

WORLD PEACE

Isaiah 2:1-5, Matthew 5:7-9 [MW18-23]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 05 August 2018

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God

- I invite you to take a moment and consider
then share with one or two people around you
if there is anything you/we/the church can do to help bring peace into our world

[space for reflection, sharing any thoughts/ideas ...]

Tomorrow is August the 6th

- "World Peace Day"
it is also "Hiroshima Day"
a day that marks the remembrance of events
surrounding the dropping of the atomic bomb
 - and a day that looks forward to a real and lasting peace
- our world is not at peace
the middle east highlights how 'not at peace' we are
and is unfortunately only one trouble spot among so many
- yet we dare to have this day, World Peace Day
to remind ourselves it is not too late
to pray for and strive for peace in our world and in our lives

I'm going to read you a story

- some of you may have heard it, may know it well
however it is a story worth hearing again and again ...
- it's a tear-jerker, so you may need your hankies or a tissue
but it does have hope
- 'Sadako and the Paper Cranes'

On August 6, 1945, a giant American airplane, the Enola Gay, dropped the world's first atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, killing nearly 100,000 people and ushering in an age of terror for the entire human race. The "Flash", as the people of Hiroshima refer to it, destroyed 4.7 square miles of their city of 250,000 people and could be seen 170 miles away.

Sadako, who was two when the thunderbolt fell two miles from her home, was one of the fortunate ones, her father told her. Only six of their relatives, including their grandmother, Oban Chan, had been killed. Though Sadako could not remember the events of that horrible day, 11 years later she knew the story well. In addition to the words of her father, each year on August 6 the city of Hiroshima celebrated Peace Day. In the atmosphere of a fair, with many wonderful foods and exciting entertainment, Peace Day was an occasion for young and old to remember. They gazed at the pictures of burned people and the devastation of the bomb, which had the power equal to 2000 B-29s fully loaded with conventional weapons. City officials gave speeches and the Buddhist priests released hundreds of white doves that circled the city. Before the day was over people inscribed the names of loved ones who died because of the bomb on paper lanterns that were lit with candles and set adrift on the seven rivers that flow through Hiroshima. The rivers carried the lanterns slowly to the sea, and with them the memories of those who died.

When she was nine years old, Sadako dreamed of being a great runner. With the speed of a deer she had won many races and had been chosen to represent her class at Field Day. "Someday," she thought, "I will represent the Junior High in races."

To reach her goal she would have to practice every day. Sadako ran home from school, easily beating her brother. At night she ran through the streets. With each passing day it seemed that Sadako became stronger and faster.

Then one day Sadako fell. While running, she had become dizzy. It was nothing to worry about, so she said nothing. As the days passed, the dizziness came more often. Then one day at school she fell and was unable to stand. Her teacher called her parents who rushed her, against her will, to the hospital. She sensed the fear of her mother as she entered the doctor's office. A few hours later Sadako heard the most frightening phrase in Hiroshima--atomic poisoning. Leukemia, or cancer of the blood, was a result of the radiation that was stored in the bodies of people who lived in Hiroshima during the Flash. It was the most feared illness of all. "Daddy," she cried, "I can't have the poison. I wasn't even scratched by the bomb!"

"The doctors aren't certain," her father said sadly. "They simply want to take some tests." But as the days passed, it was clear to Sadako from the voices and looks of the doctors that something was very wrong. She knew she would be in the hospital for a long time. Then one day Chizuko, her best friend, came to the hospital with her hands behind her back. "Guess what I have for you," she laughed. Without waiting for an answer she held high in the air a golden piece of paper that had been carefully folded. "A crane!"

Sadako thanked her. "It isn't just a gift, it is a good luck piece," Chizuko cried. "Haven't you heard the story of the crane? It is said the crane lives for a thousand years, and any sick person who folds a thousand cranes will get well. Let's get started!" With that Chizuko began to teach Sadako how to fold the crane out of a scrap of paper.

With the help of her friend Sadako folded several cranes that afternoon. Strangely, she felt better. Perhaps the crane did bring sick people good luck. "I'll have to have more paper," Sadako said. "I still have 990 more to fold."

In the days that followed, Sadako folded many cranes. Her brother and the nurses hung them from the ceiling and put them on every shelf in the hospital room. Everyone saved paper for her. By the time she had folded 200 cranes, the dizziness began to get worse. At times she was so weak that it was impossible to lift her arms. Then suddenly she would have a burst of energy and her hands would quickly fold the beautiful paper cranes again-300-350-400.

Soon the period between cranes became longer for Sadako. She was determined, however, and the total still rose-450-500. Each day the nurses encouraged the bright-eyed little girl with the pleasant smile. "Only a few hundred more to go," they would tell Sadako.

Near the end of July, Sadako folded her 600th paper crane. Her family and friends were told they should keep their visits short. She got weaker every day. Still, each time they visited her in the special hospital for leukemia victims, they discovered she had folded a few more cranes. Now, however, the progress was counted by fives rather than fifties. 610-615-620.

Finally, one night Sadako's strength gave out. She closed her eyes and did not open them again. She had fallen short of her goal.

Chizuko and Sadako's other classmates folded the remaining paper cranes and threaded them into a wreath that was placed over her body. Then, with their teacher's help,

Sadako's classmates began to raise money throughout Japan for a children's monument to be placed in Peace Park as a reminder of what the "Flash" had done to children. After a long and difficult campaign, the money was raised and a sculptor hired to design the monument. Today, on a large hollow pedestal of granite, stands the figure of Sadako, a golden crane perched on her outstretched hand. People from all over the world have sent hundreds of crane wreaths that have been draped over the granite figure.

A Folded Crane Club has been formed to assist the *hibakusha* the survivors of the atomic blast. Members of the club hold memorial services for children who die. They print a newsletter. They also write letters to governments all over the world, urging leaders to work for peace. The memory of Sadako and the symbol of the paper crane have made thousands of people determined to do all they can to insure that no one ever has to suffer from the "Flash" again.

It is said that those who fold paper cranes show willingness to labour

- for a child's desire to live
- faith in the future
- commitment to a world without war

Each year people place paper cranes

- at the base of Sadako's statue in Peace Park
- to recall the tragedy of war
- and to celebrate humanity's undying hope for peace

The words on the inscription of that statue read:

This is our cry. This is our prayer. Peace in the world.

[place paper crane on altar]

We've heard and thought about "peace" this morning

- now I invite you to take the paper you were given, and the pen
- and write a message about peace
- then we fold the messages into some kind of paper plane
- and when we're all done
- when we have all written our message and folded our plane
- we launch our planes to exchange messages of peace
- everyone will get a different one to take home
- put on the fridge, think about, may be even work on

[fold panes and exchange]

May this be our prayer as we strive for peace in our world and in our lives:

O Lord, we search for peace - be with us in our search.

Show us the face of courage, not in the flexing of muscle
but in the stretching of hearts.

Teach us to sing; teach us to hope;

call us to learn and work and pray.

Give us shalom, through Jesus the Prince of Peace.

Amen.