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Armistice Day, November 11, 1951
The Congregational Church of Norwich, Vermont

ORGAN PRELUDE

INVOCATION

DOXOLOGY

SURSUM CORDA

HYMN OF PRAISE

PSALM 90 - responsively read

SCRIPTURE READING Zacharia 1:8-16, 2:10-13
 I Corinthians 12 and 14:1

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ORGAN PRELUDE

INVOCATION We, no more than our fathers, can be content to spend all our time in the field, in the street, or even by the hearth of home.

The generations may perish. But between the spirit of man and the spirit of God, the exchange is eternal, an asking from the multitudes below, a benediction from above by the Only One, One in three persons, Sacred Trinity.

Therefore, we reclaim on this Armistice Day the privilege bestowed on us, dumb creatures, the privilege to invoke thy power as our creator, thy light as our revealer, thy love as our redeemer. For all power, light and love which we mortals crave, flows from thy tri-une Majesty. Teach us to invoke them upon us.

Thou who hast formed the unending number of celestial bodies, also hast given the tiny number of two or three congregated in thy name the power of forming thy divine body. Thou who hast scattered the tongues of warring nations in a bedlam of strife, also hast miraculously ordained that in every native tongue thy true name can be proclaimed in pure peace.

As thy congregation we now pray in the tongue instructed by thy Firstborn, Jesus, thy only begotten son, his, our Lord's Prayer:

Our Father who art in heaven

Hallowed be thy name

Thy kingdom come

Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Our daily bread give us today

And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors

And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,
forever. Amen.

DOXOLOGY

SURSUM CORDA

HYMN OF PRAISE: Armistice Hymn

Hear, hear, O ye nations, and hearing obey
the cry from the past and the call of today.
Earth wearies and wastes with her fresh life outpoured,
the prey of the cannon, the spoil of the sword.

Now dawns the new era, transcending the old,
the poet's rapt vision by prophet foretold:
From War's grim tradition it maketh appeal
to service of all in a world's commonweal.

Then, then, shall the empire of right over wrong
be shield to the weak and a curb to the strong.
Then justice prevail and the battle flag furled,
The High Court of Nations give law to the world.

PSALM 90 - responsively read

SCRIPTURE READING: Zacharia 1:8-16 and 2:10-13
I Corinthians 12 and 14:1

PASTORAL PRAYER

We are thy people and thou art our God.
We are thy children and thou art our father.
We are thy work and thou art our maker.
We are thy vineyard and thou art our planter.
We shall be thy congregation if thou art the head,
We shall be full of faith if thou art loved.
We shall be well governed if we make thee king.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP (Page 2)

How feeble is a truce between nations, how frail the bonds between citizens and their governments, how perilous are the contracts in business, how frivolously is often even the marriage vow taken, how empty are the loud words stating high sounding intentions in politics, how deadly the gossip in a relaxed group.

On all our earthly words and vows and oaths and contracts and speeches may fall light from our vow to thee, from our promise of our creed, from our songs here in church, from our prayers to thee, from the incarnated word speaking from the cross to the blind and the deaf and the mute. O teach us the fullness of true conviction, of true commitment, of creative obedience, that can overcome the din of the world and our loneliness in it.

Let the power of the divine service illuminate our daily practices, and while the separation of Church and State separates the visible organs of both, let us never separate them in our hearts, as little as we separate our father from our mother, let us not keep separated our Sunday piety from our workday toughness, our christian truth from our earthly prejudices.

Does the salt not salt? Is the church in a dead end street? Are we hopelessly desintegrating? With our hands we are busily toiling over the matter at hand. With our minds we are curiously asking every silly question we chose. With our souls we are easy joiners and easy leavers, and we are proud when we are called dynamic or flexible just because we are non-committal and on the run.

Men are curious like apes, unsteady as hummingbirds, toiling like ants, Transform this curiosity, this faithlessness, this toil!

No, there is not just "the matter at hand" to be exploited when we work. It is our daily bread and that is to say: thy own body, thy own life, divine! - and we are accountable for this land, these trees and fields, this river. These men in industry, lest any of them be merely exploited, they must flow for ever as your creation.

No, it is not a matter of curiosity to ask a fool's ten thousand questions instead of the one and only one: the question of thy will.

No, it is not a question of flexibility or dynamism to recognize our neighbor in the man who is fallen among the thieves and to stick to him for good.

Ennoble our curiosity into a sense of the miraculous. Let us be astounded over thy ways with us, unexpected as they are. In these years of wars and armistices, thou hast saved our government and ourselves from our own blindness, many a times most undeservedly.

