

Remembering: A Peace Manifesto (revisited)

(adapted¹ from a sermon preached at TUMC in November 2010)

Michele Rae Rizoli

Part 1 – Remembering the victims of violence

I remember, Je me souviens

I remember,

but mostly I'd rather forget

Mostly

I'd rather curl up in my corner and cry, wail, lament

I remember the things we do and don't do to each other:

War, genocide, injustice,

poverty, torture,

broken relationships, bullying, meanness, gossip, betrayal.

I remember,

but sometimes I'd rather forget

Denial constantly tempts me

Because I don't care?

or because I care too much?

or because I want to *do* something about it?

or because I don't know what to *do*?

I don't know what to **do**.

Maybe I'll try a different verb

Maybe I'll **feel**

Can I let my spirit take in the weight of the pain

without immediately bouncing into a flurry of privileged doing?

[Deep breath]

I'll remember

I remember the landmines, the tanks, the drones, the IED's,

¹ Not all statistics and references have been updated

the missiles, the so-called smart bombs, the exploding pagers,
the automatics, the lasers, the precision shooting, the anti-
personnel weapons, the atomic warheads,
The indiscriminate killing and maiming²
The beatings, the abuse
the tools people design to hurt and kill
other people,
other souls
guns with cool sounding names and serial
numbers ironically full of x's and o's

I remember a fact: The money it took to send
ONE North American soldier to fight overseas
Could have built 20 schools in the same locations,
twenty schools for one soldier

I remember collateral damage, the casualties, the
“heroes fighting for freedom,” the lost troops, the
unfortunate incidents, the friendly fire,
euphemisms for dead people
victims of the power struggles of the powerful
It is not the soldiers who declare war
nor are they the primary victims.
Most of war's casualties today are civilians – even children and the elderly.

I'd rather forget,
But I remember

I remember the refugees of war,
their hunger for safety
and hunger for food
Wanting things to be as they were, as they might be,
as they never will be
Craving order, craving comfort,
craving meaning, craving change.

²<https://www.ploughshares.ca/reports/statement-on-the-u-s-decision-to-transfer-cluster-munitions-to-ukraine>

I remember people seeking a refuge
A place that can hold unending despair
suspended indefinitely in time
eternally temporary.

I remember another fact:

This year more than 120 million people were forcibly displaced worldwide [by] persecution, conflict, violence or human rights violations.³

Almost three times all the people of my home country, Canada

I'd rather forget
But I remember

I remember the children
who are the most vulnerable to the violence of war
and of the schoolyard
The children who have witnessed, participated in,
And escaped from horror
or those with good reason to fear it
The children who have lost, who are lost
Lost family, lost hope, lost innocence
I remember the children who carry guns.

I try to forget, my little ones
but I remember

I remember the women
Who, through the use of sexual violence as a strategy of war
or as a strategy of dominance with any excuse
suffer brutally,
humiliatingly,
unspeakably

I try to forget, my sisters
But I remember

³ <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/statistics/>

I remember those emotionally traumatized by war
Who wake up day after day,
to relive a nightmare
Who can't erase the macabre visions that they witnessed
or that they perpetrated
Traumatic, post traumatic, re-traumatic, dramatic
broken people, breaking others,
broken trust, breaking bones and
breaking homes

I remember the veterans who come back home with
intact bodies but shattered souls
Stuck in a loop
they want to forget, but they remember and remember and remember
The lies that they were told.

I try to forget, my broken ones
But I remember

I remember "destruction on the grandest scale,
the earth cratered with hatred."⁴
I try to forget the planet's pain,
But I remember.

I remember God incarnate, Jesus,
suffering at the hands of violent men and violent systems
I remember the God of Peace, the Prince of Peace,
our Peace
Breaking down walls of hostility
I feel this pain

I will remember even if I don't know what to do
I will remember so that I won't forget

I turn to God with this remembrance lament.

⁴ Carol Penner *Peace Prayer for our Times*
<https://leadinginworship.com/2023/11/peace-prayer-for-times-like-these/>

[Sing Kyrie Eleison]

Part 2 – Remembering who we are

Sisters, brothers, friends I also remember who we are:

We are people of God's Peace

This our Season of Peacemaking

it is the proverbial string we tie around our finger

so that we won't forget.

It is a season where we kindle hope and remember who we are,

who we propose to be: We are children of God's Peace

"We who were formerly no people at all, and who knew of no peace, are now called to be...a church...of peace. True Christians do not know vengeance. They are the children of peace.

Their hearts overflow with peace. Their mouths speak peace, and they walk in the way of peace."

(to quote Menno Simons)

We are followers of this Jesus who in *his* sermon described the blessed vision for the kingdom of God

We have decided not to put off peace until "some heaven light years away"⁵

We believe peace is to be dared "here in this place",

We believe peace is to be imagined in our times

In God's name, by Jesus' example, in hope of this truth:

That these beatitudes are not just a pretty metaphor

We don't just pine away for peace,

we believe that with God's direction and protection

we can actually work for peace — like the button says

We take this job description seriously: This blessing and being blessed

We are the ones who value the poor in spirit, the humble, the meek

We are the ones who will comfort the mourning,

⁵ Voices Together #10 "Here in this Place" by Marty Haugen

and find comfort with each other and with God
We are the ones who seek nourishment and fulfillment by seeking justice,
We are the hands and feet of Christ⁶

We nurture and serve up mercy,
because God is love and has loved us first
We do not see the world with malice but with purity
We choose to be peacemakers, in the big things and in the little,
We cry out against injustice,
We choose not to be bullies –
not to put others down so that we can look good,
We choose to be friends – even to the ones who are different,
We choose not to use nor defend violence against others in any way
– even if we think they deserve it,
even on the roads
and in our comment threads,
even if we have to choose to do this everyday
over and over again.

