

July 5, 2015

THE PEACEMAKERS

Matthew 5:1-12

There is a peace that is the absence of war, the absence of destruction, the absence of violence the absence of killing. It's called a truce. A good friend of mine told me about the cessation of fighting in Viet Nam for the holiday of Christmas one year. It was quiet in an eerie sort of way. There was nowhere to go, no preparations to make, no fighting to fear. But one of his comrades said to him, "This kind of peacefulness is scary."

The land around them was devastated, villages were in ruin, the local people were homeless, diseased, and hungry. In spite of the fact that there was an interlude of no fighting in the conflict, the conflict still existed. It was only a truce, and, for many of the young men, it lasted too long..., because it lasted long enough to let them cry. They cried for what had happened up to the truce, and they cried for what they knew would happen when the truce was over. And they knew the truce would not last long.

The conflict still existed. The peace was not real. It was scary. Scary, because the tensions were still high, because trouble still lay ahead, because it was still war. Once upon a time, war made heroes. But I think we've learned... War means body-bags. War means arms, legs, and faces maimed and distorted. War means that something is not right with the world.

The United Methodist Social Principles, on War and Peace, states: (pp. VI, c) "We believe war is incompatible with the teachings and example of Christ. We therefore reject war as an instrument of national foreign policy and insist that the first moral duty of all nations is to resolve by peaceful means every dispute that arises between or among them; that human values must outweigh military claims as governments determine their priorities; that the militarization of society must be challenged and stopped; that the manufacture, sale, and deployment of armaments must be reduced and controlled; and that the production, possession, or use of nuclear weapons be condemned."

The United Methodist Church believes in peace *with* justice! There is no peace if there is a lack of justice.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God.

True peacemakers want justice for all.

Conflict, tension, trouble. These things don't only exist in times of war. There are conflicts all around us, ...and within us. In our families, in our communities, in our nation, and in our hearts. Everywhere we look, unless we turn away and try to ignore it, there is trouble. And people live in tension all the time. The Hebrew word for peace is *shalom*. The Greek word in the New Testament for *shalom* is *eirene*. It's where we get the name Irene. Shalom/Eirene in their fullest sense mean wholeness, well-being, health. It includes prosperity, welfare, and security. And it also includes quietness, rest, and tranquility. But in each sense, it always implies a relationship, a *right* relationship: to self, to God, and to others.

Peace Within the Self – Inner peace is the first effect of purity of heart. "*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*" Because of inner confusion, however, and a lack of consistency, our inner

tensions make us a walking civil war. Because he felt moments when his heart was less than pure, even Paul said, in Romans 7:19: *I know that nothing good dwells within me. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do.*

It's said that you can't be happy if you don't like yourself. In a way, that's not entirely true....if, we count ignorance as bliss. Not knowing our inner confusions, or, by simply ignoring them, some people aren't aware of the inner tensions and conflicts that may exist. We need to remember that an unexamined life is not worth living. (According to Socrates) So... I don't believe such people can really know true happiness. An unexamined life does not deal with the problems there are, and could never know the blessing of finding a sense of inner peace, a sense of serenity. I would rather say that you can't be happy if you can't accept yourself. And acceptance is the first part of peace.

Studdert Kennedy published a poem that describes the feelings of a soldier in the First World War:

Our padre says I'm a sinner, and John Bull says I'm a saint,
And they're both of them bound to be liars, for I'm neither of them, I ain't.
I'm a man and a man's a mixture, right down from his very birth,
For part of him comes from heaven, and part of him comes from earth.
There's nothing in him that's perfect; there's nothing that's all complete.
He's nobbut a great beginning from his dead to the soles of his feet.

