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North Valley Friends Trail

A gift of North Valley Friends Church.

POEMS OF PEACE



NORTH VALLEY PEACE PROJECT

Poems offer a unique venue for insight. Within this booklet you will find 12 poems. Please use them in a meditative way as you walk around the trail. Pause as you come to each peace pole.

Read one of the poems, its reflection and ponder the question at the end. Move through another poem as you come to the next peace pole during your walk. These poems were selected as reflections on the many aspects of peace: peace within our self, our family, community, and around our world as well as peace with all creation and peace with God.

The North Valley Friends Trail is a 3/4 mile trail (1 mile if you do a figure eight), featuring twelve peace poles, peace flags and a large labyrinth.

You are invited to utilize the trail at any time.

Thank you for joining us!

For information visit peaceproject.northvalleyfriends.org

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LOAVES AND FISHES

By David Whyte

This is not
the age of information.
This is not
the age of information.

Forget the news
and the radio
and the blurred screen.

This is the time
of loaves
and fishes.

People are hungry,
and one good word is bread
for a thousand.

REFLECTION:

Out of our own experience of God and creation, and out of our own gifts and need come those good words that serve as bread for a thousand. Just as the youngster in the biblical account offered up a meal intended for one, we too may offer up what we thought was intended for one alone to be used by Christ as bread for a thousand.

QUERY:

Are we positioned to listen; not to the media messages surrounding us, but to the still small voice that seeks to feed the thousands?

SONNET, TRINITY 18

by Madeleine L'Engle

Peace is the centre of the atom, the core
Of quiet within the storm. It is not
A cessation, a nothingness, more
The lightning in reverse is what
Reveals the light. It is the law that binds
The atom's structure, ordering the dance
Of proton and electron, and that finds
Within the midst of flame and wind, the glance
In the still eye of the vast hurricane.
Peace is not placidity; peace is
The power to endure the megatron of pain
With joy, the silent thunder of release,
The ordering of Love. Peace is the atom's start,
The primal image: God within the heart.

REFLECTION:

Peace is not a negative quality, the absence of violence, the pause between wars. God's peace permeates creation, a powerful presence, "the ordering of Love." There is nothing weak, wimpy or passive about this kind of peace.

QUERY:

Who do you know that brings together strength and peace in the way they face problems or conflict? How might you grow in this kind of peace?

PRAISE FOR INSTRUMENTS OF PEACE

by Arthur O. Roberts

for eyes
that linger
to see how
Truth applies

for ears
that gather
all the hurts
the joys, the fears

for noses
welcoming
whether scenting
sweat or roses

for lips that promise
picnics, parks
and other trips

for hands
outstretched
that offer love
a place to stand

REFLECTION:

Arthur Roberts' poem shows that it's ordinary people that God uses as instruments of peace. It's people who employ what they have—their bodies and senses and voices—to reach out to other people in acts of kindness. It's people like us.

QUERY:

How are you letting your body—yourself—act as an instrument of peace among your family members, church community and neighborhood?

THE PEACE OF WILD THINGS

by Wendell Berry

When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

REFLECTION:

Remembering my place in the world--as a mere creature, one tiny living spark of this vast cosmos--is the best road I know toward inner peace. I suspect it could also be a path toward peace between people and nations: it's an antidote to hubris. To calm the body and to pry the mind from action is to accept that the world will go on without me and not fall to pieces during my pause. That this statement feels profound measures my mania.

The glare of the everyday dazzles me until I forget there are stars out there, light-years away, created by the God who is here with me now. It takes even a bit more faith to remember these stars and their message when I can't see them for the sun or the clouds--yet by God's grace I'm surrounded by other wild things that tell me the same truth, if I will only come for a while into their peace.

QUERIES:

What wild things (stars, creatures) give me the sense of my place in God's creation? What can I do to find them more often? What glare blinds me to them in daily life?

REFLECTION:

In "Making Peace," Levertov proposes that peace is not an end; it is a way. In Levertov's vision, peace requires a fundamental "restructur[ing of] the sentence our lives are making." Peace is not defined by an absence of war, but it is an energy field.

Levertov compares peace to a poem, a poem that "can't be imagined before it is made, can't be known except in the words of its making." Later she continues the metaphor:

A line of peace might appear
if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,
questioned our needs, allowed
long pauses. . . .

