowa City.*

## **September 26, 2014**

*Philippians 2:6-11*

*Submitted by Lita Simpson*

*Reflection:* The story of our Christian faith, known as “Christ’s Hymn,” in Philippians 2:6-11, Paul’s letter to the Church in Philippi, reminded them and us today of Christ’s incarnation, human life, crucifixion, and exaltation. We acknowledge through this hymn God’s great gift of God’s self to us in the human form of Jesus. We struggle to fully understand the depths that Christ selflessly gave on our behalf. Some of the words in the text challenge us — “emptied, slave, humbled, obedient to the point of death.” How can we relate to such obedience, humility, or to emptying oneself today?

How does one empty oneself? What does it look like in our lives? Perhaps it is when we put others before ourselves . . . when we give more than we are asked to give without expectation of reciprocation. It looks like parents — traditional, single, adoptive, blended — who put their children’s needs before their own. Like teachers, doctors, pastors, firefighters, military personnel, and first-responders who selflessly put the needs of others before their own, often at the risk of their own lives.

Putting others before ourselves looks like feeding the hungry, building a house for someone in need, volunteering in a nursing home, or helping your neighbor. It looks like praying, praying “without ceasing,” praying for peace in our warring world.

*Action:* An act of putting others before ourselves could be to organize a Pray for Peace event around World Communion Sunday. A labyrinth can be rented or created by outlining it on the floor in your church building with masking tape. Or simply open your sanctuary for prayer. Offer scriptural passages

of peace to guide participants as they pray.

*Prayer:* Holy and gracious God, you selflessly gave yourself to us. Help us live beyond ourselves in giving selflessly to others in need. In your peace, Amen.

*Lita Simpson is the youth ministry director for Mission Presbytery and was on the leadership team for “Mosaic of Peace.”*

## **September 27, 2014**

*Revelation 4:1-11*

*Submitted by Carl Horton*

*Reflection: An “After This” Moment*

*“After this I looked, and there in heaven a door stood open!”*

We all have had “after this” moments — those turning points around and beyond which things change. In our “after this” moments, we stop the unmentioned and perhaps unremarkable and unmemorable “this,” whatever it is, like tweeting, texting, or posting, and something new begins, like simply looking up. And in that simple act of looking up, we open ourselves to discover the yet imperceptible “new thing” that God is doing right in our midst, like leaving doors open through which we can walk. And once we walk through them, these “after this” moments can be life-changing and transformational, leading us to an altered “before that” existence, from which we can never look back. That’s exactly what happened to John in this vision from Revelation. He walked through an open door into an experience of the reign of God from which he could never return. He saw something that he’d never seen before, that he wouldn’t soon forget, and that left its mark on him. And it changed him.

Every once in a while we are given opportunities to look up from whatever it is that has captured our attention and glimpse the reign of God. We get to see an image of something that is above and beyond, but also among us. It happened to me alongside other Presbyterians who ventured to Israel and Palestine last spring for the “Mosaic of Peace” conference. I saw and heard things that have changed me. I have a fresh vision of what a reign of peace can look like, a clearer understanding of the things that make for peace, and a renewed call and commitment to work for peace with justice.

Our Palestinian sisters and brothers are leaving doors open for us to walk through. We need to look up and see, and then let the “after this” moment begin.

*Action:* Take time to look up from whatever occupies you today. Notice something that you might have missed — a person in need, a news story worth reading, an experience worth having, a door left open. Allow yourself to envision God’s just and peaceable reign with fresh and hopeful images that will stay with you. Use the closing prayer as a chant, repeating it with your breath several times.

*Prayer:* You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created. Amen.

*Carl E. Horton is the associate for leadership development with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program in Louisville, Kentucky. He is a member of Mid-Kentucky Presbytery.*

**September 28, 2014**

*Ezekiel 34:25-31*

*Submitted by Paul Heins*

*Reflection:* As I traveled among the hills and wadis of the West Bank as a participant in the Mosaic of Peace conference in Israel/Palestine, it hit me that so many of the things that sustain life are a focal point of contention: water, land, food, economic opportunity, political self-determination, safety from harm, and freedom to think, believe, and move where our spirits lead. We contend with each other because we believe that the things we need are scarce: If you receive more, it means that I get less.

