

**Good Friday Worship and Witness
Livermore Nuclear Weapons Lab
Organized by
Ecumenical Peace Institute (www.epicalc.org)
and Livermore Conversion Project
with support from
TriValleyCAREs and Western States Legal Foundation**

“Swords into Ploughshares”

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Introduction and Thanks

I want to thank Carolyn Scarr and the Ecumenical Peace Institute for inviting me to share today’s message for this annual Good Friday worship. Thanks also to Marylia Kelley for her update on the activity at the Lawrence Livermore Labs and to Jackie Cabasso for her report on the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons – and for their respective organizations for the ongoing work of monitoring, education, and advocacy towards nuclear disarmament.

Anti-Asian Violence and China Policy

As I greet you this morning, I also want to bring into this space the presence of both sets of my grandparents, and mother. The photo in my virtual background is taken at the cemetery where they are all buried. Their presence is especially important to me in these challenging times as we have witnessed the rise of anti-asian racism during the pandemic. Both sets of my grandparents were immigrants at the turn of the century and both lived through harsh anti-asian sentiment in the early 1900’s leading up to the anti-asian exclusion act in 1924. Both sets of grandparents also lived through the mass incarceration in WWII where they lost their homes and businesses. My mother’s family lost their farm in Fresno as they were sent to Jerome, Arkansas. My father’s family lost their restaurant and home in West Oakland as they were sent to Topaz, Utah. In 1988 Congress apologized to Japanese Americans for the losses of civil liberties through the Civil Liberties Act of 1988. Their report cited three factors leading to the mass incarceration as 1) pre-existing racism 2) lack of political leadership 3)

war time hysteria. We have seen this toxic triangle present in recent waves of military incursions and engagement impacting Syrian, Yemeni, Iraqi, and Afghan communities here and abroad. And we see these factors present today in the ways our foreign policy has influenced anti-asian violence here in the U.S.

Pivot to Peace <https://peacepivot.org/> is an organization that has emerged during the pandemic specifically addressing the cause and effect of current anti-asian sentiment arising out U.S. demonization of China as our enemy – a foreign policy strategy that has evolved since the pivot to Asia in 2011. In polls, nearly half of Americans believe that China is the greatest threat to U.S. security. <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/poll-majority-americans-believe-china-greatest-enemy-us-180394> It is no wonder that racial animus already present among a significant portion of our population has been stirred up by statements from the Trump administration scapegoating China for the pandemic. But Pivot to Peace also reminds us that the demonization of China as a foreign policy threat preceded the last administration and even continues in the current Presidency of Joe Biden. Depicted as a perceived enemy to be feared, China provides justification for continued funding of nuclear weapons and a readiness and preparedness for deterrence, rather than diplomatic gestures. Anti-asian violence today is part of the collateral damage of our foreign policy rhetoric targeting China as the enemy of the day. Many would argue that anti-asian racism was also at play in the dropping of the only nuclear bombs ever to be unleashed upon humanity against the civilian populations in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945. <https://thebulletin.org/2020/08/memorial-days/> It is to the victims of these bombings that I now to turn to.

The Experience of the Hibakusha

My mother in law, Michiko Tatsuguchi, was just a teenager living in Hiroshima when the bomb was dropped in 1945. She and her whole family somehow miraculously survived that tragic event and she ended up living a relatively long life into her 60's, compared to many who died soon after the bombing or others in ensuing years as a result of radiation exposure. She did succumb to cancer, as was the case for many survivors. She rarely talked about her experience, except to describe the obvious horrors of witnessing a living hell seeing dismembered persons wandering the streets, as well as a graveyard of dead bodies and ashes scattered all over the city. As a survivor, she was what we call "hibakusha." The word literally means "a person who receives a bomb," but

in the case of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it has come to mean those who survived the nuclear holocaust.

