

Address to the “This is Bahrain” event

“Cultivating a Culture of Peace”

on 21st September 2024 at the Cultural Hall, Manama, The Kingdom of Bahrain

Dean Richard Fermer, from St Christopher’s Cathedral, Bahrain

Welcome to this gathering of cultures, on this island of Bahrain celebrated for its “culture of peace” - the theme of this year’s UN International Day of Peace. “Cultivating a culture of peace” is not only a vision dear to the heart of His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa, it is something that he has put into action and our coming together is a testimony of that.

What is the secret to creating a culture of peace? I want to read you a poem called, “Recipe for Peace” by Robert Devreaux. It imagines peace-making like bread-making. Remember the smell of freshly baked bread? It’s unforgettable, comforting, like a blessing. Let’s listen.

“Bare your feet, roll up your sleeves
oil the immigrant’s bowl

open the doors and windows of your house
invite in the neighbours, invite in strangers off the street”

Pause the poem for a moment. What’s unusual about this bread-making? Well, it’s the openness to others, the hospitality, the invitation. Many of us have experienced that in Bahrain. The alternative is to close the doors and windows. To see others as a threat. To defend. To fight over bread, not make it. Let the poem continue.

“roll out the dough, add the spices for a good life
cardamon and soul, cumin and tears

stir in sesame and sorrow, a dash of salt
pink as new hope

rub marjaram and thyme, lemon grass and holy basil
on your fingers and pat the dough

bless the table, bless the bread
bless your hands and feet

bless the neighbours and strangers
off the street”

Press pause again. Living in Bahrain, we know how spices add taste to our food. The different spices represent different cultures and peoples, don't they? All seems to be included in this bread, not just the spices that hit our taste buds, but also soul and tears, sorrow and new life – spiritual spices, the stuff of life. It's an all-embracing bread.

What's the next step? This lively dough needs to be baked. Let's continue.

“bake the bread for a century or more
on a moderate heat

under the olive trees in your back yard
or on the sun filled stones of Syria

in the white rocks of Beirut
or behind the walls of Jerusalem

in the mountains of Afghanistan
and in the sky scrapers of New York

feast with all the migrant tongues
until your mouth understands

the taste of many different homes

and your belly is full so you fall asleep

cradled in the skirts of the world
curled in the lap of peace.”

It's a beautiful ending to the poem. This bread is bread for the world, to be shared by everyone. When we eat this bread we taste difference, but it is not a difference that threatens us, forcing us to act out of fear and hatred. On the contrary, the belly is full and we sleep the sleep of deep contentment. Such a vision speaks of the abundance, the fullness of which our different faith traditions speak. The world is meant to be a place of blessing. Yet for the recipe of peace to work its miracle, we need to open, to share, to be a blessing to others. That's how a culture of peace is cultivated, a culture of peace we delight in here in Bahrain and what this evening is all about. Let the peace we share between us radiate out to so many places of the world scarred by violence. Let peace start with us this evening. Let us be a prayer for peace. Now mix in the spices, roll out the dough, let the alchemy of bread-making take its course, as we welcome the sharing of talent and cultures in our programme this night!