In our brokenness, our lives are governed by this vision of scarcity. We anxiously hoard and hide. Belief in scarcity easily spreads deep and wide. We treat love, hope, freedom, and peace in the same way – as if the supply were rare and buried deep.

How amazingly different is Ezekiel's vision! This word from the prophet is sent to the scattered sheep of Israel. They have been scattered by bad shepherds who hoarded the things Israel needed for life. Thank God that human belief in scarcity is not the final word!

To those resigned to the yoke of scarcity, God offers a word of abundance. Join me, says the Lord, in covenant relationship. There is plenty of life to share. The word to exiles long ago becomes Word for us: if we are willing to risk living in just relationship with God and neighbor, peace blossoms like “showers of blessing.”

*Action:* What has God given to you to share? Instead of being resigned to scarcity, in what way can you embody the abundance of Ezekiel's vision? Pick something concrete in time, talent, or treasure to share. Proclaim that scarcity is not the final word. Today's invitation is to allow God's abundance to flow through you.

*Prayer:* Lord, may we live today not anxiously clinging to life, but courageously sharing it. Help me to let go of what I can give in this moment, so that all may discover abundance and peace. Amen.

*Paul Heins is pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Logan in Utah Presbytery.*

**September 29, 2014**

*Isaiah 52:7-12*

*Submitted by Sarah Gengler*

*Reflection:* Our scripture today speaks of rejoicing, a sense of jubilation after hearing a herald announce redemption and victory to the people of Israel. There are songs of joy and celebration, as was tradition with the people of Israel. They rejoice that God has made a way for them to return to Zion. Toward the end of this passage, the prophet hurries them along, encouraging their departure, knowing it comes not a moment too soon.

The desire to return home that we read about in Isaiah is something we can still see around the world on so many different levels. At the “Mosaic of Peace” conference in Israel and Palestine, I sensed that desire again and again, especially in the lives of thousands of displaced Palestinian families with nothing but a trail of destruction and dust left where they once belonged. Instead of hearing songs of jubilation from these people, I heard the lament of being separated from what they once knew and



loved. I could see the pain and the frustration of the Palestinian people as they spoke of all that had been taken from them and what it would mean to have it back.

*Action:* Today as you pray, remember those who suffer from oppression and war and for those who long to go home but cannot.

*Prayer:* Gracious God, please protect and keep all those who are refugees in our world today. For the millions of people who have no home and see no hope in returning to one they once knew, comfort them and give them a reason to sing out, rejoicing and celebrating their deliverance from the oppression that they face. Lord, help me remember today and every day how blessed I am to have so many comforts in life and a willingness to help those who do not. Amen.

### **September 30, 2014**

*Ecclesiastes 3:1-8*

Submitted by Caryl Westerberg

*Reflection:* We face times when we become victims; we suffer, and we fear. Overwhelmed, we don't listen; we shout and blame. We build walls and make laws to protect and isolate us.

In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 we see life as a pendulum, where, like a wave upon the sand, nothing stays still, and there is a time for everything:

a time for victims, and a time for heroes;  
a time for suffering, and a time for peace;  
a time for fear, and a time for hope;  
a time to shout, and a time to listen;  
a time to blame, and a time to love;  
a time to build walls, and a time to build bridges;  
a time for discrimination, and a time for fairness;  
a time for isolation, and a time for acceptance;  
a time for protection, and a time for creativity.

While we may try to hold a wave upon the sand, we cannot. It is time for us to move on, to become heroes, to work for peace and hope. It is time to listen and love. It is time to build bridges and make fair laws that encourage acceptance and open the way for creativity.

*Action:* Let us become the heroes. When our media, our laws, and our political and justice systems favor one side over another, speak up! Write to the media; tell them to cover both sides of a conflict. Speak to the politicians; let them know when legislation is not fair.

*Prayer:* Dear God, remind us that with you, victimization will come to an end. Let us learn from our suffering and become heroes. Teach us to move from fear to listening, love, and hope. Give us the creativity to build bridges and bring a peace of fairness and acceptance of those around us. Amen.

**Caryl Westerberg** is a member of Stone Church of Willow Glen in San Jose Presbytery.

### **October 1, 2014**

Psalm 48

Submitted by Kathy Huffstetler

*Reflection:* Jerusalem is where pilgrims flock every day. It is a beautiful and perplexing confluence of major religions and cultures — all crammed into the old city walls and yet somehow remaining segregated from each other.

