



Are We Peaceful?

I was asked recently why I think peacemaking is important, especially right now. That we are living in a violent time; that we need to find a better way of dealing with conflict; that we need to think of others as well as of ourselves; all these things appear obvious to one who is steeped in the message of Jesus and seeking to live as his disciples; or does it? I am a student of history. When I was young, I was assigned as an art project, to create a piece representing what I liked. I made a book because of my love of reading, library work, and book repair. For my love of history, I included a medieval knight (world history) and a revolutionary war soldier (American History). Looking back, I wonder why I chose those history images and feel I should have used different ones since I have always tried to be a peacemaker.

One reason for the choice is the way history is taught. Much of school room history centers around war as does much of our national thinking, to the extent that we talk about everything in war terms from fighting drugs and cancer to sports. Americans occasionally try to isolate themselves from actual war when it is 'someone else's war (as a matter of self-preservation)', but usually, even then, Americans emphasize the need for military might to 'defend ourselves' against 'the enemy' said to be always present (though with an ever-changing identity). Such 'defensiveness' is touted as noble, even though the U.S. has been the aggressor far more often than the one attacked. (Just between 1948 (the end of WWII) & 1991 the U.S. 'intervened' militarily in other countries 46 times & between 1992 & 2017 there were 188 U.S. military interventions. "Interventions" are offensive not defensive.) Even when more of these military actions are failing despite unrivaled military might and the enormous costs to the nation and the people, the number of 'interventions' is increasing as is the glorification of war.

Most people are unaware of the full reality of our history of war and have not considered its impact on our thinking. During America's first century (1776-1876) the country was at peace for only 9 years. During our second century (1876-1976) there were only 8 years of peace, and since 1976, there have only been 4 years of peace. That means the U.S. has been at war 93% of the time. In fact, most of the military operations launched in the world since World War II have been launched by the U.S.

(The News International <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/595752-the-us-has-been-at-war-225-out-of-243-years-since-1776>. The Centre for Research on Globalization. Global Research. <https://www.globalresearch.ca/america-has-been-at-war-93-of-the-time-222-out-of-239-years-since-1776/5565946>. The Washington Post <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-fix/wp/2015/05/18/heres-how-much-of-your-life-the-united-states-has-been-at-war/>.)

This history means Americans actually have very little experience with peace! No one born after 2000 has ever lived in the country at peace. Is it no wonder non-violent ways of problem solving are not the first options most people think of? For me, this is disheartening and points to part of the reason peacemaking is such an up-hill climb and also an urgent need.

There is hope and a reason for continuing the work of peacemaking in these times. One example: In 2003 political scientists Erica Chenoweth (Harvard Univ.) and Maria J. Stephan (U.S. gov. & U.S. Institute for Peace) set out to prove the "strategic logic" and need for armed resistance to bring about change. Their findings surprised Erica, changed her thinking, and are encouraging others: Peaceful civil disobedience "is not only the moral choice, it is also the most powerful way of shaping world politics – by a long way." Nonviolent campaigns are twice as likely to achieve their goals as violent campaigns. There are many factors in getting there. If only 3.5% of the population is actively involved in a non-violent campaign, success is all but assured. (Their book: *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*. 2011. David Robson. "The '3.5% rule': How A Small Minority Can Change the World".) Peacemakers have known the power of peace all along. Chenoweth and Stephan's findings support that power. Peaceful action to solve problems or bring change is certainly not easy, but it is creative not destructive which makes it worth the effort.

This week, in your prayer time:

- Pray for those working peacefully for needed change. Pray for insight and courage to play a part in the effort. Pray that one day we will forget what living with war is like and know only living in peace.
- Remember those grieving COVID-19 losses & those put at risk of the virus by location, lack of protective measures, attitudes, or complacency.



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