

Saturday "Sermon"

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The Path to Peace

I spent Labor Day visiting the "secret city" of Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where I saw a Japanese pagoda that houses a huge "Bell of Friendship." Designed at Oak Ridge, where the material for the first atomic bomb was made, and fabricated in Japan, where the bomb was detonated, the huge bronze bell was dedicated on August 6, 1995, the 50th anniversary of the destruction of Hiroshima.

The bell is about ten feet tall, and a long beam, like a battering ram, is suspended by chains so visitors may ring the bell. As I sounded that bell of forgiveness and reconciliation, I wondered about our situation in a post-9/11 world.

Jesus said, "*You have heard that the Law of Moses says, 'Love your neighbor' and hate your enemy. But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven*" (Matthew 5:43-45).

Loving someone as Jesus commanded doesn't have anything to do with feelings of warm regard—if we felt that way toward our enemies, they wouldn't be enemies, would they? Loving our enemies means that we do our best to give them what we think they need, not what we think they deserve—as God does for us.

Jesus didn't promise that such behavior would turn enemies into friends. Sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't, as His own crucifixion is stark witness. But Jesus did tell us that such self-giving is the only way to peace—if not for ourselves, then for those who come after us.

My trip to Malawi this summer reminded me that we Americans enjoy far more than our share of the material prosperity of the world; and so long as this is true, we're going to find ourselves involved in warfare that has a lot to do with making sure that the material inequalities currently stacked in our favor remain that way.

It seems to me that if you and I are genuinely interested in the safety and the welfare of our children and grandchildren, we won't keep all of our personal financial resources for ourselves—or for them—but will instead invest those resources aggressively in reducing these inequalities such that the world has more justice and less hunger, less hatred and more compassion.

The Bible says, "*Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good*" (Romans 12:21). You and I can become active participants in homeland security by giving generously to Christian organizations that meet the needs of those who are currently our enemies. That kind of giving will change the world.