In Jerusalem, on our “Mosaic of Peace” trip, we saw people crowded into the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, a series of chapels built over the possible location of Christ’s tomb. Throngs of people from many countries and cultures were touching and rubbing ancient stone, gazing at shrines, and taking snapshots of altars, murals, and windows.

People are drawn to the beauty and meaning of this edifice and to Jerusalem as a whole. They attach sacredness to this site and city. People fight over these places. People fight over other holy places.

But could it be that the sacred and divine mystery is enshrined in each human being and does not just manifest itself in holy places? Could it be that the test of true spirituality is the act of compassion, respect and social justice? As disciples of Christ, we believe that the Kingdom of God is a place where faith, equal opportunity, and full justice are to exist for all people.

Peace is not silence, fear, and oppression. Peace is dynamism, boldness, and risk-taking. Peace is the joy of all the earth, and the earth belongs to all of us.

*Action:* Plan a worship service around peacemaking. Include reflections and stories from people who have traveled in areas of conflict and are committed to trying to make a difference and right the wrongs.

*Prayer:* Lord of the living stones, help us to look out of ourselves and become part of the bigger world, the righteous world, where we are interconnected and accept the rights of all people to experience hopes, dreams, fulfillment, safety, and nourishment. Help us to celebrate all faiths, to listen to one another in humility, and meet in a spirit of acceptance and love. We thank you for dialogue in the community, for mutual enrichment, for growing understanding, and for moving forward to sustain the legitimate rights of each of person and bring healing to places and hearts that are fractured. Amen.

**Kathy Huffstetler** is a member of West Raleigh Presbyterian Church in New Hope Presbytery.

**October 2, 2014**

John 2:1-11

Submitted by Sally Altobello

*Reflection:* If this bridegroom’s family had run out of food or wine for his wedding celebration (which could last many days), he and his family would have been very embarrassed. But Jesus saw this potential humiliation and prevented it from happening by turning the water into wine. Jesus made an ordinary wedding into an extraordinary celebration for the family. How many times in our lives have the expected, ordinary happenings become extraordinary? When I’m in the mountains of upstate New York, I see this happen in the beauty of the mountains against the blue sky, the sound of the loons calling to each other across the lake, the sun dancing and sparkling across the water. The ordinary becomes extraordinary. God is at work in our lives.

*Action:* Take a walk in the woods, sit on the pier by a lake, get involved in a help organization. Whatever you choose to do, look for and name the extraordinary happenings and feelings you experience. Deliberately think about how God is responsible for turning the ordinary in your life into the extraordinary.

*Prayer:* Lord Jesus, how grateful I am that you care about me in my most trivial moments. Help me to notice and acknowledge and be thankful for all the great and small miracles you perform in my life, making the ordinary into the extraordinary. And, every day, help us to remember that you are busy in so many ways working those miracles in us. With thanks and praise, Amen.

**Sally Altobello** is a teaching elder at Laurelton United Presbyterian Church in Presbytery of Genesee Valley.

**October 3, 2014**

Philemon

Submitted by Bryce Wilson

*Reflection:* Have you ever done something that you didn't particularly want to do, simply out of respect for the person who asked you to do it? Or perhaps the appeal was so powerfully convincing that you couldn't bring yourself to deny the request? In Paul's epistle to Philemon, he made an appeal for reconciliation that he knew Philemon wouldn't be able to decline. This short epistle is an ancient, masterful example of a powerful form of advocacy we still use today: letter writing.

From the chains of his prison cell, Paul carefully crafted a petition to Philemon, appealing on the basis of love that he would accept and fully embrace his runaway slave, Onesimus, *as a beloved brother in the Lord and in the flesh*, permanently upgrading his status in society. Perhaps we can learn something about tactful, diplomatic peacemaking from Paul, who showed genuine concern for both Philemon and Onesimus.