Ennoble our rush so that we may find the next neighbor offered to us in his hour of need as a new companion and our alleged enemy as our indispensable spur.

Ennoble our toil so that we may become living organs of a living creation.

Give us clean hands, cool heads, warm hearts, so that we may move in thy spirit whether our mind or our hands are engaged.

In thy Son's cross let us recognize the royal way for ever.

Be we shaken free from naive pride in our self-made plans. For our plans usually cause the depth of thy suffering. Only when thy suffering touches our heart so that we renounce our will, does thy life return. Then and only then may we hope to partake in the exaltation of the victory.

THE ORDER OF WORSHIP (Page 3)

THE OFFERTORY

Your offerings will now be received.

Cast thy bread upon the waters for thou shalt find it after many days. We have said that we offer God our will and that our own will shall be turned into the fire of our love to God. To this burnt offering now let us add some offering from his good gifts to us.

We have become a nation great, mighty, and populous. God has brought us into this place and has given us this land, even a country that floweth with milk and honey.

Therefore let us bring some of his gifts before him, let us rejoice in every good gift that God has given us. And let our rejoicing overflow because we are able to give to him of the good things which we have received.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON

May the meditation of my heart turn out to be a meditation of this congregation.

May the words of my mouth come before thee as humble service. May our meditation and our words be acceptable to thee, their fountain and their destination.

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The Sermon

Our text really is the whole reading from Scripture but especially those verses from Zachariah 1 and 2: BEHOLD, ALL THE EARTH SITTETH STILL AND IS AT REST and AND THE LORD OF HOSTS ANSWERED THE ANGEL THAT COMMUNICATED WITH ME, SAYING: I AM VERY DISPLEASED WITH THE NATIONS AT EASE and AND THE LORD SHALL YET CHOOSE JERUSALEM.

This is a text on a situation of apparent rest on our planet, rest but without peace. I have chosen it as our text for the most obvious reason. Today is Armistice Day. As the Church of Christ in Norwich, we are a tiny group indeed. Yet the eyes and ears and hearts of faith do not depend on multitudes. The Bible opens our understanding to the biggest events in History. It reveals God's plan with man, and his wondrous ways. Armistice Day, then, is a day of testing our faith in the God of history. For, we are put to the test: Do we dare to put on the glasses of faith? You may protest: Armistice Day as a day which tests our faith? Is this not a crazy idea?

The day was instituted in 1918. A day of simple rejoicing, a day of victory and of triumph. The masses never thought of any such thing as a test of their faith on Armistice Day. It was the universal assumption that it was a day of making merry and giving thanks as the shooting was ended.

This assumption has a curious ring today. We have stored up two more armistices: one at the end of the main war in 1945 (I am lumping together the German and the Japanese unconditional surrender) and another one debated and haggled over in Korea.

The unbelieving eye sees three wars and therefore three armistices. I have heard people speak of the Korean incident as another war. And it has given me a pang. He who calls the shooting in Korea another war has no eyes of faith. He does not see that there never has been peace since 1945. The eyes of faith look back to 1918 when General Foch quietly called it an Armistice for twenty years.

To the eyes of faith, all these armistices are one because faith knows something of peace. Therefore it can distinguish three things: war, armistice, peace. In an armistice there is as little peace as the South received for forty years after Lee's surrender. Peace in the Southern States of the Confederacy seems to be breaking out during the last ten years. Before, the Civil War had ended in an armistice.

During the armistices, the unity of true peace is in God alone. For this reason, our text calls him the God of Hosts. As such he is still waiting that the promises of our many armistices may be realized in one new city of peace, to be lived patiently and obediently by at least three more generations.

Let this then be the order of our meditation: the armistices (three in number and seven in fact); God as the Lord of Hosts, intervening in a cleft world; and The true City of Peace, not as a written instrument but as a slow process of the next hundred years.

Our text has precisely this sequence. First, the nations of the world are at rest. Second, the Lord Zebaoth, the Lord of Hosts, is displeased. Third, the real Jerusalem, in which all are members and no schism of the body is allowed, is promised.

Our hymns of today emphasize the same three phases. The first hymn echoes the naive elation by the armistice of 1918. The second depicts our blindness in singing the first. All courts of justice, even the very World Court triumphantly hailed in the third stanza of "Hear, hear, O ye nations" would have condemned Jesus to die on his Cross. Therefore, our sacred Head's sufferings debunk our overestimation of the armistice. The second hymn says: Look at the suffering rain our political naivete

is causing our God and Saviour on the cross. In our third hymn, our strange garment woven out of human elation as its warp and God's shame as its woof, is accepted as the uniform of God's soldiers.

