



(Photo by Jim Burton)

Peace Pilgrim's Progress

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THE LONE STAR STATE

Even though Texas - often referred to as the Lone Star State - is no longer the biggest state, it is still very big. One thing you will surely find in Texas, and that is variety. This word can also be used to describe the Texas weather. The Texans have a saying, "if you don't like the weather just stick around, it'll be different tomorrow." Texas is big enough to include many cultural patterns. Western Texas reflects the culture of the west, Eastern Texas reflects the culture of the "deep south", Central Texas has a mixed culture. There is a resort area along the Gulf of Mexico - for instance, I found beautiful Corpus Christi full of tourists - and here the culture tends to be cosmopolitan. Many of the interesting border towns - like Laredo with a 90% Spanish population - seem very like Old Mexico, and even towns quite a distance from the border - like picturesque San Antonio - reflect the Spanish culture. Much of the Texas cowboy clothing I saw was very embroidered and very Spanish, and I was told that the "ten gallon" hat which Texans wear is an adaptation of the Mexican sombrero. Texas is big enough to include many contrasts. There is much desert in Texas with its cactus and sage brush, but there is also much water - I walked through areas where rainfall was so over-abundant that farmers could not get into their fields to plant. There are many mountains in Texas, but there is also much low land and much high flat land - and the "wide open spaces" they talk about are really there in abundance. Northwestern Texas gets plenty of snow, but Southern Texas - the Lower Rio Grande Valley which is sometimes referred to as the Magic Valley of Texas - is a land of palm trees and citrus groves and winter-blooming flowers, and as I walked through this area I ate delicious pink Texas grapefruit right from the trees. Texas is known as cattle country, and of course I saw plenty of cattle in the grasslands, including a few Texas longhorns, but I also saw plenty of cultivated land which was planted in a variety of crops - and in many areas the most important "crop" is oil. Throughout much of Texas the vegetation is low enough so I could look away to the horizons, but in some sections there are many trees - and the bare trees are often covered with mistletoe, making them look green in winter and eventually killing them. One thing I found almost everywhere in Texas was friendliness. In places where I had walked before, like Dallas, old friends arranged good speaking opportunities. In places where I had not walked before - like Houston - new friends arranged good speaking opportunities. Friendliness is more than traditional in Texas, it is actual.

HOLIDAYS ON THE HIGHWAY

People sometimes ask me how I spend holidays - especially Christmas. I spend most of them walking. Many people go for a drive on a holiday, so it is a good time to contact people. I remember one Christmas Eve when I slept under the stars. One planet was so bright that just a little imagination could transform it into the Star of Bethlehem. The next day, at a temperature of 80 degrees, I walked into New Orleans to find poinsettias blooming abundantly for Christmas - and to find some fine new friends. I spent one Christmas in Fort Worth, where the towers and the tall buildings were outlived with colored lights, presenting an unforgettable picture as I walked in the city. That day I was given the welcome Christmas present of enough time to catch up with my mail. People sometimes ask me if I do not feel lonely on holidays - especially Christmas. How can I feel lonely when I live in the constant awareness of God's presence? I love people and I enjoy being with them, but when I am alone I enjoy being alone with God.

PRAY WITH FAITH

One day a lady said to me, "I'm praying with you for peace, but of course I don't believe it's possible." I said, "Don't you believe peace is God's will?" "Oh, yes," she said, "I know it is." I said, "How can you tell me that which is God's will is impossible? It's not only possible, it's inevitable, but how soon is up to us." The darkness that we see in the world today is due to the disintegration of things contrary to God's will. All the not-good things that we see are transient things, containing within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. We can help them fade away more quickly by remaining in harmony with God's will ourselves - and by praying with faith!

OUR TIMES IN A NUTSHELL

One day as I was walking along the highway I began to sing peace words to a familiar tune which I believe sum up the present world situation in a nutshell:

The world is feverishly working to build the things of war -
The world is preparing destruction of a kind unknown
before.
I hear much cursing of enemies, and arguments increase -
But oh, the world is longing - is yearning - is praying for
peace-
for peace!

Yes, this sums up the present world situation in a nutshell. On the one hand the drift of world affairs in the direction of war and destruction. On the other hand the stirring and awakening which I have faith will accelerate sufficiently to turn the tide toward a golden age of peace.

