

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

Texts: Matthew 5:9

James 3:13, 17-18

I. Introduction

- A. It strikes me that when we try to be “peacemakers”, sometimes we put the cart before the horse.
 - 1. We put ourselves in situations or try to intervene in situations without first figuring out what Jesus means when he talks about “peace.”
 - 2. So maybe that’s today’s question—what does Jesus mean when he talks about peace and peacemaking?
 - 3. Which leads me to one of the great paradoxes of scripture—one that goes something like this:
 - a) In John 14, Jesus promises to leave us with his peace. He says, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you.” And we think, “Thank you, Jesus—we could use your kind of peace.
 - b) But then along comes Paul, who says that the “Peace of Christ passes all understanding.” And we think, “Oh, no, if Paul doesn’t understand it, then I’ll never understand what Jesus means by peace, let alone be a peacemaker.
 - c) And that’s exactly the struggle—how do we become a peacemaker after the example of the one whose sense of peace and example of peace was so great that “it passes all understanding”?
- B. Last week I talked about how in that last Beatitude, “Blessed are the pure in heart” that the bar was raised as high as it could possibly be in that none of us, in this life at least, could ever have a perfectly pure heart.
- C. I’m not sure the bar is all that much lower this week, as we try to be peacemakers after the example of Jesus. He is the Prince of Peace, after all.
- D. Erik Kolbell asks the same question we struggle with, the question of “why doesn’t that peace that Jesus left with us just come and light upon our shoulder when we take our first breath and remain our constant companion until we take our last?”
 - 1. It would be so easy then, wouldn’t it?

2. The next time our kids were fighting in the back seat, we'd know just what to do.
 3. As we watched the news and saw what was going on in the world, we'd know exactly what to do to make a difference.
 4. As we lay awake nights in the turmoil of an internal kind of war going on inside of us, we'd know just what to do to get back to sleep.
- E. But living in the world we live in, with world peace and community peace and inner peace often so hard to find, it's equally hard to find that peace that Jesus left us with, that peace that we need to have if we are to be blessed as peacemakers.
- F. I love Erik Kolbell's story of being at a monastery and asking one of the monks what they talked about all day in that sheltered and cloistered environment.
- a) Expecting the answer to be something like "the Bible" or the "writings of the early Christian fathers", he was shocked when the monk said what they talked about most were things like haggling over who had kitchen duty and who snored and who got to drive into town the most."
 - b) Which just goes to show how people are—that even in what seem to be the most peaceful settings, peace can be hard to find.
- II. So maybe what we need to do to begin with is to at least try to understand what Jesus is talking about when he uses the word "peace".
- A. When you see the word "peace" in the Bible, most often what you are seeing is the Hebrew word "shalom".
1. It is a word that most of us Christians are familiar with, at least in passing, but we may not totally appreciate all the nuances of this kind of peace.
 2. It is way more than an absence of war or even an absence of hostility going on in the back seat.
 3. Here are some possible synonyms for "shalom"—harmony, beauty, unity, virtue, security, and justice.
 4. It is a word that describes what our lives and what our world should look like, but so often don't.
 5. It is a word that Jewish folks still use as both a greeting and a word of departure.

6. When you greet or say goodbye to someone with “shalom”, you are blessing them with your hope that their worlds and their lives will be filled with all of those qualities of “shalom”—beauty, unity, security, and all the rest.
 7. To wish “shalom” to someone is to be a peacemaker at a very simple yet fundamental and important level.
 8. And to do that is possible for any of us—it’s just not easy to do to those who haven’t been bringers of peace into our lives.
 9. But it is something we can all do, and when we do it, as Jesus says, we are blessed.
- B. It’s also pretty clear that to be a peacemaker as Jesus desires us to has to begin with inner peace.
1. I did a quick word study this week on every time that Jesus used the word “peace”
 2. What is interesting is that almost every time, he uses the word to describe an inner peace.
 3. And by far, his most specific use of the word was right after he healed someone. He would say to them at that moment, “Peace be with you.”
 4. In other words, “I have healed you of whatever your physical ailment was, but even more importantly, I have brought you the gift of inner peace.”
 5. There is much to learn from those stories
 - a) Beginning with the fact that Jesus’ greatest desire for all of his children is to have within them his gift of “shalom” within them.
 - b) To know that perhaps Jesus’ greatest act of healing in our lives is when he brings us this kind of inner peace.
 - c) And then beyond that, we have to realize that we can never be peacemakers to the world if we don’t have that inner peace.
 - d) We should give Fred some credit in the skit—at least he knew that until he had that inner peace, he couldn’t ever referee what was going on in that car in a loving kind of way.
 - e) You’ve got to have peace within your heart, if you’re going to be a peacemaker.
 - f) Erik Kolbell quotes the Dalai Lama as saying, “world peace begins with inner peace.”

