



1914 dawned with the world careening toward war just when we are introduced to the fictitious Father Palmer serving an Anglican parish in northern Scotland. In the movie Joyeux Noel, we share his anguish watching fearfully as many of his countrymen enlist in the Allied forces. As the movie unfolds, eventually Father Palmer felt compelled to serve in a noncombatant role as stretcher carrier and chaplain to the troops.

As we follow the movie, troops are positioned across the battle trenches from one another on Christmas Eve...young German soldiers staring down their rifles at Scots and Brits who comprised the company Father Palmer was serving. It was into this carnage and horror that a miraculous event occurred that was beautifully captured in the movie. Father Palmer, playing a bagpipe, begins to inspire his boys to strike up Christmas Carols that were surely carried across the no man's land to the German troops.

It wasn't long until other tunes answered back leading to some of the soldiers having the audacity to step into the war-torn ground separating the troops. Many of us know the story of shared brandy, choruses of Christmas music in different languages, a flair lit soccer game and trading of pictures of girlfriends and family from back home.

True to his calling, Father Palmer prepares to celebrate a Christmas Eucharist into the comradery of the enemy and allied soldiers. No distinctions, no borders, no allegiances other than to the one true God who has come among these war-torn souls as the newborn Prince of Peace. In that moment Father Palmer's actions didn't seem like a radical act, but no sooner had he pronounced the blessing and the troops dispersed to fight another day than was he discharged from his duties and suspended from his priestly position.

In a disturbing scene, Father Palmer, is harshly criticized by his bishop, who argues that Jesus did not come to bring peace but a sword. Later, we see the bishop telling the new recruits that they are in a crusade, a holy war for freedom. Hearing these words and realizing how far this view is from the teachings of Jesus, Palmer takes off his cross, leaves it on a bedpost, and walks away.

***Listen to the words of Psalm 85: “God will speak peace to God’s people who turn to God in their hearts. Surely salvation is at hand. Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; justice and peace will kiss each other. Faithfulness will spring up from the ground, and justice will look down from the sky. Justice will go before the Lord and will make a path for the Lord’s steps.***

The psalmist reminds me of the soldiers defying the rules of war as justice and peace kiss each other in the no-man’s ground of war. Something compelled those soldiers into the breach as we hear, “justice will go before the Lord and will make a path for the Lord’s steps”.

The Episcopal Peace Fellowship was likewise founded in the shadow of a world war, on November 11, 1939. As did Father Palmer, countless EPF chaplains and clergy, lay leaders, bishops, parishes, and chapters have dared to step into the breach of war, and gun violence, and capital punishment, and occupation of Palestinian homelands, and institutional and systemic racism. Often this work has resulted in ridicule and even banishment from secure positions but each of us has been upheld by the words of the psalm, “*God will speak peace to God’s people who turn to God in their hearts.*”

It is not the voices of oppression that speak hate and bigotry, but *God will speak peace*. It is not the voices of violence that speak dominance and gender cruelty, but *God will speak peace*. It is not the voices of retribution that speak vengeance and recrimination, but *God will speak peace*. It is not the voices of imperialism that speak apartheid and dehumanization, but *God will speak peace*.



The Episcopal Peace Fellowship invites as supporters those who feel empowered by our baptismal covenant to “strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being”.

Striving for justice and peace is the driving force behind the work of EPF these 81 years. Each EPF supporter joins his or her hearts and arms across the various chapters and Peace Partner parishes to determine the causes that symbolize their unique work toward bringing about God’s Peaceable Kingdom and Beloved Community.

Desmond Tutu once said, “Do your little bit of good where you are; it’s those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”

It is the intent of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship to overwhelm the world and the church with a radical witness for justice and peace. To overwhelm the world and the church with a radical witness for non-violence and solidarity with victims of violence in any form.

To overwhelm the world and the church with a radical witness to demand racial reconciliation and justice for the victims of bigotry and racism.

In our statement of purpose, the Episcopal Peace Fellowship calls on its supporters to join hands for *substantive peace*, to resist and eradicate both overt violence and all systemic violence that wounds, diminishes, or dismisses the humanity and value of God’s children.

We join hands for *nonviolent engagement* as our process for personal and societal transformation. We join hands to become *people of peace* as individuals and as a fellowship, confronting violence in our hearts as well as the outer world, equipping, empowering, and sustaining one another for the practice of peace.

Our heartfelt invitation is extended to any of you whose calling for justice and peace resonates with this mission and purpose of the Episcopal Peace Fellowship.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. dreamed of the day when justice would roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.

May we boldly dare to step into the torrents of those waters knowing that a mighty God will carry and uphold us in the sacred work of establishing God’s Kingdom of Peace and Justice.

AMEN.