

The Park Road Pulpit

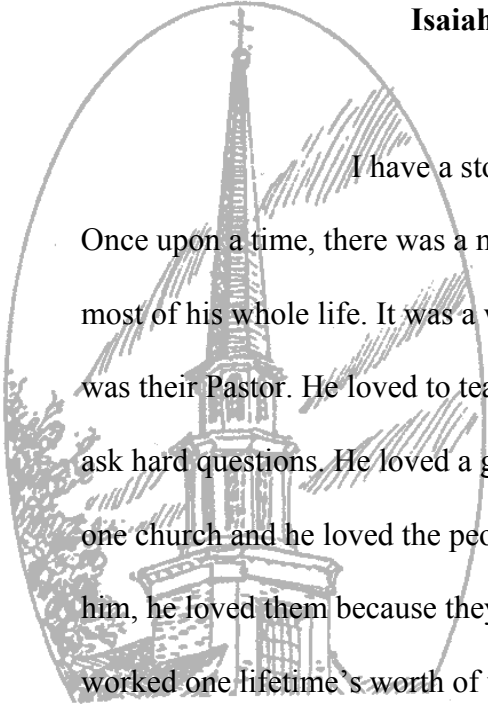
Sermons from Park Road Baptist Church

Russ and Amy Jacks Dean, Pastors

**Prophets of a Future Not Our Own
Isaiah 55.10-13 and Romans 12.9-18**

June 27, 2004

Amy Jacks Dean



I have a story to tell you today. It goes like this:

Once upon a time, there was a man. This man dedicated his whole life to a church – well most of his whole life. It was a wonderful church, and he loved the church very much. He was their Pastor. He loved to teach. He loved to preach. He loved to study. He loved to ask hard questions. He loved a good debate. Most of all he loved God and he loved this one church and he loved the people in the church. Even the people that didn't agree with him, he loved them because they were a part of the church that he loved. After he had worked one lifetime's worth of work, the man retired. And when he retired, he moved away to the mountains - another place that he loved. Now the man could have simply enjoyed his retirement by fishing in the mountains or reading in the mountains or relaxing and napping in the mountains. But not this man. Though I'm sure he did some of all of that, he also did something very important – more important than fishing and reading and napping. He volunteered his time and his energy and his enthusiasm with an organization called Habitat for Humanity. When he retired to the mountains about 20 years ago, he “recognized the great need for affordable housing for working families in the county. [So he founded a local affiliate of Habitat and] served as President of the Board of Directors for five years and worked essentially full time with the affiliate's housing ministry. Since 1993 this mountain ministry has averaged building two houses each year. (Facts taken from HFH, Avery County website) You see the man had spent a lifetime already

preaching peace and the first chance he got to really practice his own preaching was after he retired. Oh, sure. He practiced what he preached while he was preaching, but sometimes I wonder if his best practicing might just have come after his best preaching. Anyway, the man believed that all people deserve a decent place to live, and he set out to make it so in his little mountain community. After another retirement lifetime, he retired again from his volunteer work with Habitat in the mountains. And they honored him by buying a tract of land - 40 acres big – and they named it after the man. Decent, affordable houses can be built on this piece of land, but the first house will be built in honor of the man because he practiced for many years what he preached for many years. For you see, when you work to provide decent, affordable housing – you bring peace.

Now there was another man, who was still young, who was just a child when the other man retired from a lifetime of teaching and preaching. Little did the young man know, that long before he was born, the first man would be planting seeds that would one day allow the young man to own a decent home for his family in the mountains. Little did the young man know, that when he was just a child, that another older man would be working even in retirement to make a way for the young man to have house to put his home in. And little to did the older man know that he would live to see, and even get to know, the fruits of his labor. And so the older man, Charlie and the younger man, Keith will work together to build the first house in Milford Meadows. It will be a house to put the Nelson home in.

And the moral of the story is: Preach Peace and then practice what you preach your whole life long.

Now listen and watch what happened here last week in Vacation Bible School as we all worked to see this piece of the story come to an end.

