

The Challenge to Peace (Mother's Fervent Wish)
Mother's Day 2021
First Congregational Church of Westfield
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I was speaking with a new friend the other day. She has two small children and I asked her what she had planned for Mother's Day. "All I want is peace," was her reply. She wanted of course to be treated nicely, maybe breakfast in bed, a card, all the usual things. But her fervent wish was for peace. That got me thinking.

Mother's Day has gone through a lot of changes in the past 150 years. You can go on-line and read about it. The one that sticks out for me is the day organized by Anna Reeves Jarvis to help mothers of Confederate and Union soldiers gather in order to bring about peace between the North and the South. It was called "Mothers' Friendship Day," to promote healing and reconciliation. Maybe they should bring that one back.

Another precursor to the Mother's Day we think of now was started by abolitionist and suffragette Julia Ward Howe. In 1870 Howe wrote the "Mother's Day Proclamation," a call to action that asked mothers to unite in the promotion of world peace. In 1873 Howe campaigned for a "Mother's Peace Day" to be celebrated every June 2. If you stop and think about it, if anyone can bring about world peace, surely it is at least in part, mothers, or anyone with what we might call a "Mothering Spirit."

Eventually Ann Reeves Jarvis' daughter Anna was able to get the official Mother's Day on the American calendar. In May 1908 she organized the first official celebration at a Methodist church in Grafton, W. Virginia. Thousands attended a Mother's Day event at a Wanamaker's retail store in Philadelphia. Wanamaker's had financially backed the idea at the request of Reeves in honor of her own mother who had died in 1905. This day was touted to acknowledge and celebrate the many sacrifices of all mothers.

Mother's Day grew nationally and in 1914 President Woodrow Wilson officially established the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day. Interestingly, Reeves came to regret the work she did to get this accomplished, because of all the commercialization that ensued.

Going back to my friend's wish for peace (and Paul's charge to the Colossians), I'd like to underscore the wish for peace, on the home front and in the world. Many mothers wish for peace; but all of us should be honoring the Great Mother today, as one who wishes for nothing but peace among all brothers and sisters everywhere.

At times I marvel at all the peace there is in the world. And then I turn on television or I hear complaints and harsh words and malicious misunderstandings, and I see we have far to go. Why does peace elude us? Why can we not see all men and women as our kin, our family, ourselves? Sometimes it happens, but it's fleeting. It's a practice for people of all faiths and no faith. To tame the tongue, let alone the mind, to wish others well and gently resist the temptation to

make another into a “thing,” an object, “the other,” is our lifetime challenge. If we want generations of mothers and their children to flourish and thrive long after our time, we need to accept this challenge and there’s no better place to do it than the church.

The church is a love lab. The church is a place to learn how to love, forgive, serve and grow. The stated mission of this church is the following:

First Congregational Church of Westfield is a community united to worship and serve God. In faith we minister to all with unconditional love and acceptance by following the example and teachings of Jesus Christ. By using our unique gifts, we share the word of God and his salvation.

Wow. Maybe this should be read at every meeting. Every Sunday. This Mission Statement could be studied for days and weeks and still invite more study. It’s a good thing to reflect on and ask as a body from time to time? *How are we doing with this? Like, how are we doing with Paul’s mandate to the Colossians?*

When I got married our vows included the following: “I promise to love you and to serve you, in all ways, great and small. I promise to support you toward the realization of your highest self.” I can’t tell you how many times we have reflected on these promises. “Serve you in all ways, great and small.” What might that look like? Not complaining when he works too much? Asking if he’d like a sandwich when I’m making myself one? Preparing the coffeemaker at night and bringing a cup to the bedside every morning? Yup, all that and more.

The challenge to peace is the challenge to a good marriage and the challenge to a successful, loving church and a world that works for everyone. It’s the challenge of our mouths and our minds. How we talk to, listen to and see one another. How we behave when no one is looking. How we forgive each other for merely being human.

The Great Mother wants peace today. Peace in our homes and peace in our hearts. It takes courage to stand for peace and it takes work to be peaceful ourselves. End the drama. Let go of the small stuff. Extend an olive branch and maybe even a kind word to someone you don’t like or have trouble loving. Go ahead. Just do it. Feel Mother smile down on you.