

## *"God's Prescription for Peace"*

Micah's vision of peace seems as illusive today as it was in the eighth century before Christ. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks" (Micah 4:3)—to actually take instruments of killing, that *destroy* life, and refashion them into farm implements for the cultivation of crops, to feed the hungry, to *sustain* life? I wonder how the people listening to Micah's words reacted. I suspect maybe they thought to themselves, "We don't know whether to *laugh* at the absurdity of what the prophet is saying or to *cry*, because this vision seems so far-fetched, so out of reach!"

These were horrible times for Israel. During Micah's life and ministry as a prophet, the Assyrians had invaded Palestine multiple times, leading to the fall of Damascus and the collapse of Samaria. Political alliances with Egypt to go up against the Assyrians had failed, until finally in 701 the Assyrians reached the gates of Jerusalem.

In the midst of the chaos, Micah speaks out with words of judgment and hope. There were many reasons for this. In the first place, Israel's political leaders were talking out of both sides of their mouths: they were supposed to rule with justice; instead, they oppressed their own people. Here's how Micah describes them in chapter 3: "you who hate the good and love the evil, who tear the skin off God's people and the flesh off their bones; who eat the flesh of my people, flay their skin off them, break their bones in pieces, and chop them up like meat in a kettle, like flesh in a caldron" (vs. 2-3). Not a pretty picture, is it?

But it gets worse. Micah is a lonely voice among the other prophets of his day. He complains that they "lead God's people astray" (3:5). They cry "Peace" when it's convenient and then turn around and declare war. It's an unsettling image where the religious establishment gives political cover for the nation's leaders to do whatever they want. It's a situation that's gone terribly wrong, where money talks and power corrupts. Micah says Israel's "rulers give judgment for a bribe, its priests teach for a price, its prophets give oracles for money; yet they lean upon the Lord and say, 'Surely the Lord is with us! No harm shall come upon us'" (3:11).

Does any of this sound remotely familiar?

But all is not hopeless. In chapter 4, Micah envisions a time when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid..." (vs. 3-4). In chapter 6, Micah offers a plan for how the people

might be able to realize the vision of peace he had described earlier. It's summarized in that familiar poetic text found in verse 8:

"God has told you, O mortal, what is good;  
and what does the Lord require of you but to  
do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk  
humbly with your God?"

This is God's prescription for peace.

"To walk humbly with God" reminds us of the importance of the spiritual life, our relationship with God. This is where we are becoming devoted followers of Jesus. It's the first step toward lasting peace. You see, God's peace plan isn't sustainable unless it rests on a firm foundation of a life that's in an on-going relationship with God. That's because what God requires of us is impossible on our own strength. Loving our enemies? Making personal sacrifices, sharing generously my own resources (time, talents, money) so that I can help alleviate the suffering of others in the world? In the face of so many urgent needs all around us, it's just too overwhelming to contemplate, until you realize it's not *our* work, not *our* mission at all. It's God's. We're simply joining with God in making the world a better place. And it all starts with knowing God. "To walk humbly with your God." This is where we learn the heart of God, a heart of compassion, mercy and grace.

Knowing and experiencing the heart of God. This is where the power to live a life of peace comes from. And this is how we become motivated to take the second step, to "love kindness." This is where we begin to make a difference in the world around us, to address the symptoms of a broken humanity. To *love* kindness is not just an activity we do sometimes, whenever we feel like it. It's a growing part of our identity, of who we are in Christ. Kindness is one of the fruits of the Spirit Paul mentions in Galatians 5. It's one of the ways we express our faith, breaking down walls between us, alleviating suffering, meeting human need. When we love kindness, it shows in the words we speak, and the actions we take.

