

August 30, 2026

Paul Purdue preaching

Maybe like me, you spent the week crying to Dolly tunes? In 1996 Dolly Parton covered Yusuf/Cat Stevens "Peace Train" for her album Treasures. Dolly heard the South African band Ladysmith Black Mambazo's tight zulu harmonies and flying vocalizations in a Lifesavers commercial and reached out to collaborate with them. Dolly said "Peace Train" reflected "*my feelings about the world and the importance of peace and harmony.*" (*Rollingstone dolly-parton-ladysmith-black-mambazo-cover-peace-train*)

*Oh, I've been smiling lately  
Dreaming about the world as one  
And I believe it could be  
Someday it's going to come*

*'Cause out on the edge of darkness  
There rides a peace train  
Peace train take this country  
Come take me home again*

*Peace train sounding louder  
Ride on the peace train  
peace train holy roller  
Everyone jump on the peace train*

*Get your bags together  
Go bring all your friends,  
Come and join the living  
It's not so far from you  
And it's getting nearer  
Soon it will all be true*

*Now I've been crying lately  
Thinking about the world as it is  
Why must we go on hating  
Why can't we live in bliss  
Why can't we love one other?  
Why can't we ride on the peace train?  
Why can't we be like sister and brother?  
Why can't we ride on the peace train?*

*Hallelujah hallelujah  
Ride on the peace stream*

Do we dare do any holy daydreaming? Could we prayerfully imagine what peace might look like? Jesus woos us towards peace, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*” (Matthew 5:9) Do we dream of how we might pass the peace of Christ with each other, our neighbors, strangers, and even our political opponents? What does it mean to ride on the peace train?

During the Vietnam conflict, the Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh made a hard observation, “*In the peace movement there is a lot of anger, frustration, and misunderstanding. People in the peace movement can write very good protest letters, but they are not so skilled at writing love letters. We need to learn to write letters to the Congress and the President that they will want to read.*”

*The way we speak, the kind of understanding the kind of language we use should not turn people off. ... Can the peace movement talk in loving speech, showing the way for peace?*

*Without being peace, we cannot do anything for peace. If we cannot smile, we cannot help other people smile. If we are not peaceful, then we cannot contribute to peace. Peace work means, first of all, being peace. ” (Peace Is Every Step)*

“*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.*” Today, our news apps, politicians, and social media amplify outrage, division, and tribalism. I fear we have lost our prayerful longing for peace. We may have traded the longing for peace for a desire to defeat our opponents. These are not the same things. Why would you listen to me if I am cursing you or calling you names? Can we hear Jesus whispering another way “*Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called the children of God.*”

In The Case Against Tokenism, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King reminds us. “*The means (we use) represents the ideal in the making- the end in process. So in the long run, destructive ends can not bring about constructive ends, because the ends are preexistent in the means.*” If we use hate to motivate or inspire, King warns “*it always distorts the personality and scars the soul.*” If I am hating you, I add hate to the world. If I curse you, I add curses to the world. Harmful tools will not create beauty, goodness, or harmony.

Kat Armas, our retreat speaker puts it like this: “*True courage lays down the armor and stands exposed...(and) (p)erhaps this is the truest resistance to empire, the one we*

*must first cultivate within ourselves—to choose vulnerability over violence, peace over power, love over fear. When we begin to strip away our defenses, to dismantle the internal forces that demand control and domination, we make space for the peace of Christ.”* (Liturgies for Resisting Empire: Seeking Community, Belonging, and Peace in a Dehumanizing World)

The Apostle Paul often pulled together little “to-do” lists to stick on your refrigerators. Romans 12 includes 31 actions, one for every day of the month. At least 24 of these actions promote peace.

1. Love genuinely;
2. hold onto what is good;
3. love one another with mutual affection;
4. Rejoice in hope;
5. Be patient in affliction;
6. Persevere in prayer.
7. Contribute;
8. Pursue hospitality to strangers.
9. Bless those who persecute you;
10. Bless and do not curse them.
11. Rejoice with those who rejoice;
12. Weep with those who weep.
13. Live in harmony with one another;
14. do not be arrogant,
15. Associate with those with no-status;
16. Do not think you are so smart.
17. Do not repay anyone evil for evil,
18. take thought for what is noble in the sight of everyone.
19. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all people. (That is a lot of qualifiers)
20. Beloved, never avenge yourselves,
21. Instead, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them;
22. if they are thirsty, give them something to drink,
23. Do not be overcome by evil,
24. but overcome evil with good.

In the middle of this solid peace giving advice, Paul ignores or obscures Jesus’ most challenging commandment “*to love enemies*”. Perhaps worse than forgetting Jesus’ teaching Paul tells us to hold on to the hope that God will settle our scores for us.

*“Leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.”* What happens to our souls when we hold onto a little wrath hoping God will one day repay our enemies? How can I genuinely love you while harboring a little wrath and hoping for some holy payback?

I am sympathetic to Paul, he is a pioneer of full inclusion and as been through a lot: publicly whipped 5 times, beaten with rods 3 times, once stoned and left for dead, *often hungry, thirsty, cold and naked and “under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches”* ( 2 Corinthians 11) However, when make space for vengeance, is it not harder to live in peace? How can I truly love you if we want you to suffer?

Jesus offers another way, a way of peace

*“But I say to you who are listening: Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you.... Do to others as you would have them do to you. “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? Almost everyone does that. Instead, love your enemies, do good, and give, expecting nothing in return. Your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for God is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. Be merciful, just as your Heavenly Father is merciful.”*

*“Blessed are the peacemakers, they will be called children of God.”* In a world filled with vulgarity, violence, judgement, untruths and slander it is easy to lose sight of peace. We forget to strive for peace, to do a little holy day dreaming about how to make peace, to sing peace songs, and to pass the peace of Christ to the whole world. Instead of making room for wrath, let us remember *God is merciful- God is merciful to the ungrateful. God is merciful to the wicked. Be merciful, because mercy is holy, healing and directs us to the path of peace.*

*Let us become those “blessed are the peacemakers, the merciful ones, who others call come to call the children of God”* Children of God, *God, who is kind to the ungrateful, God who is kind to the wicked.* Oh that we might sing, pray and dream of Peace.... And live a life of peace.

*Oh, Get your bags together  
Go bring all your friends,  
Come and join the living  
It's not so far from you  
One day it will be true. Amen*