



Culture of Peace: Engage in the pursuit of peace; it won't pursue you

BY **THE REV. DAN FOWLER** June 16, 2018

When I was asked by David Wick and Irene Kai to write something regarding peace for the Tidings, initially I was honored. As the deadline approached to write something regarding practicing peace in my own life, however, I became aware that I am by no means an expert on peacefulness. I have read a number of the articles on this page, and there have been some very heart-felt and wise suggestions on finding peace in our lives. And last night, as I thought about what to write, I found myself tossing and turning, and saying to myself, "You need to demonstrate peacefulness now and stop worrying about what to write!" This led me to feeling more anxious about not being peaceful, which led me to more worrying. After about another hour or so, trying to breathe deeply, to pray, to quiet myself, I finally went back to sleep. So much for having an expert opinion on peacefulness.

The Psalmist writes, "Seek peace, and pursue it" (Psalm 34:14). This suggests that perhaps peace is a moving target, one which we must pursue. That is by no means easy, especially in this fast paced 24/7 culture in which we live. I wish it was the other way around — that peace would pursue me, but that has never been my experience. So how then are we to seek peace and pursue it? I have some practical suggestions that come to you from a person who claims to be nothing more than a seeker and pursuer of peace.

First, pursue peace within your own soul. I find that now, in this hyper political environment, with a president who continually sows strife in his speeches and tweets, if I have a choice of listening to classical music on my satellite radio, or turning on one of the news networks, the peaceful choice is to listen to Vivaldi or Mozart, rather than one of my favorite talking head pundits. And when I come home, I try to have 15-20 minutes sitting on my back porch, staring at the trees, the clouds, and Grizzly Peak before re-engaging with the world, plopping down in

front of the TV to stress out about the news of the day. Spend time in God's creation. I like to hike Bandersnatch trail with my wife and dog. I listen to my breath, to the songs of the birds in the trees and enjoy the beauty around me. And when I get to the top of one of the peaks at Bandersnatch, I pray. Finding time for prayer and quiet helps me pursue peace in a most profound way.

Second, pursue and spread peace in your community. When you get to an intersection at the same time as someone else, wave the other person through. Say hello to folks you walk by. Make eye contact with those who serve you your coffee, who ring you up at the register, or who pump your gas. Be helpful to tourists looking to find restaurants or OSF, or the water fountain at Lithia Park. When we value the humanity of others, when we connect with others, we promote peace and understanding, and we all tend to pass on what we experience from others.

Third, and by no means lastly, pursue and support opportunities for peace in the world, by working for justice. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr once said, "There can be no justice without peace and there can be no peace without justice." Without justice in our world, peace will be an elusive goal. And without peace, injustice is bound to continue. So, find a just cause you can support to help the world be more at peace. Help the homeless. Fight racism. Support the immigrant. Strengthen the environment. Do acts of justice, so that peace might be possible.

These are just the musings of one who is by no means an expert on peace and who seeks peace in his own life; a peace that is often elusive and difficult to find. May your pursuit of peace be successful in your life, whether they are but fleeting moments, or long lasting deep experiences. And may that peace spread from us throughout the world.

The Rev. Dan Fowler is the pastor of First Presbyterian Church. He was a music major at San Francisco State, specializing in vocal performance. He uses music in ministry and, in addition to singing, also plays piano and guitar. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission; follow twitter.com/AshlandPeace on Twitter. All are welcome to join the ACPC's Talking Circle at 11 a.m. each Tuesday and Community Meeting at 4 p.m. each Wednesday, both at the ACPC office, 33 First St., Suite 1, diagonally across Lithia Way from the Ashland Post Office.