But the third step is perhaps the hardest of all: "*to do justice*"—not just talking about it, not just agreeing that it's important, but acting upon those core values and convictions God has placed in our hearts. This is where we begin to address not just the *symptoms* of injustice, but the *systems* behind them—the institutions, conditions, and circumstances that helped create the problems we now face. Someone has said it's the difference between feeding the hungry at a soup kitchen, as helpful as that is, and finding out why they're in line for soup in the first place, then seeking to address the root causes.

Now why am I sharing all this at a memorial service for Art Goering? Two reasons. First, I think if Art were here he'd say, "Don't focus on me. That's not necessary." I experienced Art as a quiet, reserved Christ-follower who was usually content to work in the background. He wasn't one to be the center of attention. But a second and perhaps more important reason to share this message from the Scriptures today is because Art was committed to the way of peace Micah was talking about. I think this is exactly what Art would want us to focus on today. This is how we can offer a tribute to him and his life, by thinking about and reflecting on how we can be a people of peace in a world that has gone terribly wrong.

I remember several years ago when we held our first Fun Fest here at the church as a way of reaching out to our neighbors and community. It's a kind of outdoor carnival, with activities for the whole family. Art was serving on the board responsible for planning the event. As we brainstormed ideas for what to include, Art suggested we include a few activities related to peacemaking. So one idea he came up with was to have a peace tent, with different peace-related activities—reading children's stories about peace, making peace cranes out of paper, and so on. But then outside the tent, as a way of attracting the attention of the children, he set up what he called "stomping for peace." He took tin cans and attached ropes to them that came up to your knees. Then what you did was to stand on those tin cans, one for each foot and holding on to the rope, "stomping for peace." I remember Art even took a turn himself, along with some of the rest of us older folks lacking in common sense! It was a lot of fun, but also a good way to introduce peacemaking to kids.

During a visit several days before his death, I was telling Art and Rosie about a "peace walk" I'd gone on while visiting Koinonia Farm in Georgia during my recent sabbatical. It was actually a walk in the woods where at several stops along the way there were plaques attached to trees with short biographies of famous peacemakers, like Martin Luther King, Jr., Gandhi, and Archbishop Oscar Romero. Art was resting quietly in his bed as I shared. He seemed to doze in and out of sleep. At one point, I raised the question, "Why is peacemaking so hard, so illusive in our world today?" With that, Art raised himself up in bed and, with a gesture of the hand, he said, "It's because we're greedy and we don't want to give up power."

Until the end, you could always get Art talking if the topic was related to peace. These concerns were always close to his heart; for him, the way of peace as Jesus taught and modeled for us was vitally important to his understanding of Christian discipleship. But it

wasn't just an intellectual exercise for Art. His faith was strong and deep. As you heard earlier in the life sketch, Art knew God was with him. He'd made a commitment to Christ as a young man, a journey of faith that would continue to grow and deepen with each passing day. Over time, he learned firsthand the message Micah preached so long ago: *to do justice, love kindness and walk humbly with God.*

Here's a poem I believe expresses Art's walk with God. It's a simple affirmation of a steady, but bold, faith I commend to each of us today. It was written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian, from a prison cell, at a difficult time of war when he was struggling with how to remain faithful under harsh circumstances (quoted in *The Christian Century*, Sept 4 '07, p. 3):

"Let candles burn, both warm and bright,  
Which to our darkness thou hast brought  
...Night and morning, God is by us faithfully  
And surely at each newborn day."

Art heard God's call to be a peacemaker in a troubled world. But he also knew that ultimately peace is a gift, a sign God's faithfulness "at each newborn day." May we, too, know God's faithfulness in our lives, as we follow Jesus along the way of peace.

-Gordon Smith

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*A meditation shared at "A Life Celebration Service" in memory of Arthur D. Goering, Faith Mennonite Church, Newton, Kansas, on September 8, 2007.*

## Arthur D. 'Art' Goering

*The Newton Kansan September 7, 2007*

Arthur D. "Art" Goering, 80, died Wednesday (Sept. 5, 2007) at his residence in North Newton.