We choose to stay and do the hard work of disagreement
to believe in reconciliation
We choose to see in the face of the other
another human being who also bears God's image

We know this is misunderstood and misinterpreted
by those who believe that we are naïve,
that war is necessary, ordinary
that questioning is unpatriotic, idiotic.
Yet we persist in seeking first the kingdom of God

Sisters, brothers, friends let us not forget who we are:
We are people of God's Peace.

[Kyrie Eleison]

⁶ Quoting Teresa of Avila

Part 3 – Remembering the stories we live by

Most people wish for Peace
Even beauty queens, with their tiara's and
sparkling dresses wish for [*sigh*] world peace

Even the Lennon's who imagine there's no countries
[*sung*] and no religions too (Oh, oh – o-o-oh)

Even some folks who earnestly engage in war – so they say.
They are invested in the idea that a show of mighty force will somehow
bring conflict to a speedy end –but it doesn't

I wanted to say that everyone wishes for peace, but
the choices of those who take the path of genocide
make me profoundly question that.

Most people wish for Peace
But the wish comes from within different stories

So let us remember the misshapen stories that might be shaping us:

The tale of entitlement goes something like this:
We have power
At the switch of a button, the swiping of a card,
the checkmark on a ballot
We can opt, consume, have
“Sometimes we possess things so long that do not really belong to us
that we come to think they are ours.”⁷
Like the land we live on....
Remember to question the tale of entitlement.

I remember the myth of redemptive violence:⁸
Coming to a theatre near you! Now available on streaming...
It says that good things only come through fighting,

⁷ Walter Bruggeman, “Voices of the Night – Against Justice”, in *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly: An agenda for ministers.*

⁸ Walter Wink, *Engaging the Powers: Discernment and Resistance in a World of Domination*

the only way to have victory over evil is with ‘guns, lots of guns’⁹
the prize goes to the strongest
peace through war, security through strength.”¹⁰

The easily identifiable “bad guy” must die a horrible death in the end
The illusion that that is actually the end.
Remember to beware of the myth of redemptive violence.

I remember the “either or story” that reduces reality to a simple binary:
A Billboard in Toronto once read:
“Should the military kill the bad people or help the good ones?”
Who, may I ask, presumes to know the difference?!

God does not see us and them, them and us,
–them, in our view always worse, stupider, more evil than us
Remember to avoid the deadly trap of the story of “us and them.”

The “we’re defending our rights” story
That puts guns in people hands,
And justifies overtaking land through bloodshed
The story that aims to silence dissent
It is a story of domination placing one above another
It gives itself permission to dehumanize, annihilate
and gaslight those who are appalled by its path of escalating destruction.
Remember to cry out against the false story of self-defense.

I remember the narrative that “killing is required by God”
Which lives even in our own theology
He says: “Killing is wrong, people have always claimed that God is
on their side as a way to justify their violence.”
She says: “What about Jesus’ death? Didn’t God require it?”

Remember there is another way of telling this story:
Jesus’ life so threatened the powers that be
that they resorted to their only strategy: extermination
Having God’s character of love,

⁹ Quoting from The Matrix

¹⁰ J. Denny Weaver, The Non-violent Atonement

Jesus absorbed the violence,
stopping the cycle by not seeking retribution,
by not seeking revenge
There will be no battles to watch here
“Forgive them, they don’t know what they’re doing”
God is mercy,

Don’t forget to scrutinize the stories that might be shaping us.

Most people wish for Peace
Christians don’t have a corner on that wish
We’ve simply decided to place our hope for peace into a different story

A peace story that is grounded in God who owns life and death,
that sprouts deep inside of us, by the work of the Spirit
that shows up in all our relationships
A peace story that lives *right now* by different values,
by different assumptions,
by a different plot.

The peace story pokes holes in the plotline of violence and re-reads reality
It wonders about privilege and how it was acquired
It listens to the people at the bottom and challenges those at the top

The peace story unmask the industrial military complex that fuels war
It wails and rants against false narratives that justify untold destruction
It asks: “We’ve tried violence for so long and it hasn’t worked,
isn’t it time we try something else?”¹¹
It wonders what could happen if non-violent people
were as willing to put their lives on the line for peace as others are for war.¹²

The peace story is not either-or,
it is a both-and, yes-but, see-it-from-a-different-angle,
question-your-assumptions, surprise-
ending, new-beginnings kind of story.

¹¹ Jewish peacemaker Marcel (Bob L.’s friend)

¹² Reference to a question by Ron Sider that gave origin to the Community Peacemaker Teams

Remember to live by that story.

This is the end of my piece about peace

We cannot forget that these are heartbreaking times.
Before rushing ahead under the influence
of the good ol' work, work, work ethic
That asks what we might *do* (and there are many things)
Let us take a pause

Let us remember to lament - for that is a prayer
Let us remember who we are - for that is a light in the world
Let us not forget the peace story we have chosen to be a part of – that is our
commitment and our hope.

Peace be with you.