

PEACE

WEEK TWO

A Reading from Biblical Wisdom: Philippians 4:6-7

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

Context for the Contemporary Wisdom

The Rev. Dr. Howard Washington Thurman (1899–1981) was an influential African American author, philosopher, theologian, educator, and civil rights leader. He played a leading role in many social justice movements and organizations of the twentieth century. Thurman's theology of radical nonviolence influenced and shaped a generation of civil rights activists and he was a key mentor to leaders within the movement such as Martin Luther King, Jr. Thurman was Dean Emeritus of Marsh Chapel, Boston University, Honorary Canon of the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine, New York City, and Founder of Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples in San Francisco, the first interracial, interdenominational church in the United States. Howard Thurman was a spiritual friend to Martin Luther King Jr., and he was considered a "Social Mystic."

A Reading from Contemporary Wisdom

Excerpt from the Foreword to *The Inward Journey* by Howard Thurman

- <https://youtu.be/y1hmQQeG790> (Vincent Harding describing Howard Thurman's spiritual journey)

"There are not many windows in these meditations; they are, as the title indicates, an Inward Journey. It may be that if there were more illustrations, the meaning could be more quickly grasped. The choice here is deliberate. It is my hope that they will make reading and rereading rewarding and sustaining. The purpose remains ever the same: to focus the mind and heart upon God as the Eternal Source and Goal of Life. To find Him as Companion and Presence is 'to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly' with Him.

“‘Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace.’ These words, taken from the prayer of St. Francis, speak to one of the most insistent conditions of the human spirit. It is not easy to be an instrument of peace because we understand so little about the anatomy of hostility and its particular kind of etiquette. Again and again, we use our words to protect ourselves, to ‘put others in their place,’ to humiliate and to wound; sometimes, quite unconsciously. Have you ever been caught in the backwash of your words which hit their mark, resulting in an injury which was not part of your intent? All of this because you were too preoccupied with your own interests, your own concerns to take into account the other person? At such a moment your good word may easily become an instrument of violence.

“Ask yourself, ‘Have I ever indulged in gossip which gave me an opportunity to say something uncharitable about someone else?’ Of course, if I had not heard the gossip and passed it on, then there would have been no chance for me to express my quiet hostility and, at the same time, be relieved of the responsibility for it. When I participate in the shared rumors and the gossip around me by passing them on or by refraining from stopping them with what I know to be the facts and the truth, I let my attitude and my influence become instruments of violence in my hands.”

Questions for Reflection

1. Dr. Thurman’s is not a rhetorical question and is worth pondering: “Have I ever indulged in gossip which gave me an opportunity to say something uncharitable about someone else?”
2. Where do I find peace when experiencing turmoil in the presence of injustice?
3. What does peace look like when witnessing injustice?

Howard Thurman’s Prayer:

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy Peace.” Teach me how to order my days that with sure touch I may say the right word at the right time and in the right way — lest I betray the spirit of peace. Let me not be deceived by my own insecurity and weakness which would make me hurt another as I try desperately to help myself. Keep watch with me, O my Father, over the days of my life, that with abiding enthusiasm I may be in such possession of myself that each day I may offer to Thee the full, unhampered use of me in all my parts as “an instrument of Thy Peace.” Amen.