First then, the armistice. This country always has equated armistice and complete victory. Thus, in 1865, Appomatox was armistice and victory. Thus it was in 1918. In 1945 armistice day was even christened VDay, Victory Day.

Now, however, in Korea an armistice is sought between former allies, both victorious, neither vanquished, the Soviets and the United States. Whatever the outcome may be, armistice or no armistice, it pricks our pride that it will be an outcome unknown in American history, an armistice between equals. For the first time, armistice and peace become discernible as two quite different propositions. This is unpalatable doctrine for the American dogma of history. But there it is: Armistice is one thing, peace or victory quite another.

Therefore, instead of confusing the two, let us give to the armistice the real honor due to it. There is no reason to disparage or to belittle Armistice Day because it is not Peace Day. After all, the peace day of 1919 could not be celebrated today. But we still may renew the solemn feelings of 1918 when the slaughter ended.

This slaughter of the best manhood of Europe was worse than even the bombing of Europe in this second war. Never have the British or the French or the Austrians or the Germans recovered from the human losses of those years 1914-1918. Their fate results from the extinction of their best men. So, an armistice which ends such slaughter, deserves to be implored.

There is also at the end of the second World War every reason to thank for the end of the physical destruction on Armistice Day even though it was not VDay.

Now with regard to the pending armistice in Korea: our own town of Norwich has suffered a loss there. The destruction of this innocent land defies description. Naphta bombs destroyed its soil and cities. The cruel fate of this one perfectly helpless victim of the whole world's ineptitudes and especially our own unpreparedness I for once am incapable to articulate. The corpse of what once was Korea certainly demands a fervent prayer for an armistice.

Let us ask God that both sides may no longer have to sacrifice Korea to their own enmity, suspicion, and fear. This our first prayer however cannot be our only prayer today. For let us assume that the third armistice is signed. Does it promise more than the two previous ones? Does it promise peace? Will the Lord of the heavenly hosts be satisfied when the hosts on Earth cease to fire but leave the world and Korea in particular cut in halves? Is the commander in chief of the Army of Heaven satisfied by our armistices?

It is implied in his very name that he is not. The name for God as the head of an army is a late name in the Bible. His first names are: the GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JAKOB, then JAHWEH (I shall be with thee) and GOD OF ISRAEL. Also ELOHIM, the God of Gods. The name ZEBAOOTH seems to have become important the more the kingdoms of Israel and of Juda entered the field of power politics, as one power among others. Then, the One God, to whom Israel testified with her very existence was in danger of becoming a partisan. Therefore he now was extolled and named as the General-in-chief from whom all the custodian angels of all the nations took orders. The last time that the heavenly host is mentioned is in the New Testament in the Christmas story in Luke. The term there is literally "The army of the heavens". God's hosts in Heaven promise peace to all men of God's election. With the coming of Christ this name ZEBAOOTH was superseded. For in the body of Christ there

was to appear on Earth the perfect Man which was neither Russian nor American, neither Chinese nor Japanese, neither Korean nor German, but the sons and daughters of God.

In the name of God as the Lord of the heavenly hosts then, our wars on earth are exposed as irrelevant to our faith. God is not in charge of an American army or of a Russian army. He is in command of the powers that move our hearts and the Russian hearts, the bowels of the Koreans and the heads of the French, the Arabs, the Israelites and our own.

Recordingly in our text, the Lord of Hosts is not satisfied with the way the nations have used the armistice. He scorns them. They have treated this opportunity of a cease-fire solely to increase the affliction. They have not cared, each has just required to be left alone, after the armistice. They have perhaps tried to export American or Russian ways of life to the vanquished. The Lord of Hosts is uncleft. He is not Russian and he is not German.

What then, should we have done? What is God's will after an armistice? I don't think this is very difficult to answer. Take heed! The depression and crash of 1929 wiped out innumerable fortunes because the armistice of 1918 had been ignored as being a mere armistice. God's will after an armistice is very simple: Remember that an armistice is not a peace. It is nothing but a Truce of God. Now, a truce is an act of God's faith, he trusts that we will exploit this period of outer rest to carry out the victories over ourselves which alone create peace. This we have done neither in 1918 nor in 1945.

