

A meditation given on March 30, 2003, by Robert Kreider, Bluffton College Emeritus, from North Newton, Kansas at New Eden Fellowship, Schwenksville, PA.

This evening a sense of failure hovers over us. Despite letters, e-mails, letters to the editor, articles, vigils, marches, the authorities did not listen. They launched a war. Did we fail? It is heartening that we are joined with millions of others around the world who have declared for peace. Our cause is blessed. Our Lord said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."

For those devoted to peace, and for all peoples, these are troubling times. I have a deep foreboding that angry forces have been unleashed which can cause irreparable and lasting damage to all of society. The powers in Washington seem intoxicated with a vision of an American empire, clothed in self-righteousness, contemptuous of dissent, lacking in humility, entrapped in the methods of redemptive violence—so triumphalist. I see no evidence that leaders who talk of bringing democracy to Iraq have demonstrated in the recent past the wisdom, skill or the will to plant and nurture humane democracy in Kuwait, Afghanistan or Israel-Palestine. I shudder at the prospects of a growing American imperial mentality committed to missile diplomacy: next North Korea, then Iran, then, who next? We must continue to witness that "those who take the sword shall perish by the sword."

In this bleak landscape, there are yet windows of hope: The millions protesting war The desire of most nations to act in concert The little people begging for peace Evidence that many in power doubt the wisdom of all this redemptive violence Voices of church leaders united in urging diplomacy rather than war We can be grateful for our unique world-wide Mennonite base that can provide a perspective not narrowly American, but global-mission programs, Mennonite World Conference, Mennonite Central Committee, Christian Peacemaker Teams. . . "[nothing] in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

With our nation at war, let us find our mission of peacemaking in many little acts.

1. Let us not be caught up in the excitement of watching war as theater, entertainment, spectacle.
2. Let us use the third person in describing war—"US bombers" not "our bombers."
3. Let us tell it like it is—not using nice euphemisms: not "casualties" but "those killed" ... not "enemy" but "the Iraq people" ... not "collateral damage" but "civilians killed."
4. Let us be skeptical of the sweet rhetoric of war. Name the deceptions, the lies. Skepticism can be a higher form of patriotism.
5. Let us deny to the President the role as our national pastor, our national theologian. Let us be Jeremiahs and rebuke those who preach a prideful made-in-America gospel, a Jesus wrapped in the flag and silent in preaching the Beatitudes
6. Let us seek out those who suffer from the war: the homeless, orphans, prisoners, refugees, the abandoned, the tortured.
7. Let us commit ourselves to some simple spiritual disciplines. I have chosen three:
 - a. To pray for the enemy—even Saddam Hussein and bin Laden.
 - b. To read each day a passage from the Gospels starting with the 5th chapter of Matthew
 - c. To read each day a Psalm—each one deeply penitent and vibrant in hope.

Today: Psalm 21 with these words:

Some take pride in chariots and some in horses,
but our pride is in the name of the lord our God.

They will collapse and fall, but we shall rise and stand upright.

Robert Kreider