

Blessed are the peacemakers - Their services will always be needed on earth

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Blessed are the peacemakers. Their services will always be needed on earth. We wake up every morning to the clamor of partisan warfare, impeachment hearings, terrorist attacks and the prospects of World War Three. I served twenty years in the United States Congress, and I know that every day about half of Washington wakes up determined to tear down their political opponents. We are constantly bombarded with stories of conflict, of strife and bad news. Yet, when we look at the actual state of the world today, in terms of armed conflict and causes of conflict, we discover a very startling and surprising fact. The world today is more peaceful, prosperous and safe than it has ever been since the garden of Eden.

According to Matt Ridley, a well-known British journalist, and Hans Rosling, a Swedish statistician, we are better off now. Fifty-five years ago, when I was just a little girl, the average human earned only one-third of what they earn today. Yet today, that average human eats a third more calories and can expect to live a third longer than before. The rich get richer. But guess what? The poor do even better, because in the last twenty years, the poor doubled their consumption. In fact, the UN estimates that poverty was reduced more in the past fifty years than in the previous five hundred year, and every day, a hundred and eighty thousand people in the world earn their way out of extreme poverty.

Our basic needs are easier to get now

One reason that we are richer, healthier, taller, cleverer, longer-lived, and freer than ever before is that the four most basic human needs -- food, clothing, fuel, and shelter -- have grown remarkably cheaper. Let me give you an example. Imagine that it's nighttime. It's dark and you want to read a book for an hour. If you lived in the year 1800, you would have to work for six hours in order to buy [a large enough] enough candle to read your book for an hour. In 1880, one hour of light from a kerosene lamp would take fifteen minutes of work to pay for. In 1950, it was eight seconds, and today, it is half a second. If we look at that, we are 43,200 times better off today than in 1800.

The environment is better off than you think. For example, a car traveling at sixty miles an hour today gives off less pollution than a car that was parked in my driveway leaking fluids in 1970. Even allowing for the many people who still live in poverty, our generation has access to more calories, more watts, horsepower, gigabytes, square feet, air miles, food per acre, miles per gallon, megahertz, and of course, access to more money than any generation who lived before us.

Healthy economic exchanges

This will continue as long as we use these things to make more things. The more we specialize and exchange, the better off we are. For example, by 9:00 am, I will have brushed my teeth with American toothpaste, eaten bread made with French wheat and spread with New Zealand butter and Spanish Marmalade, brewed tea from Sri Lanka, dressed in clothes made from Indian cotton and Australian wool, put on shoes of Chinese leather and Malaysian rubber, and read a newspaper printed on Finnish paper with Chinese ink before I get in my Korean-made Kia and drive to work. I will have consumed tiny fractions of the productive labor and trade and specialization of hundreds of people. So the more we trade, the better off we are. In fact, self-sufficiency actually equals poverty in my book. And while the world's

population has increased four times since 1900, other things have increased also. The area covered by crops by 30 percent, our harvest by 600 percent. And there are more than two billion acres of secondary tropical forest, because farmers have moved to the city, so there is more forest emerging.

Life is getting better

And do you know what? The good old days weren't so good. Some people argue that in the past, there was more simplicity, tranquility, sociability, spirituality, and that that has all been lost. But do you know what? It is my opinion that that good life was confined to the wealthy people. It is easy to talk about the lifestyle of a pioneer when you are not using an outhouse. Because we are the luckiest generation. We have experienced more freedom, more leisure time, more education, more medicine and more travel than any other generation in history.

And do you know what? Great ideas keep coming. The more we prosper, the more we can prosper. The more we invent, the more inventions are possible. Almost everything follows the law of diminishing returns. But not the world of ideas. The ever-increasing exchange of ideas causes the ever-increasing rate of innovation. And we will never, ever, exhaust our supply of ideas, of discoveries and of inventions. And do you know what? We can solve our problems. If you say, the world will go on getting better, you are considered crazy. If you say, catastrophe is imminent, people nod and say, yeah, she's right. If you watch TV, all you see is doom and gloom. But do you know what? We, the human race, are a problem-solving machine. We solve problems by changing our ways. The only real danger is if there is no change.

Resist pessimism

For two hundred years, pessimists have had all the headlines, even though most of the time, the optimists were the right ones. Because there is immense vested interest in pessimism. For example, no charity ever raised money by saying "Things are getting better." No journalists ever got on the front page by writing a story about how a disaster is less likely now. Pressure groups and their customers in the media search even in the best statistics, looking for all the bad news.

So here's my list of what we as leaders and parliamentarians can do to move peace forward in this great time of ours. One, we need strong moral leadership in the world today. And we begin with us. Two, we need to seize this moment of transparency and of economic wellbeing. If not when the economy is good, when will we seize peace? You know, we talk about diplomacy and intelligence, and the military, and economics -- these are the levers of power to move the way people and countries work together. We need to stop using military and intelligence and use diplomacy and economic powers to help the rest of the nations and the people of the world to prosper with all of us.

Here is the most important thing that we can do. We need to spread the "good news." Now, I know that particular phrase means something to Dr. Moon and her family and to other people of the cloth who are with us today. But, I am just talking about me, being an evangelist for good news. Remember the statistics that I began with? We are in good a time. Rejoice and spread that good news. For most of history, religion played an important role for humanity. So, let's spread our hands out. Let's reach out to people. Let's bridge the differences that we have. We need to go where others fear to go. We need to reach across a deeply religious and political gulf that we have and to be builders of optimism. Because, remember, blessed are the peacemakers. Thank you.