QUERY:

How do I know and recognize peace?

Are there ways in which I need to "restructure the sentence" my life is making?

How am I guilty of reaffirming profit and power in the way I approach my life?

What could I do to better live out the "grammar of justice" and "the syntax of mutual aid" in my community?

MAKING PEACE

By Denise Levertov

A voice from the dark called out,
“The poets must give us
imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar
imagination of disaster. Peace, not only
the absence of war.”

But peace, like a poem,
is not there ahead of itself,
can't be imagined before it is made,
can't be known except
in the words of its making,
grammar of justice,
syntax of mutual aid.

A feeling towards it,
dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have
until we begin to utter its metaphors,
learning them as we speak.

A line of peace might appear
if we restructured the sentence our lives are making,
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,
questioned our needs, allowed
long pauses. . . .

A cadence of peace might balance its weight
on that different fulcrum; peace, a presence,
an energy field more intense than war,
might pulse then,
stanza by stanza into the world,
each act of living
one of its words, each word
a vibration of light—facets
of the forming crystal.

YELLOW GIRL

by Priscilla Lowery

Climbing yellow roses
Blanket the arbor in sunshine.
Each bloom a burst of yellow joy

Stepping under the golden arch,
A memory rises into thought
Of a distant girl who loved yellow;

Clothed herself in yellow.
Yellow jeans, yellow top, yellow coat;
Her golden shield of balm

Soothing the fire of a father's violence
Burning in her ears
Darkening her soul's inner sky

Yellow to cover her sadness
Yellow to befriend her lonely spirit
Yellow to bind up and preserve the remnants of her shiny self

Under the blooming halo
She still wears her yellow
As light; God's love light

And listens only to the sweet, love-filled
Yellow words of her angels
God's shiny yellow girl.

REFLECTION:

If you are in need of healing, know that you are loved. Your heart is big enough to hold joy with the suffering. Seek a spiritual advisor who can help you live from a place of love and blessing.

QUERY:

Are there places in your life that are in need of healing? Are you listening to lies from the past or learning to live under the true light of blessing? Do you need someone to talk to? Is there something keeping you from seeking the help you desire?

ALONE
by Maya Angelou

Lying, thinking
Last night
How to find my soul a home
Where water is not thirsty
And bread loaf is not stone
I came up with one thing
And I don't believe I'm wrong
That nobody,
But nobody
Can make it out here alone.

Alone, all alone
Nobody, but nobody
Can make it out here alone.

There are some millionaires
With money they can't use
Their wives run round like banshees
Their children sing the blues
They've got expensive doctors
To cure their hearts of stone.
But nobody
No, nobody
Can make it out here alone.

REFLECTION:

What is it inside us that tells us we can do it alone? We try to go through life, independent. But nobody can make it alone. We need the love of family, the relationships within our community, We need to learn from those who are different from us, we need to reach out to others both near and far in generosity. We are all needy people needing other needy people. This is the way of peace and wholeness.

QUERY:

In what ways do you need to open up your life to the presence of others?

THE WORLD IS WAITING
by Arthur O. Roberts

O God of heaven
and of earth below,
the world is waiting,
 it is waiting now,
 like willows in the snow,
for some clear sign,
some indication how
the winds will blow.
What do these dark clouds
signify? Tell us now.

O God of heaven
and of earth below,
the world is hoping,
 it is hoping, now,
 like willow buds in snow,
for your sun to shine,
for changes that allow
Christ's love to grow.
Can there be peace,
not war, O tell us how!

REFLECTION:

Sometimes we simply need to plead for peace in our prayers. We need to a knowledge our utter dependence on God and express our longings, our cries for help, to the Prince of Peace.

QUERY:

Am I agonizing in prayer for world peace? How can my prayers and tears make a difference?

