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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
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Mark 10:13-16; James 3:13-18  
“Harvest of Righteousness”

I cherry-picked the scripture readings today because they affirm a childlike joy of appreciating God’s realm of peace and justice and a strong affirmation of peace in general: “...the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.”

In this fall season, it is good to reflect on the harvest of righteousness, which is peace – and what makes for peace.

I could have chosen many other passages from scripture for today’s denominational theme of World Communion. It is the day on which we receive the “Peace & Global Witness Offering,” formerly called the “Peacemaking Offering.”

I promised the Mission Outreach Committee – Debbie Lundberg, Ani Lelea, Jan Salas, Nancy Rademacher and Suellen Barnett – that I would say something about the new name of the offering, “Peace & Global Witness.”

Half of the offering goes to global ministries of peace, which include supporting and promoting reconciliation through education and Christian witness by mission coworkers, and half to local and regional peacemaking and ministry programs. Locally, we invest in mission programs the congregation is passionate about.

An insert in your bulletin expands on this. Debbie will speak to that during the announcements.

I am very excited about what we do as a denomination for peace and global witness and I shall say something about that through a journey of advocacy I undertook this week.

It began with a letter to the editor by Robert Cromey of San Francisco last Monday. He writes, “In ‘Silence on the Pope’s pet issue’ (Sept. 25), the Chronicle beats up on Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone for not being aggressive enough on income inequality. We have heard precious little if anything from the local or statewide bishops of the Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal or Orthodox churches on this issue. The leaders of the Presbyterian, Baptists, Pentecostal and Mormon churches have hardly been vocal on income inequality.”

I was so upset with the blatant generalizations in this letter that I wanted to write a letter to the editor in response but I had other priorities on my plate like designing two worship bulletins and thinking through two sermons to be ahead of the game since I will be at a Presbyterian pastor's preaching retreat at Zephyr Point, Lake Tahoe, this week. I did not have time to write the letter.

The week went on. On Thursday, I read an email letter from our denomination, which encouraged us to write our congresspersons on the Syrian crisis. A link sent me to the Presbyterian Mission Agency page of The Office of Public Witness.

The page carried a model letter and spaces for personal information. I adapted the letter and provided my zip code and hit "Send message" and the agency forwarded the letter to my congresspersons, Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne Feinstein and my representative, Mark DeSaulnier.

I wrote, "As a person of faith, I am extremely concerned about the refugee crisis in Syria. Millions of men, women and children have nowhere to go. I respectfully urge you take the following steps to alleviate the current situation.

"Commit to resettling in the United States at least 100,000 of the most vulnerable Syrian refugees, allowing more individuals and families to start new lives in safety and freedom."

An aside, I was not sure whether the number 100,000 was too many or too few but I trusted our mission agency on this and I was impressed that they wanted our Congress to admit not only engineers and professionals but also "the most vulnerable Syrian refugees."

It reminded me of Emma Lazarus's words posted at the Statue of Liberty,

"...Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me..."

Our mission agency stands in the shoes of the best of US American values. My letter to my congresspersons continued,

"Increase the amount of humanitarian aid that we are providing in the region to ensure that refugees have access to food, shelter, medical care, and education while displaced from their homes, so they do not feel compelled to flee a second time.

“Continue to make the resolution of the Syria crisis a top foreign policy priority. Work for diplomatic, peaceful, non-military solutions.

“Sincerely, Cornel Barnett.”

I then explored the Office for Public Witness site, which I encourage you all to do, and found a list of many other issues, local and global, for letter writing to Congress and the media. The site offers to send letters on your behalf to news outlets of your choice.

They request your zip and in giving it to them, they provide a list of all the newspapers in your region. The Marin IJ, Berkeley Planet, Oakland Tribune, San Francisco Chronicle and all the Bay Area newspapers are there.

This inspired me to write the letter in response to Mr Cromey’s letter to the editor. I did so and with a click of the mouse, our mission agency sent the letter to the editor of the Chronicle. In the case of both letters, they sent me an email thank you and a confirmation that the letters were sent.

This is what I wrote to the editor of the Chronicle,

“The letter to the editor (Sept. 28) by Robert Cromey of San Francisco is an example of the kind of superficiality and shoddy information people have about the church. He castigates the Chronicle for beating up on Archbishop Salvatore Cordileone for not being aggressive enough on the Pope’s concern for income inequality. He goes on to castigate all churches. He writes, ‘We have heard precious little if anything from the local or statewide bishops of the Methodist, Lutheran, Episcopal or Orthodox churches on this issue. The leaders of the Presbyterian, Baptists, Pentecostal and Mormon churches have hardly been vocal on income inequality.’ I’m a Presbyterian and our denomination alone has written papers for study on the subject and has a page on the denominational website that provides model letters and will mail your form or adapted letters to newspapers and congresspersons on this and a host of other social justice issues. Many of our local churches are also engaged on the ground with meeting and feeding those who fall between the cracks. This is just one denomination. Other denominations are doing their part too. Please, Mr Cromey, do your homework before taking pot shots at the church.”

This was the fruit of my labor in the harvest of righteousness for peace in this week of Peace and & Global Witness. Please contribute yourself by responding to the offering today. Read if you can the latest edition of “Presbyterian Today” which deals with “Our Hurting World” covering articles on the war in Syria, police brutality, violence against women, disease, poverty, education gap, child soldiers, climate change, school shootings, bullying, ISIS attacks, genocide, payday loans, land grab and spiritual thirst. You may also want to order for next year the 2016 Presbyterian Mission Yearbook for Prayer and Study, which covers per day every presbytery in the US, and every country

where we are involved. Our reach for compassion, education and care is amazing. Finally, you can visit the PCUSA website and the Presbyterian Mission Agency page. There you will find many other mission emphases as well as a host of ways to get involved. Amen.