

PSR Sacramento 2016 Scholarship Essay Contest Finalist

The World Around Us Is Broken

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It's broken into continents, broken into countries, broken into states, into cities, into houses. It's broken by lines in the dirt—so-called borders that we put up to divide ourselves. It's broken by a rapidly changing environment that is wreaking havoc on millions of species.

At the same time, we are broken. So many of us carry a thousand moments of pure agony around with us and pretend like they don't exist. Negativity in the form of envy, greed, bitterness, and hate burns inside even the most innocent. This fire inside of us is what's killing us. In our desperation to smother the fire, we direct it onto others. This amounts to war. Not just war in the sense of military combat, but war in our everyday lives.

Peace is what will save us in the end. But so many people today stand, arm-in-arm, in opposition to peace. They yield to the fire and worship it as God. They run countries where people aren't treated like people, where they are denied access to basic rights like food and shelter, where they're denied the freedom to live their lives in safety and happiness. When people face this primeval struggle of life and death on a daily basis, violence is the only logical conclusion. People will fight to live, to take what's rightfully theirs, to overthrow oppression. Peace, thus, cannot survive in these conditions. It's like expecting a sunflower to outlast winter in the Antarctic.

So it's true that peace cannot last where people are denied basic rights and freedoms. But it's also true that peace is not guaranteed by having those rights and freedoms. Look at America. We are among the wealthiest people on Earth. We are a country whose reputation is anchored in freedom and the idea of natural rights. But we are not free from the fire. We let it out in racism, in xenophobia, in white supremacy, in sexism. Today, we have a presidential candidate who has supported many of these ideas and incites violence at his political rallies. And yet we, as an entire country, have not condemned him or stopped him. Every day, we too are fostering an environment of unrest.

So how do we create lasting peace if the fire burns everywhere? When we live inside of ourselves, all we experience is the inferno. We have to step outside of our own minds to see the beauty in the world around us. We need to unite against the fire and condemn it together—rise up above the selfishness and the greed and the hate. Many people view this as an impossible task, but we can't lose hope. Because when everything is broken, we should try putting the pieces back together instead of dismissing it as a lost cause.