PEACE LIKE A RIVER

by Sarah Klatt Dickerson

Like a river rock
I wait
To be plunged into
Places where all is
Right
Where all is
Well
Cool waters form and
Shape me
Their gentle tide
Persistently moves
Rubs off spores and
Wounds from
Being alive
In a violent world

There is strength
In the current
It moves with ever patient
Hope
Bringing together
Small silly stones
Who think their creation
Is complete
The waters dare us
To go
Find the places that
Call us to
Wholeness
Join hands with whoever
Is next to us
And breathe life together

REFLECTION:

There's something peaceful about sitting next to a river, watching its ever-moving waters, and listening to its quiet babbling. I grew up singing the hymn "It Is Well With My Soul". The first line is "When peace like a river, attendeth my way" and the chorus simply repeats "It is well with my soul". When I imagine a world where all is well, I picture a safe place without violence, injustice, or brokenness. A place where people love each other, rather than hurt or judge. While the river waters are gentle and calming, they are also filled with great power. They move, rearrange, and wear down sharp stones. Peace is very much the same – it's gentle and soothing, but it also wears down injustice and violence. It may take a while, but slowly, one stone at a time, the river becomes a place of beautiful new creation, a place where all can be well.

QUERY:

What are the "rough edges" that keep me from participating in the gentle and powerful movement of peace? What would it look like for all to be well?

THE ESKIMOS HAVE NO WORD FOR "WAR"

by Mary Oliver

Trying to explain it to them
Leaves one feeling ridiculous and obscene.
Their houses, like white bowls,
Sit on a prairie of ancient snowfalls
Caught beyond thaw or the swift changes
Of night and day.
They listen politely, and stride away

With spears and sleds and barking dogs
To hunt for food. The women wait
Chewing on skins or singing songs,
Knowing that they have hours to spend,
That the luck of the hunter is often late.

Later, by fires and boiling bones
In steaming kettles, they welcome me,
Far kin, pale brother,
To share what they have in a hungry time
In a difficult land. While I talk on
Of the southern kingdoms, cannon, armies,
Shifting alliances, airplanes, power,
They chew their bones, and smile at one another.

REFLECTION:

Our culture is not a peaceful one. While Mary Oliver's poem may seem naïve in some respects (are there any cultures where conflict in some form is not evident?), it is true that many ethnic groups have things to teach us about relationships to one other and to the land.

QUERY:

In what ways does the gospel call to peace challenge us to live in contrast to the values of our own culture?

GOD'S GRANDEUR

by Gerard Manley Hopkins

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.

It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;

It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil

Crushed. Why do men then now not reckon his rod?

Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;

And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;

And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil

Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And, for all this, nature is never spent;

There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;

And though the last lights off the black West went

Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—

Because the Holy Ghost over the bent

World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.

REFLECTION:

I suggest that you walk this poem. Step to the rhythm or pace you feel in each line. I think you might feel anticipation or awe in your steps at the beginning, then a dragging or stumbling as the weight of our human mess comes close to blotting out God's face in Creation. At the second stanza, perhaps you might pause in your walk. Look all about you, breathe deeply, feel the sun or wind, then walk on as you read. Your steps might slow in wonder at the grace, renewal and healing that God embedded in his world, or you might end up springing, maybe even running, ahead as this renewal lifts the weight of human toil, human smudge and smell.

Then then, oh and then you might just have to sink to your knees or throw out your arms because this dear freshness, this new-day grace is not merely nature following its own laws, a happenstance of chemistry and biology, but because we in our "bent"-ness are tenderly sustained by God's Spirit who broods over the world with warm breast and with ah! bright wings!

QUERY:

In the midst of a world in conflict- both globally and locally- how can you keep more in touch with the Spirit who broods over this bent world with love and hope?

SECRET SOWERS

by Nancy Thomas

"Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness" (James 3:18)

We lay down our seeds in the dark.

Spring has been exceptionally cold

this year. Reluctant daffodils

have done little to convince me.

But we do the work of the faithful

farmer, rising in the pre-dawn hours.

It is a chosen hiddenness, a subtle

stretching over time, ear bent to listen

to the ground, ready for instruction.

Slow rhythmic movements are best.

Sometimes we simply show up,

holding borrowed pain, applying tears

or not. With a gentle

but demanding attention

to detail, we prepare the soil.

We plant. We wait.

REFLECTION:

Most peacemaking happens through ordinary acts of love, most of them hidden. It's part of the life-style of people who follow Jesus day in, day out, raising their families, doing their work, relating to their neighbors, responding to the hard issues of the times, all in quiet obedience to the Master. The metaphor of planting seeds, then waiting for harvest, is apt.

QUERY:

What secret seeds of peace are you planting?