While my mother in law rarely spoke about what she experienced, others have documented their experiences with the support of academic researchers on the subject. Naomi Shohno, in her 1986 publication, "The Legacy of Hiroshima: Its Past, Our Future" captured a number of stories of "hibakusha." Eiko Matsunaga was an elementary school girl in Hiroshima and related this memory:

"Mommy, where are you?" Crying for my mother, I tried to get close to where her voice was coming from. She was lying under a fallen roof, and she was knocking from the inside of something like a sheet of zinc, but her voice was growing thinner and weaker. I was too weak to lift the big broken pieces of wall, pillars, and glass windows. I sobbed, 'Mommy, I can't let you out, because there are a lot of broken pieces...' Then my mother's voice faded. Yet I didn't feel especially sad or think about trying to free her. I was simply stunned, and just stood still, looking into the roof. The knocking sound stopped, too. 'Eiko-chan,' said my brother. He had a deep wound in his belly which was about ten centimeters long and looked like an appendectomy incision. Whenever he moved, blood oozed out of the wound, and his bowels were hanging out. All I could think was that he seemed to be a different person, someone I didn't know. My older sister sat down, saying she felt ill. My father had just crept out of a rubble heap. It seemed he was about to suggest that we help my mother get out, but my brother cried, 'Come now. We must run away, or all of us will be burned to death. Be quick!' I looked around. The fire came upon us in a big wave."

Needless to say, stories abound from those who witnessed the deaths and disappearances of family members and their painful experiences have lingered for a life time for most survivors who were able to extend their lives.

Last year, in August 2020 my family and I had the opportunity to participate in the 75th Anniversary of Hiroshima and Nagasaki with the Japanese American community here in the San Francisco Bay Area. The event was led by the Friends of Hibakusha and the Nichi Bei Foundation along with the support of the Japanese American Religious Federation. The event centered around the testimonies of hibakusha who had migrated to the U.S. from Japan and now resided in the Bay Area.

Friends of Hibakusha

The Friends of Hibakusha was founded in 1981, just around the period this Good Friday service and witness was initiated at the Livermore Labs. Friends of Hibakusha was created to provide support to those survivors of the bombings who were living in the U.S. The intent was to help with the physical, psychological, and spiritual scars experienced as a result of the bombings, especially given the lack of any U.S. support for them. Like my mother in law, it was difficult for many hibakusha to tell their stories for years because of the trauma that continued to linger, but over time some began to recall memories and share their stories publicly. Creating public spaces for the survivors to tell their stories became part of the work of Friends of Hibakusha. As the only living witnesses to the horrors of nuclear devastation, they became a haunting, but clearly unified voice calling for a nuclear free world where no one will ever experience such travesty ever again. Their refrain reverberates the cry: “No more Hiroshimas. No more Nagasakis.”

As you can imagine, with the passing of time, most hibakusha have also now passed away. But the hope is that the legacy of this generation of survivors will continue to live on in our world, and perhaps even hover amongst us as ancestral spirits blowing with the wind of the Spirit to inform our collective consciousness and decision making on the planet.

I ask us to take a moment of silence to remember them, their stories--- as well as the thousands who died instantly as a result of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. (silence)

Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

At our 75th Anniversary Commemoration, we also shared a call for the ratification of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. When the treaty was officially ratified later in the year and became official in 2021, you can imagine that for the hibakusha, this was a significant step forward in the long journey towards hope for a nuclear free world.

There are many reactions to the fact that all 9 of the states possessing nuclear weapons have not signed on to the treaty, and, in fact, the U.S. has intentionally lobbied against it ----but from the standpoint of faith, perhaps it is significant that the treaty has been **initiated, signed, and ratified by non-nuclear states**. For those of us of the Christian faith, we know that Jesus came to

empower the marginalized and the powerless.....and to challenge those who wield the power of weapons and of empire. It is only fitting that it is those nations who have no nuclear weapons ---are the ones to call on those wielding the power and threat of weapons – to put the weapons away, so that we can live in peace in this world. As we invoke the words of Isaiah, we know that Jesus came with a message to help us turn our swords of violence and destruction into ploughshares for the cultivation and planting of new life on the earth. For us to build beloved community among the human family.

What are the stories that we might hear from these non-nuclear states about their living conditions and vision for the future, which clearly does not include nuclear weapons?

