

Hiroshima Day reflection, Coventry Cathedral, 6 August 2019

Jesus said: “Let me give you a new command: Love one another. In the same way I loved you, you love one another. This is how everyone will recognize that you are my disciples—when they see the love you have for each other.” [John 13:34-35]

To me this is all very simple. This is all about love. The love of God, and the love of one another. That warmth of human relationships, the gentleness of touch, the trust which can grow between people who love one another through thick and thin. I don't know what you think about when you hear the word love, but the cold, hard, grey reality of nuclear weapons is about as far from it as you can get. How can we love someone, and yet have such an instrument of death, primed and ready for launch, pointed towards them at the same time? How is it that we fail so utterly to follow Jesus' command? In the same way I loved you, you love one another. Two thousand years on, this should no longer be a *new* command.

How do you take that simple instruction – to love one another – and apply it to nations? In the same way as we make marriage vows to one another to formalise the love between individuals, so nations can make promises to one another in the form of treaties. In 1987 it was the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces Treaty in which the then Soviet Union and the United States made promises to one another which reduced the then immediate threat of a nuclear war. The treaty that collapsed last Friday after 32 years, just in time to serve as a reminder of what's needed this Hiroshima Day. Promises and trust are slow to build and sadly so easy to destroy. So it is with treaties; they can be many years in negotiation, and yet can collapse in the time it takes to sound a four-minute warning.

I grew up in the time of that treaty. As a child I speculated about what I would do if the four-minute warning sounded. I read *When the Wind Blows* and lay awake wondering if its story of slow death from nuclear fallout could happen to me. Since the events in Hiroshima 74 years ago today, and in Nagasaki 74 years ago on Friday we know everything we need to know about the destruction nuclear weapons wreak – on the places they fall, on the people they fall on, on the generations which follow. But perhaps the unseen damage is in our hearts; in our ability to trust each other across the nations; in the confidence we have in our leaders and the often misplaced trust we have in those who position themselves as the biggest, the strongest, the greatest, the one with the biggest arsenal.

Because we know that the work of love is not done like that. That's not love, it's domination. If we love one another we have to talk, to listen, to be sensitive, to keep one another safe and secure. At national and international level we have to form movements, to bring pressure to bear, to empathise with others' situation, to negotiate, to send our diplomats in with open hearts and messages of peace, to work on treaties and conventions together which bring about the peace we envision.

In 1955, British Quakers' national body spoke out against nuclear arms, saying: “We in Great Britain have decided to make hydrogen bombs. If a major war breaks out the temptation to use them will be very great. We are warned by our scientists that their use will involve not only the most terrible suffering now, but unknown consequences for succeeding generations who will pay the penalty for our sin. We

believe that no one has the right to use these weapons in his defence or to ask another person to use them on his behalf. To rely on the possession of nuclear weapons as a deterrent is faithless; to use them is a sin." [London Yearly Meeting, 1955]

Our planet faces a twin emergency. The crisis of climate change, and the crisis of nuclear arms. Both could destroy us all and render our planet uninhabitable – one through slow poison and the other a blinding flash. Both emergencies can only be resolved by people working together across our globe, reaching out our hands to one another in warm embrace. There is no room for a nuclear weapon in an embrace.

We can do this. We are humans, built with the capacity to love, to meet one another in the middle, to make friends, to trust one another, and to make promises we keep for ever. Jesus was right: this is, in the end, all about love.

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