As I reflect upon the "Mosaic of Peace" conference in Israel/Palestine, one of the lasting impressions that continually comes back to me is the appeal that we heard from many speakers who addressed our conference — pastors, rabbis, theologians, activists — asking us to be a prophetic voice in the United States, bearing witness to the untenable situation we experienced on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories. Many reminded us of our own complicity as US citizens whose tax dollars have subsidized the occupation, now in its 47th year. But our complicity ought not lead us to complacency. Like Paul, we need to use our voices, pens, and positions of authority to advocate on behalf of the oppressed, leveraging our privilege for the cause of peace and reconciliation.

*Action:* Join the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in sending letters to Congress advocating a just peace in Israel/Palestine. You can use the PC(U.S.A.)'s Office of Public Witness website to form a letter requesting the halt of illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, one of the growing obstacles in the peace negotiation process.

*Prayer:* God of Peace, you are Holy! We pray for your kingdom to be realized on earth as it is in heaven; for a world where power is defined by sacrifice, love defined by justice, and where all your children may live in peace. Give us the courage to speak truth to power in love and wisdom. Amen.

**Bryce Wilson** is a program assistant with the Presbyterian Peacemaking Program in Louisville, KY

and was on the leadership team for “Mosaic of Peace.”

### **October 4, 2014**

Hebrews 13:20-21

Submitted by Geoff Browning

*Reflection:* This passage, like the rest of Hebrews, is an exhortation to keep the faith and persevere, even in the face of adversity, persecution, or lack of evidence of the coming kingdom of God. We are reminded that God is a God of peace, not of war, injustice, or the chaos of political and civil upheaval. This is sometimes difficult for us to remember when there are wars and conflicts around the world, in our communities, families, and churches. If God is really God, why has the kingdom of God not arrived? Why is there so much violence on our streets and in our communities? Why are there wars that cause so much death, destruction, and suffering?

The author of Hebrews doesn't answer this question directly but lets us know that we must have a clear conscience in all things. This means that we must focus on the essentials of hospitality to strangers, remembering those who are in prison or tortured, be morally upright, and not allow ourselves to be seduced by money. We should avoid strange teachings about food and rituals or anything that might distract us from the essentials of our faith that must include doing good and sharing what we have. And what is more, we can have confidence in the God of peace because the resurrection of the Lord Jesus and his sacrifice will allow every good thing to be completed in us.

*Action:* Compile a list of all the ways that you contribute to the support of peace and justice and love in the world. This may include committees you serve on, unpaid work you do at church or a nonprofit, contributions to nonprofit organizations, teaching Sunday school, etc.

*Prayer:* God of peace, thank you for allowing me to work with you in bringing peace and justice and love to our world. May your work in the world be fulfilled and completed within me and all your church this day and every day. Amen.

**Geoff Browning** is a member of First Presbyterian Church of Palo Alto and is the peacemaking advocate for San José Presbytery.

### **October 5, 2014**

*Romans 12:1-8*

*Submitted by Irene Pak*

*Reflection:* When I was a child, whenever I heard anything with the phrase “world peace,” the image of the diverse world holding hands and singing “Kumbaya” would come into my mind. You may say that this vision was the naïve hope of a young child who did not understand the realities of the real world, but this vision made me happy and gave me hope in the midst of the reality of a childhood where I was bullied and tormented on a daily basis for being different.

In this passage from Romans, we hear words like “renewal,” “grace,” and “this one body of Christ.” It's a beautiful image of how the different parts work together and belong to one another. Kumbaya, my Lord . . . . But let's keep it real. In the midst of a time in the life of our world, nation, and even

denomination where this one body is being hurt and broken and divided, words of oneness, new life in Christ, and belonging to one another are difficult to swallow and to believe.

And yet, we are still called to this vision of resurrection hope, because we need this kind of hope in the midst of the realities of violence, division, war, injustice, and violation of human rights everywhere. We have been given gifts to live into this hope of a living God, who, despite our divisions, still sees us as one body with many members. At the table of grace where the world is invited by Jesus to gather today, we have a moment of living out the reality of God's peace, even if just for a moment.

*Action:* Make time today to meet one of the neighbors you live next to or nearby that you do not yet know.

*Prayer:* Holy God, three in one, today, on World Communion Sunday, we pray for a glimpse of the hope of peace and the unity of one body as we share the meal together. We pray for the courage to let it be so through the gifts you have shared with us. Amen.

*Irene Pak is an associate pastor at Stone Church of Willow Glen in San José Presbytery and was on the planning team for "Mosaic of Peace."*