Notes to Preaching Colleagues
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Our organization, the Coming Home Collaborative, has been wrestling with how to help veterans be at peace at home since 2005. We encourage our greater society to pay attention to the well being of veterans and their families at a deeper level. The 100th anniversary of the original Armistice/Veterans Day, Sunday, November 11, 2018, is one opportunity to do that in church. Along with a diverse set of veterans’ organizations, we encourage congregations to focus on the intent to end all wars, preventing the harm that lasts long after hostilities cease.

If such a focus is included, I recommend substituting a different passage for the Gospel reading assigned for the worship service.

Given our current election turmoil and violent atrocities, a focus on making peace might be the most pastoral choice. I encourage us to Imagine Armistice –imagine a world where we no longer harm each other. For text suggestions, see the end of these notes. My congregation will be reading: Micah 6:6-8, 1 Peter 3: 8-11, Psalm 23, and Mark 8:34-37 (What does it gain to dominate the whole world but lose your soul?) Another Gospel choice might be Luke 14:28-31 where Jesus urges us to count the cost of war.

Combining the Widow’s Mite text, which is assigned by the Common Lectionary, and concerns for veterans can too easily lead to confusion between “sacrifice” in the context of being in the military, and “sacrifice” in a religious context. Making that necessary distinction can take quite a bit of unpacking. (Please see more at the post “Cautions on Sacrifice and Suicide.”)

We might unwittingly reinforce barriers to healing by equating military and religious activities. For healing to occur, veterans must be able to tell their stories of what really happened, not censored by what they think people want to hear. In this time of increasing military suicides, for both active duty and other veterans, we need to be very clear that we do not want our veterans to die, or to “give their all”—either in the exercise of war, or by suicide after deployment. Our loved ones who go to war are not dispensable. Each life is precious.

At essence, the Widow’s Mite text encourages generosity and discourages hypocrisy, especially claims of exceptional righteousness. I don’t think that Jesus is speaking about military service. As many will be preaching on the Widow’s Mite scripture, I offer these thoughts regarding an Armistice/Veterans Day focus:

- Even as 11/11 is Armistice/Veterans Day, it is also a time of remembering our Reformation roots. It is the Feast Day of Martin of Tours (namesake of Martin Luther), who renounced the military and, eventually, became a bishop in the early Christian church. St. Martin is claimed by many as their patron saint, including conscientious objectors and some military branches.

- We are told that one of Luther’s triggers to move to reform his church was his seeing how low income people were tricked into giving beyond their means in order to purchase indulgences. Luther knew that God cannot be bought, and that the funds contributed likely would not be put to good purpose.

- Luther insisted that we remember who is God and not allow others to claim that
fealty. He believed in the ongoing necessity of reforming institutions and in the divine calling of speaking truth to power.

- We know that God cannot be bought by treasure or by blood, but that God's gifts of Grace are free—but not cheap! Indeed, remembering who is God—and who is not—helps us orient our thinking related to the suffering of our active military and veterans on this day. We lament that we have not implemented the vision of our ancestors, those who established Armistice Day as the end to the insanity of all wars. (They also achieved the first international pact declaring war a crime – the Kellogg-Briand Pact.)

- We lament that our military, our veterans, and their families—as well as the many others caught in the maelstrom of war—have suffered so much. Emblematic of that suffering is that more veterans die by suicide than by enemy action.

- We want to be very clear that there is nothing Christian about making war, whatever the religious background of those whose lives and homes are destroyed.

- We want to be very clear that God asks no blood sacrifice of our beautiful children for whatever end: “freedom,” “security,” “honor,” or “American interests.”

- Even as Luther recognized the distortion of what was asked of the poor in his time, we too are called to recognize the beauty of the lives of those who serve in the military, and the great losses when they are harm—as so many are. It is not God who is requiring them to suffer. They are not dispensable.

- Even as Jesus “shouted out” the action of the widow (considered useless in her society), so each of us continues to have beauty and purpose regardless of our disabilities or societal status. We each have contributions to make. Whether or not we hold our lives in esteem, God is never done with us.

- Of course, the English homonym of Mite and Might was not in the original Greek, but it could serve the Holy in our discernment: What is our true Might? Are we misusing our M-i-tes in pursuit of false Might? Your mite will not protect you. See the excerpt from our ELCA Social Statement For Peace in God’s World at the end of this post.

