When thinking about what I wanted to say about Peace Village, the list got longer and longer. So, hopefully you've settled in to your comfy pew. Just kidding.

The story of how the Columbia Gorge Peace Village came to be through Bethel isn't MY story, at least not my story alone. I think it was Kathy Thomas who read an article about Peace Village Inc. in Lincoln City. She and Karen Murphy and I, probably over coffee after church, said, “wouldn't that be great for our Bethel kids. How fun!” Little did we know what would evolve.

The first years of bringing Peace Village to the Gorge involved many people at Bethel-- Pastor John helped identify and invite other interested faith groups, Debra lent her expert hand to much of the curriculum and teaching, David Duncombe came to share his stories as a local Peace Hero, many, many hands helped provide food, Suzanne and Aaron brought pizza for all our counselors, with Rune just a few days old, John Mayo created our logo art. Deana nursed countless scrapes and bee stings. We've managed to convince most of you at one time or another to join in some part of the fun. And if you haven't had your chance yet, we'll be taking sign ups after church today.

It often seems like the problems of the world are too big, too scary, just too overwhelming to make any difference. And looked at from the small perspective of one lone person, they are. But what I have learned is that peacemaking, changemaking, really is as simple as a whole bunch of individual people doing the very practical, often mundane, tasks it takes to put on a day camp for kids but doing this in service to an impractical, radical vision.

It's not necessarily this camp, or these kids, and it's not only camp, or only any one thing. It's the vision of radical inclusiveness, playful peacebuilding, community, and joy. It's saying a different world is not only possible, it is already with us, we just have to live in it. I've mentioned recently that I read and was moved by the book, “The More Beautiful World our Hearts Know is Possible,” by Charles Eisenstein. The quote in the bulletin is from that book. The book is a look at Story and how we as humans live in a certain Story of the World. How a new Story is possible, but we aren't there yet. We get glimpses, and we can practice, and it is coming.

I'm sure that resonates with me because I am a reader and a writer and understand the world better through story. I enjoyed the quote because I often find myself doing the practical, with a deep conviction that it is in dedication to the sacred.

I have been involved with many, many efforts to make the world a better place in my life. I can't remember a time when I didn't have some plan or idea about how things could be different. I was in middle school when I first read Gandhi and was deeply moved by the idea of active non-violence. Having gone on to get a degree in Peace Studies I can wax on about the varying degrees of difference between pacifism and just war theories, community vs. market economics, and how they all relate to the history of women, or the Judeo Christian worldview, or a pedagogy of change in oppressed cultures. But what it comes down to is story. Do I want to live in the culturally defined story of life or do I choose to live in a new story.

In college at my small, private, Christian oriented, liberal arts school, I often felt the need to defend my somewhat unorthodox beliefs. Or to downplay my connection with ideas not considered Christian. Many of my dearest college friends have simply moved beyond christian community. They consider themselves post-christian. It would be easy to go there with them.

  But the story of Jesus won't let me go. This teacher who was fully human and fully divine. What is that about? Jesus was an embodiment of God. God as human. Divine nature as nature. This is our story.

I think this is what Jesus came to say. Step in. The new story is here, now, in you, in us. Everything is new. People, human, frail, imperfect, trying and messing things up again and again, AND divine. Made from star dust. One with the very creative energy at the beginning of it all. Oneness. I get glimpses of the Oneness sometimes. These glimpses are usually fleeting and knocked out of my vision by a very human aggravation, such as stubbing my toe, one too many dishes left dirty on the counter or a to do list that takes on oppressive importance.

I've been practicing yoga for over 20 years now. I especially love yoga because it is a practice. The time spent on your yoga mat is always called practice. What are we practicing? Not necessarily a deeper stretch or a fancier pose or balance. But the practice is of how to stay connected, body, mind and spirit. The real yoga is your life. It is embodying yoga in the mundane. The every day. And in the divine.

How does any of this relate to Peace village? To me, what Peace village is about, at it's core, is to give us time to practice the new story of humanity. Peace village gives us a week of practice, a time of play and place to be community.

Kids and adults, from up and down the gorge, playing, learning, arguing, running, eating, working, side by side.

What world can you imagine, when you let go of the accepted and adult story of what life is like? Is there a lot more music? Art? Dancing? Running and playing and people working together to feed us all, care for our hurts, nurture our ideas? Can you imagine young and old, Christian, Bahai', Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Native and Unitarian, all together seeing the world through one another's eyes?

That's the Big Village. The big vision of Peace Village. Like my yoga practice. The time on the mat is just practice for the yoga of real life. The time at camp is the practice of the big village. Of the possible.

We craft the week to give the campers a taste of as many different practices for peace as we can squeeze in to a day. Each camper participates in Core Curriculum activities designed to give them practical tools for creating peace within themselves, among their families, schools, communities and in the larger world. There is variety in how these are presented each year, and a camper may only know that the next activity is called Theater or Peace Heroes or Art but what they are learning is non-violent conflict resolution, compassionate communication, media literacy, stewardship of the earth, service to one another, healthy food choices, and wellness habits. Besides the Core curriculum, each camper gets to choose two activities each day. These we call Village Fair and they can be almost anything. Here they mold clay, play cooperative games, learn to sew, try marimba, hear stories, go on hikes, do crafts, art, music, dance, or yoga. Some years we meet bees, or raptors, or go visit gardens.

And it's growing. Slowly, organically, hopefully sustainably. For me anything done in the spirit of the new story is the work of peace village. So where there is energy and enthusiasm, be it for adult workshops, one-time classes offered for kids or adults, the new Right of Passage overnight opportunity for our oldest campers or a year-round youth program, we are willing to give it a try. It is peace unfolding in the making. The poem of peace writing itself.

I started getting involved in Peace Village for my kids. I wanted something holistic in their summer. It is that-- they have had a chance to try out so many different practices for creating a whole and holy life. They have tried yoga, aikido, ceramics, made mandalas, walked labyrinths, done all sorts of art - from sculptures made out of vegetables to weaving with recycled t-shirts, drawing, writing, singing, and drumming. They have learned about local food, worked in service to each other and the larger community, played games, explored nature, become leaders, grown in to young men connected to their own core and to the larger world.

I could feel done. I got what I thought I wanted.

But now I stay for me. The people and the practice of peace village have become a spiritual practice in my life. Just like the people and the practice of being community at Bethel are-- being the new story with all of you, even when it's not easy, especially when we disagree, even when it just looks like a lot of work, that's the sweet spot of practice. That's the yoga mat work. That is embodying the divine.