A DRAMATIC SCENE

A saloon-keeper called me into his tavern to give me some food, and while I was eating he asked, "How do you feel in a place like this?" "I know that all human beings are God's children," I replied. "Even when they are not acting that way I have faith that they could, and I love them for what they could be." As I arose to leave I noticed that a man with a drink in his hand was also on his feet. When he caught my eye he smiled a little, and I smiled back. "You smiled at me," he said in surprise. "I should think you wouldn't even speak to me and you smiled at me." I smiled again. "I am not here to judge my fellow human beings," I told him. "I am here to love them and serve them." Suddenly he was kneeling at my feet and saying, "Everyone else judged me, so I defended myself. You didn't judge me, so now I judge myself. I'm a no-good worthless sinner! I've been squandering my money on liquor, I've been mistreating my family, I've been going from bad to worse!" I put my hand on his shoulder. "You are God's child," I said, "and you could act that way." He looked with disgust at the drink in his hand, and they hurled it against the bar, shattering the glass. His eyes met mine, "I swear to you I'll never touch that stuff again," he exclaimed. "Never!" And there was a new light in his eyes as he walked through the door with steady steps.

FOUR LETTERS

One day as I was answering mail a woman said to me, "What can people do for peace?" I said to her, "let us see what some of these people who have written me have done," and I showed her four letters. The first one said, "I am a farm housewife. Since talking with you I have realized I should be doing something for peace - especially since I am raising four sons. Now I am writing one letter every day to someone in our government or in the United Nations who has done something for peace, commending

them to give them moral support." The second one said, "World peace seems a bit too big for me to get my teeth into, but since talking with you I have joined the Human Relations Council in my town, and I'm working on peace among groups." The third one said, "Since talking with you I have resolved an unpeaceful situation between myself and my sister-in-law." The fourth one said, "Since talking with you I have cut out smoking." When you do something for world peace, peace among groups, peace among individuals or your own inner peace you improve the total peace picture. Every time you bring harmony into any unpeaceful situation you contribute to the cause of peace.

GRASS ROOTS PEACE ACTIVITY

I have been suggesting that Community Peace Fellowships start with a Peace Prayer Group for seeking the way of Peace. In some places my literature has been used for this prayer group, since it deals with peace from a spiritual viewpoint. Read a paragraph, dwell upon it in receptive silence, then talk about it. Have as many prayer meetings as you need to get through the literature. Anyone who can understand and feel the spiritual truths contained therein is spiritually ready to work for peace.

Then would come a Peace Study Group. We need to get a clear picture of what the present world situation is like and what will be needful to convert it into a peaceful world situation. Certainly all present wars must cease. Obviously we need to find a way to lay down our arms together. We need to set up mechanisms to avoid physical violence in a world where psychological violence still exists. All nations need to give up one right to the United Nations – the right to make war. The United Nations needs to be improved. We people of the world need to learn to put the welfare of the whole human family above the welfare of any group. Starvation and suffering needs to be alleviated wherever it exists. And of course fear and hatred needs to be alleviated. A world language to be taught as a second language in all schools in the world would be very helpful – so would an extensive exchange of people among the nations of the world. There are some national problems in connection with peace. Work needs to be done on peace among groups. Our number one national problem is the adjustment of our economy to a peacetime situation. We need a Peace Department in our national government to do extensive research on peaceful ways of resolving conflicts – then we can ask every other country to establish a similar department.

After world problems and steps toward their solution become pretty clear to you, you are ready to become a Peace Action Group. You can become a Peace Action Group gradually – acting upon any problem that you have learned to understand. Peace action should always take the form of living the way of peace. It can take the form of letter writing – to commend those who have done something good for peace, to legislators about peace legislation you are interested in, to Editors on peace subjects, to friends on what you have learned about peace. It can take the form of public meetings on peace subjects, speakers on peace subjects, distributing peace literature, talking to people about peace, a peace week, a peace fair, a peace walk, a peace parade or peace float. It can take the form of voting for those who are committed to the way of peace. Grass roots peace work is vitally important. In this crisis period there should be a Community Peace Committee in every town. Such a group can begin with a handful of concerned people.