- An excerpt from my 2012 sermon:

  “Consider the scholarship of moral psychologist Richard Height. He traces how we evolved from tribes/clans to communities/nation. We learned to cooperate, placing value beyond selves, to something larger. There is a constant tug of war between instincts for survival—neurologists can identify that part of the brain—and the values of care in community. Other social scientists show how our natural sharing and compassion for each other get interrupted. One set of neural disturbance comes from involvement in violence. Another way our compassion gets interrupted is thinking about money.

  Our moral behavior research shows us that we are wired naturally to share and care for each other, but when the idea of money gets into the picture we stop
being unselfish. Violence, money and hoarding distract us from what is of true value.

That Widow in Jesus’s view, knew better. She was held in low esteem in her society because she had little “mite.” But Jesus attends to her, shouts her out, to those who trusted in “might,” because they had more. And I think the widow was making her own statement. The rules of her religion required her to give one mite to the Temple. Totally vulnerable within her web of the interdependent care of others, she boldly dared to give her only other mite as well. She was so comfortable in her ultimate vulnerability, but, also, aware of her supportive community that she could give away all the money that she had. I read her actions to say: “This mite is not what I need; this will not protect me.”

Within the last one hundred years of 1918, the treasure of our nation—our daughters and sons and our trillions of dollars—not just mites—have been sent abroad with the intent of making us safer at home. And our military members have suffered greatly

**Context of the Original Armistice Day**

WWI was horrific. Combat poets described their experiences as barbaric and futile. Military historians count it the beginning of industrialized slaughter; weapons of mass and indiscriminate destruction were used, including dropping bombs from the air. Public health experts blame it for the world’s largest pandemic of flu. “We’re never doing that again,” said the people, who were promised an end to all wars. Congress called for the world to pause at this time on this day, to remember the suffering and affirm the intent of world peace. By 1928, the peoples of the world had agitated their leaders to sign the Kellogg-Briand Pact, outlawing war. Implementing that international law is still a work in progress.

**Excerpt from For Peace in God’s World official ELCA Social Statement**

The Church is a disturbing presence when it refuses to be silent and instead speaks the truth in times when people shout out, “‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” (Jeremiah 6:14). The Church is this presence when it names and resists idols that lead to false security, injustice, and war, and calls for repentance. We therefore denounce beliefs and actions that:

- Elevate our nation or any nation or people to the role of God;
- Find ultimate security in weapons and warfare;
- Ordain the inherent right of one people, race, or civilization to rule over others;
- Promise a perfect, peaceful society through the efforts of a self-sufficient humanity; and
- Despair of any possibility for peace.
Alternate Texts, Highlighting Peace can be found in the liturgy at https://www.lutheranpeace.org/articles/peace-litany/

Also, here are some pasted in from LPF:

Jesus Way of Shalom: Peace… Justice… Welcoming Community… Wholeness…

And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God? Micah 6:8

I have called you and given you power to see that justice is done on earth. Isaiah 42:6

Love is patient and kind, love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude, self-seeking or easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. It protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres. 1 Cor. 13

Perfect love casts out fear…
1 John 4:18  all of Chapter 4

Leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother and sister, and then come and offer your gift. Matthew 5:24

Now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love. 1 Cor. 13:13

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed… Live in harmony with one another… Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good….

If your enemies are hungry, feed them. Romans 12

A few more thoughts…

The truly happy are those who have sought and found how to serve. Albert Schweitzer
The beginning of love for our brothers and sisters is learning to listen to them.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Fearful as reality is, it is less fearful than evasions of reality. **Caitlin Thomas**

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced. **James Baldwin**

Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has. **Margaret Mead**

The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don’t have any. **Alice Walker**

There remains an experience of incomparable value, to see the great events of world history from below; from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the reviled; in short, from the perspective of those who suffer... to look with new eyes on matters great and small. **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**, From *Letters and Papers from Prison*

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Seek peace, and pursue it!  
**Psalm 34:14** and **1 Peter 3:11**

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God who reconciled us to himself and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.  
**2 Cor. 5:18-19**

Blessed are the Peacemakers.  
**Matthew 5:9**