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Peace is so big. So vast. So seemingly unattainable and unrealistic that we are immobilized to work for peace. It's the little things that we do and say that will make a way for peace. In our global society, we see no hope for peace. Too many still die *fighting* for peace. (Isn't that an oxymoron!) It is difficult - impossible I would bet - to picture a peaceful Iraq, and so we feel our only recourse is to keep fighting for it - literally. Would that there would be a better way. And I wonder, is there anything we can do to bring peace to this vicious cycle?

In our local community, many see no hope for peace. The lack of affordable housing – which has been sighted as the number one problem in Mecklenberg County - sends people over the edge. That kind of hopelessness breeds violence. Budget cuts disable the disenfranchised first so that you and I don't have to bear the pain of paying more in taxes, and we wonder why crime continues. Should we be surprised that the undereducated, poor, and minority populations continue to fill up our prisons – when they feel their only recourse is rage and revenge? I'm not excusing their behavior. I'm simply trying to understand it. And I wonder, is there anything we can do to bring peace to this vicious cycle?

And in our homes and in our own families - grief, depression, loneliness, fear, mental illness, and addictions of all kinds - make for lives that are far from peaceful. There seems to be no end to the chaos of life - whether we are talking of global, local, or

personal issues. But the good word for today is this: there is a way to end the chaos. It takes longer than a snap of the finger - a lot longer. It's more difficult than wishing on a shooting star - a lot more difficult. It takes lifetime of preaching peace and then practicing it.

You see, in my opinion, the global issues in Iraq and Afghanistan and North Korea are issues of chaos craving peace. We need to be praying for peace in our world. We need to be speaking a constant and consistent word of peace on behalf of our sisters and brothers who in the midst of battle. For those whose bedtime lullaby is gunfire, we need to be practicing peace. There is no other voice like the voice of the Church, and the world needs to be hearing our voice. They need to hear our demands for peace.

The local issues here in Charlotte, NC are issues of chaos craving peace. We need to be praying for peace in our community. We need to be speaking a constant and consistent word of peace on behalf of our brothers and sisters who are homeless and hopeless, who are unemployed and underemployed. For those whose bedtime lullaby is _____, we need to be practicing peace.

Dysfunctional families – and we all have them in some form or another – have issues of chaos craving peace. We need to be praying for peace in our families. We need to be speaking a constant and consistent word of peace in our homes so that is all our children know. For those whose bedtime lullaby is soft whimpers and wailing anguish, we need to be practicing peace.

The prophet Isaiah spoke a poetic word of hope – *you shall go out in joy, and be led back in peace* – and the apostle Paul spoke in specifics about how to make peace

happen. And he concludes by saying *if it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

Is it possible? Yes. Yes. Yes. Will you be the solution to our global state of affairs, or our local conundrum, or even your own family strife? No. But that wasn't the question. Is peace possible? Yes. In the little things we do, we can bring peace. In what we say and how we act, we can make a difference. If you don't believe me, just ask Keith Nelson. His life has been changed because a man loved a church and that man spent one lifetime teaching and preaching peace and then that man practiced what he preached so that now Keith Nelson's family will house to put their home in. Ask Keith Nelson if peace is possible and I think he will answer a resounding "Yes!" – because a man and the church that he loved will build that house.

And I wonder about those boys and girls that we saw hammering – did we plant a seed that one day they (Brooks and Cathryn and Ben and Hudson and Noah and Ala and Josh and Copelyn and Allie and Jackson and Margaret and Bennett and Patrick and _____) will they one day take up a hammer and bring peace to a family? Will they one day speak the word of peace? Act for the cause of peace? Did we start, last week, a movement by teaching our children that if it is possible, so far as it depends on them, that they should live peaceably with all.

Pastoral Prayer (by Archbishop Oscar Romero who was martyred in San Salvador, 1980)

It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts, it is even beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny

fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection, no pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the church's mission. No set of goals and objectives includes everything. This is what we are about: we plant seeds that one day will grow. We water seeds already planted, knowing that they hold further promise. We lay foundations that will need further development. We provide yeast that produces effects far beyond our capability. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well. It may be incomplete, but is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for the Lord's grace to enter and do the rest. We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker. We are workers, not master builders: ministers not messiahs. We are prophets of a future not our own. Amen.