Our meditation part two declares: armistice grants protection against the external foe. Peace however depends on our victory over ourselves. Meanwhile God is sore displeased as he was with the crazy twenties.

The whole Bible seems written around this distinction between armistice and peace. External victories end in armistices. They enjoin ourselves the task of conquering ourselves.

So we turn to point three. This task, what is it? You know, William Blake formulated it: that we may build Jerusalem despite these dark satanic mills! - After every war, God demands a greater unity than our hearts had been capable of before. The parties to these two world wars must now become interdependent or perish. Wars are the first steps towards unity.

Unity will take a century or more. An armistice can be signed any minute. Peace is the quiet and stubborn work of at least three generations aligned in the profound silence of unspoken, inarticulate yet strong unity. The three armistices which ended the violence, have not done in the minute it took to sign them. The work is expected from the collaboration of three generations. This work entails three conjunctions:

1. The international crash of 1929 must never return.
2. The living generation has no right to waste or to exploit the lasting opportunities of life on this planet.
3. Correspondingly, as the soil, the youth, the resources of this earth are one and the same for all generations, we also have to stay ready to uphold by continuous preparedness and might the protection of the regions we ourselves have disarmed. We must cease to think that we have done our duty by creating powerless fragments out of the body of formerly mighty empires like Turkey, Austria, China, or Japan. To give an alleged freedom to these little bits of country, is hideous.

Therefore, the three armistices dictate a very well discernible lesson and demand that we drop some intolerable illusions. The armistices will haunt us, indeed the present Korean one remains unsigned for this

special reason that otherwise we would not learn. For the lesson is the one lesson this country declines to learn: the dependence of every generation on repeating and repeating and perpetuating the achievements of the past instead of escaping to another and another and another allegedly better world.

For the sake of the better, we have risked to lose all the good.

The lesson of perpetuation will have to be expressed in three institutional changes:

1. Our friends must be enabled to eat as we eat.
2. This good soil of the earth must be accessible in its very best shapes to the next and the next and the next generation:
3. Our military will of yesterday must remain in perpetual existence tomorrow.

These three changes recognize that neither the past nor the present nor the future are meaningful terms as long as they are considered to be fleeting and transient moments in time. They are institutions. In this way, the armistice between warring parties will be discarded for a peace between partners. Armistices may be between nations. Peace, however, does not exist except among members.

This brings us to the end of our text. The prophet seems to distinguish between rest or stillness, and silence. For although the earth is found to be at rest, the Lord of Hosts is sore displeased. Obviously, the external rest did not do away with the inner din in the souls of men. Therefore, the prophet proclaims solemnly: AND THE LORD SHALL CHOOSE JERUSALEM AGAIN. BE SILENT, ALL FLESH!

Divine silence against earthly rest? Can this make sense? What could be the difference? Any housewife, and learning child do their work in silence because they have no misgivings about their goal. Silence is directed. No human heart can serve in deep silence unless it is sure of its destiny. We all make anxious noises whenever we feel uncertain. But a heart that has direction, may work silently. Also it has endless time. It makes the right use of the armistice which is our portion. The uprooted man must make noises. The silent one is edified into the city of peace, the perpetual Jerusalem. Our faith responds to Armistice Day by silence, and our Lord of Hosts speaks: I have given you armistices, and you have abused them as peace. Give me the peace which depends on your silent faith and on your commitment to the steps which you have so far simply treated as your whim of one day.

God leaves his starry heaven and this stony temple when the great silence befalls us as we rest, assured of our direction. Then God is raised up "out of his habitation" and enters history, through you and me.

CLOSING HYMN

Lead on, O King Eternal,
 The day of march has come.
 Henceforth in fields of conquest
 Thy tents shall be our home.
 Thro' days of preparation
 Thy grace has made us strong,
 And now, O King Eternal,
 We lift our battle song.

Lead on, O King Eternal,
 Till sin's fierce war shall cease,
 And holiness shall whisper
 The sweet Amen of peace.
 For not with swords, loud clashing,
 Nor roll of stirring drums,
 But deeds of love and mercy,
 The heav'nly Kingdom comes.

Lead on, O King Eternal,
 We follow, not with fears,
 For gladness breaks like morning
 Where'er thy face appears.
 Thy cross is lifted o'er us,
 We journey in its light;
 The crown awaits the conquest;
 Lead on, O God of might. Amen!

THE BENEDICTION

The peace of the Lord of Hosts,
 The love to our Lord Jesus Christ,
 and our fellowship in the spirit of Wholeness
 May they come to life in us all.

Amen!