Among the supporters of treaty, Palestine was one of the first to ratify it, ironically, as a people living under the oppression of a brutal military occupation. Living without freedom of their own, theirs was a voice from the margins sharing these powerful words to the negotiating conference that discussed the new treaty:

“But doomsday is not inevitable and the power of collective will should never be underestimated.” <https://www.icanw.org/palestine>

These words of hope come from a people whom we might not blame if they were feeling hopeless in the face of years of unresolved oppression.

As we commemorate the death of Jesus on the cross on Good Friday, we do so honoring the sacredness of his suffering, scourging, and persecution at the hands of an empire wielding the power of the sword. But we know that the story did not end on Good Friday, as we affirm the presence of a divine love that transforms tragedy into hope, suffering into new life, and swords into ploughshares for the creation of a new day and a new way. Can we anchor ourselves in this spiritual truth along with the spiritual power of other living faith traditions so that we might garner the strength of a collective will that speaks for the common people of the world...a collective will that should never be underestimated.

Engagement of Faith Communities

As a United Methodist pastor, it has been heartening to know that our General Board of Church and Society <https://www.umcjustice.org/what-we-care->

[about/peace-with-justice/nonproliferation](#) has been one among over 300 participating organizations involved with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, playing their part in the development of the new treaty. But we also know that participation from a national church agency does not guarantee the engagement of the entire body, and especially at the grass roots level of congregational life.

The Rev. Nobu Hanaoka, one of the remaining living hibakusha, and one of the founders of the Friends of Hibakusha, was only an infant when the bomb fell in Nagasaki upon his family. He is well known to this annual Good Friday service – as he continues to carry the banner for the abolition of nuclear weapons – born out of the faith, hope, and love that he embodies as a disciple of Jesus. He is bringing forth a resolution to our California Nevada Annual Conference to contact President Biden and the State Department to express our collective support for the treaty, and to call upon all of our congregations to read and study the contents of the treaty. Although he carries no memories as an infant living through the bombing, he does carry a living consciousness in his being that rises up from the ashes of destruction in calling for the conversion of swords into ploughshares. The resolution is intended to engage the highest levels of our U.S. government for accountability, but at the same time engage our churches at the grass roots level, where collective consciousness and collective will must be cultivated for change to be actualized.

Local, regional, and national grass roots action has also been urged on by Marylia Kelly of TriValleyCAREs in her report on the activities at the Livermore Labs. We are urged to take action in support of legislation that would literally convert swords into ploughshares through legislation introduced by Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) and Representative Ro Khanna (D-CA-Silicon Valley). Their bill proposes to defund the Pentagon's development of a new Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) and Livermore Lab's development of a new warhead that would sit atop the missile. The Bill is called the "Investing in Cures Before Missiles (ICBM) Act." It would fund the development of a universal corona virus vaccine to save lives before investing in a new and lethal ICBM, called the Ground-Based Strategic Deterrent (GBSD) missile. Further, the bill would redirect funds from Livermore's W87-1 warhead to the Centers for Diseases Control and Prevention to research and combat emerging infectious diseases. The bill would also prevent any new funding for the GBSD missile or W87-1 warhead in the upcoming fiscal

year 2022 federal budget. The bill number in the Senate is S.982. In the House it is H.R.2227. We are urged to contact our representatives to co-sponsor the bill.

Finally, we are reminded by Jackie Cabasso of the Western States Legal Foundation-- in her call to action ---that our work is intersectional, and that groups like the Poor People's Campaign <https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/resource/policy-and-legislative-priorities/>are carrying out the legacy of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he named the triple evils of militarism, racism, and materialism in the year leading up to his death. In the context of the Vietnam War, King made the explicit connection between spending for war and those sent to fight our wars, while conditions here in this country continued to languish for needed support to truly convert swords into ploughshares. King was speaking about intersectionality before it became a more commonly used phrase for solidarity building among and between justice movements. Our intersectionality explicitly stands on the principles of the indivisibility of justice.

In two days we will commemorate the death of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and it is fitting that we close with one of his often repeated quotes:

“We must all learn to live together as siblings (brothers) or we will all perish together as fools. We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.”

May the solidarity of our mutuality be on the increase day by day as we seek to convert swords into plowshares for the renewal of the earth. Amen.