

In this week after Christmas many of us could use a bit of a break. And that's even true of preachers. So on this Fifth Day of Christmas, I'd like to give to thee: a sermon that isn't by me.

This is a sermon by one of our twentieth-century saints and martyrs, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; his Christmas sermon from 1967. Hear these words from Dr. King.

Peace on Earth...

This Christmas season finds us a rather bewildered human race. We have neither peace within nor peace without. Our world is sick with war; everywhere we turn we see its ominous possibilities. And yet, my friends, the Christmas hope for peace and goodwill toward all can no longer be dismissed as a kind of pious dream. If we don't have goodwill toward all in this world, we will destroy ourselves by the misuse of our own instruments and our own power. ...

Now let me suggest first that if we are to have peace on earth, our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation; and this means we must develop a world perspective. No individual can live alone, and as long as we try, the more we are going to have war in this world. Yes, as nations and individuals, we are interdependent. ...

Did you ever stop to think that you can't leave for your job in the morning without being dependent on most of the world? [...] You go into the kitchen to drink your coffee for the morning, and that's poured into your cup by [someone from South America]. And maybe you want tea: that's poured into your cup by [someone from China]. Or maybe you're desirous of having cocoa for breakfast, and that's poured into your cup by [someone from West Africa]. And before you finish eating breakfast in the morning, you've depended on more than half of the world. This is the way our universe is structured, this is its interrelated quality. We aren't going to have peace on earth until we recognize this basic fact of the interrelated structure of all reality. [...]

Now let me say that the next thing we must be concerned about if we are to have peace on earth [. . .] is the nonviolent affirmation of the sacredness of all human life. Every [person] is somebody because [they are] a child of God. And so when we say "Thou shalt not kill," we're really saying that human life is too sacred to be taken on the battlefields of the world. [A human being] is more than a tiny vagary of whirling electrons or a wisp of smoke from a limitless smoldering. [A human being] is a child of God, made in God's image, and therefore must be respected as such. ...

There are three words for “love” in the Greek New Testament; one is the word *eros*. *Eros* is a sort of esthetic, romantic love. [. . .] *Philos* is a kind of intimate love between personal friends. This is the kind of love you have for those people that you get along with well, and those whom you like on this level you love because you are loved.

Then the Greek language has another word for love, and that is the word *agape*. *Agape* is more than romantic love, it is more than friendship. *Agape* is understanding, creative, redemptive good will toward all. *Agape* is an overflowing love which seeks nothing in return. Theologians would say that it is the love of God operating in the human heart. When you rise to love on this level, you love all [people] not because you like them, not because their ways appeal to you, but you love them because God loves them. This is what Jesus meant when he said, “Love your enemies.” And I’m happy that he didn’t say, “Like your enemies,” because there are some people that I find it pretty difficult to like. Liking is an affectionate emotion, and I can’t like anybody who would bomb my home. . . . I can’t like anybody who would trample over me with injustices. I can’t like them. I can’t like anybody who threatens to kill me day in and day out. But Jesus reminds us that love is greater than liking. Love is understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill toward all. [. . .]

I’ve seen too much hate to want to hate, myself, and I’ve seen hate on the faces of too many sheriffs, too many white citizens’ councilors, and too many Klansmen of the South to want to hate, myself; and every time I see it, I say to myself, hate is too great a burden to bear. Somehow we must be able to stand up before our most bitter opponents and say:

“We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We will meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will and we will still love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws and abide by the unjust system, because noncooperation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is cooperation with good, and so throw us in jail and we will still love you. Bomb our homes and threaten our children, and, as difficult as it is, we will still love you. ... But be assured that we’ll wear you down ... and one day we will win our freedom. We will not only win freedom for ourselves; we will so appeal to your heart and conscience that we will win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.” [. . .]

I still have a dream today that one day justice will roll down like water, and righteousness like a mighty stream. I still have a dream today that in all of our state houses and city halls [people] will be elected to go there who will do justly and love mercy and walk humbly with their God. I still have a dream today that one day war will come to an end, that [people] will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. I still have a dream today that one day the lamb and the lion will lie down together and [everyone] will sit under [their] own vine and fig tree and none shall be afraid. I still have a dream today that one day every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill will be made low, the rough places will be made smooth and the crooked places straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. I still have a dream that with this faith [. . .] we will be able to speed up the day when there will be peace on earth and goodwill [to all]. It will be a glorious day, the morning stars will sing together, and the [children] of God will shout for joy.