- g) Jesus would say the same thing, and take it even closer to home—he would say peace with our families, our neighbors, our co-workers, etc. also begins with inner peace.
- C. All of which begs the next question—how do we find that inner peace that is necessary to be peacemakers? Kolbell has some very helpful hints here as well.
1. He talks about the difference between “reaction” and “response”
 - a) The next time someone pulls into the parking space ahead of you at Meijer’s that you had all picked out, or when you get in the store and are ready to check out with your three items in the self-serve express lane and the guy ahead of you has a whole cart full of stuff, do you react or respond?
 - b) To react is to do what comes to mind first—to give in to that flash of anger and react accordingly. If you honk your horn, or worse, that’s a reaction.
 - c) To respond suggests taking a deep breath and responding within yourself that it doesn’t really matter where you park—that maybe having to park further away is even better; just think of the extra exercise you’ll get if you have to walk a little further.
 2. He refers to the need to “turn the other cheek” sometimes as the act of a peacemaker who understands the need for inner peace.
 - a) This is not to suggest that the initial hit we receive on the first cheek doesn’t hurt, it just means that we are to get beyond that and not react in kind by hitting right back.
 - b) The people I’ve known over the years who have discovered the gift of inner peace are those who have also discovered the art of turning the other cheek.
 3. And then finally he talks about this ability to allow anger and pain into us without being absorbed by it.
 - a) In other words, to have the inner peace necessary to be a good peacemaker, it doesn’t mean that we have to wear Teflon suits and let everything roll off.
 - b) But to not be absorbed by anger and pain means that we don’t just give it back in the same way we received it.

- c) And sometimes we are the best peacemakers when we offer people a different kind of example of how to handle whatever that conflicted situation is.
- d) Kolbell calls it the ability to “not rise to the bait”.
- e) How are you at “not rising to the bait”? A sign of a peacemaker is one who doesn’t rise to the bait.

D. And then the other connection to make in all of this is that which James makes in the passage we heard. Jesus always connected peace with justice. And James makes the connection by saying that peacemakers are the ones who not just plant the seeds of peace, but they harvest justice.

1. So what are we doing to harvest justice?
2. What are we doing to bring Jesus’ vision of God’s kingdom of a place where all persons are equal?
3. When we make this connection, we realize that even today, we can become peacemakers. Using that definition of “peacemaking”, we understand that:
 - a) When we buy an item for the UMCOR Birthing Kits, we are being peacemakers.
 - b) When we serve in some way when we host Family Promise as we did last week, we are being peacemakers.
 - c) When we support our youth this morning in attending their breakfast, as we help them to go out to be peacemakers as they will this summer in Chicago, we too are peacemakers.
 - d) So what are you doing right now to harvest seeds of justice? There are so many opportunities to do that, and any time we do, we are blessed by God as His peacemakers.

III. Conclusion—So that’s the first half—what it takes to be peacemakers. What about the second half? In the original, it says “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called “sons of God”. We used the more inclusive version this morning, which says “they will be called “children of God.” A couple of thoughts on this:

- A. First, it’s interesting to note that Jesus may have had something deeper going on in this beatitude.
 1. Historians tell us that the Roman Emperors of the time liked to call themselves “peacemakers” (even though they were anything but)

2. They also called themselves “sons of God” or even “God”.
 3. So was Jesus sort of taking on the Emperor in this beatitude? Was there a not-so-hidden agenda in his choice of words here?
 4. Was he really saying to his people something like “Blessed are you when you are my kind of peacemaker, for when you are, you are a true son of God.” Or in other words, “In your peacemaking, don’t be like the emperor, be like me.”
 5. Was he raising the gauntlet not just against the ruling authorities but for his own people that they might be true peacemakers?
 6. Knowing Jesus, my guess is probably so. And so the gauntlet is also raised before us, to be true peacemakers in an era when peacemaking is often given lip service by those in charge.
- B. And then as I consider us as “children of God”, I can help but come back to those kids in the back seat of the car in the skit.
1. Because the truth is that even as children of God, we are so often like them. “Are we there yet, are we there yet, are we there yet?...” “He started it! No I didn’t! Yes, you did!” So often, those kids are us!
 2. Even for the children of God, the notion of peace and being a peacemaker can be a difficult thing.
 3. So if that’s us in the back seat and God in the front seat, the good news is that unlike the father in the skit, God never leaves us behind at the gas station!
 4. Even when we struggle with being peacemakers, God’s gift of peace to us through the ultimate peacemaker, the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, is unconditional and eternal.
 5. So until we get to heaven, until we are perfect peacemakers, maybe the version of the beatitude that can help us the most would go something like, “Blessed even are you who try to achieve inner peace, who try to be peacemakers, for even when you struggle, as children of God, you have been given God’s peace.”
- C. So may we accept God’s gift of peace in the spirit in which it has been given. God gives the gift of peace to us as the ultimate and eternal peacemaker. May we absorb that gift into our hearts and spirits that we might be the kind of peacemakers that Jesus calls us to be.