He was born on June 28, 1927, near Moundridge to John B. and Jessie (Schrag) Goering. On Oct. 6, 1956, he married Rosella Goossen at Alexanderwhol Church. She survives at home. He was a member of Faith Mennonite Church in Newton. His faith and religion was very important to him. He taught Sunday school and served on many committees and boards. He graduated from Canton High School and attended McPherson College. He graduated from Bethel College and later earned a master's degree from Wichita State University and specialist in education degree from Emporia State University. He enjoyed teaching especially junior high math. He had a positive influence on many students during his 32 years teaching career. He greatly enjoyed traveling with his wife. They had been to all 50 states and several foreign countries. He had a love of gardening and was a master gardener in Harvey County for 10 years. He greatly enjoyed spending time with his loving family and many friends, Especially watching the growth and progress of his grandchildren.

Survivors include sons, Randall and Carol Goering of Newton, and Steven and Mary Goering of Evanston, Ill.; a daughter, Jan and Ross Baty of Missoula, Mont.; brothers, Larry Goering of Ayden, N.C., Harry Goering of Menifee, Calif., James Goering of Dayton, Va., Leonard Goering of Newton, and John Goering of Gresham, Ore.; sisters, Martha Sungren of North Newton and Joan Epp of Goessel; and six grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his parents; brothers, Walter Goering, Alvin Goering, Bill Goering, Daniel Goering, Herbert Goering and Ralph Goering; and sisters, Elva Goering and Frieda Regier.

Visitation will be from 1 to 8 p.m. today at Petersen Funeral Home in Newton with family present from 6 to 8:30 p.m.

Service will be at 11 a.m. Saturday at Faith Mennonite Church in Newton with Pastor Gordon Smith officiating. Burial will be a private family burial in rural Moundridge.

Memorials may be made to Faith Mennonite Church or Offender Victim Ministries in care of the funeral home.

## Tribute to Art Goering

Sep 5, 2007

By Rosie Goering

### Let there be joy:

For I have seen the wonders of the world, the Sphinx of Egypt, the falls of Igausu, the mountains of Switzerland, the canals of Venice, the canyons of Arizona, the treasures of St. Petersburg. I have enjoyed the wildflowers of Mt. Rainier, the waving wheat fields of Kansas, the prairies of the Flint Hills, the quiet waters of our back yard where the Canada Geese land in graceful majesty. When I die, let there be joy.

### Let there be joy:

For I have enjoyed my career as a teacher I have helped countless students to learn the fundamentals of math and algebra and even succeeded in helping some to enjoy it. I have challenged my students to become aware of whom they are. I have shared my humor, graded countless papers, and tutored many.

### Let there be joy:

For in my travels I have seen the marker to honor Menno Simons, the cave of the Anabaptists, the hidden church of Holland. I have tramped the streets of Jerusalem, visited the caves of Bethlehem, and seen the quiet Galilee. I have learned the stories of my foreparents at the villages of Kotosufka and Edwardsdorf. And I have learned the stories of Jesus at Eden's Sunday School and at my sister's knee.

### Let there be joy:

For I have been blessed to have a soul mate for just over 50 years, three beautiful and loving children. For I have been further blessed by three more children through marriage, and six talented grandchildren. For I have taught paper folding and played games with the grandchildren, given and received many hugs, and have

been wonderfully gifted many times. For I have had good homes and good food. For I have had many friends who have given me many moments of happiness. I have played many games with friends, worked on many committees, and attended many Boy Scout campouts.

Let there be joy:

For I have enjoyed many blessings because of places I have been; people I have known, and students I have taught. I have been given many opportunities. I have seen the young rise up strong and take their place in the world. I have been blessed.

Let there be joy, not for the years that I have been privileged to live, but for the things I have been able to accomplish, for the persons who have blessed me, for the family who has loved me, for the God who has always been faithfully beside me. When I die, let there be joy!

- Rosie Goering