Nothing but a great beginning. William Barclay describes humankind as "part ape and part angel." We're a mixture. Peace is sorting things out....and putting them in the right order. So, in a way, we are all peacemakers trying to make peace within ourselves, trying to find an angel – to be what we'll become – trying to find an inner wholeness, an inner well-being, an inner health, a sense of order, and a sense of self-control

Peace with God – Peace within is connected to peace with God. We can't really be right with ourselves, or, with anyone else for that matter, until we can be right with God. This peace with God is the foundation of all right relationships. Peace is living in harmony with God's plan. Righteous obedience gives us peace. Psalm 119:165 says: *Those who love Thy law have great peace.* Isaiah 26:3 says: *Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee.* Perfect peace! Isaiah 32:17 says: *The effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and rest forever!*

Peace is reconciliation, a returning to a right relationship with God. Colossians 1:20 says: *Through Jesus, God has reconciled all things to Himself, making peace by the Blood of the Cross.* And also Philippians 4:7: *The peace of God which passes all understanding, will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.* Colossians 3:15: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts!

Let there be peace! Peace is there just waiting for us to let it happen. But it happens because of the love that binds everything together in perfect harmony. God loves me, and that's enough to give me peace...the peace of security, the peace of tranquility, of wholeness, and well-being. God loves me....and, God loves you! The only thing that prevents us from living together in peaceful harmony is the barriers we hold in place. We need to break down those barriers and be able to say: God loves you, and so do I! Peacemakers are barrier-breakers!

Peace with Others – What are those barriers? What is it that keeps us from loving others? ...form healthy and whole relationships? It's got to be more than race or gender or class or age or language. We've experienced over and over how those walls keep tumbling down. And yet there is still a battle between the reconciling influences we believe in and the disruptive influences we fail to defeat completely.

In a way, it all returns back to our lack of inner peace. When we can't accept ourselves, when we feel insecure about ourselves, we project our own inner tensions on to others. We carry a bundle of emotional baggage that leaves us angry, grudging, and bitter. But it's the other who is always wrong, not us. At least that's the way we tend to think. And we refuse to try to understand each other. Our anxieties and insecurities are revealed in our inability to be truly reconciled to each other. And more often than not, we end up living in a state of truce rather than a state of peace. A truce may seem good, but it will never quite make the peace that brings us the full blessing of being the children of God. Sometimes a truce can be a barrier itself.

Peace with others is built upon each person's relationship with God. And the love that is needed for such a harmony with God is a result of faith. For without faith, true forgiveness and mercy are hard to come by. We fall short of peace, because we fall short of faith.

Children of God – And it is the peace makers that are blessed and called the children of God! Not the peace-feelers! Feeling peace may be nice, but it brings no divine blessing. It's not the peace lovers, or, peace-hopers, or, even peace-prayers, but *makers*, builders, creators. Unless we work for understanding; unless we work for reconciliation; unless we work for positive social change; unless we struggle to resolve our conflicts and fashion a peacefulness out of our confusions, striking at the roots of the problems instead of just proclaiming truce after truce; unless we do this, we will never know peace as God planned it! We will never know *shalom*. We need to cure the disease instead of merely salving the symptoms.

There are a lot of troublemakers all around us, and in order for us to let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts, we can't let the troublemakers plant seeds that take root. God relieves us of this. We no longer feel like victims, but victors. The ultimate work of peace-making is reconciling others with God, for as long as people are at odds with God, they are at odds with themselves, and with their neighbors. Jesus is the Prince of Peace. Peacemaking is what God does. God's Kingdom is a Kingdom of peace. Christ is the reconciliation of God. And to be a peacemaker is to reflect the image of God the way Jesus did.

They shall be called the children of God! And we already are the children of God! God is our Father in Heaven. We are created with this special relationship already among us. But to be a real child of God includes recognizing all people as our brothers and sisters. Then peace becomes a power among us... the power to build up, the power to heal, because I am a child of God. A CHILD OF GOD!!! What is there that we cannot do? We are God's children! Peacemakers!

Let me conclude by telling a story: Back in the early 1940s, the fields of two ranchers shared the same property line. One summer when the rain was scarce, good grazing land became hard to find, and the cattle wandered back and forth across the open fields as they always did. Out of their frustration,

each rancher blamed the other for using up each other's good grazing land, and friends became feuders. One day, one of the angry ranchers went out and dug a trench along his side of the boundary line. When the second rancher saw it, he came out and dug a trench along *his* side of the property line. Then the first man came out and dug a deeper trench, a wider trench. Well, pretty soon they had a great, impassible ditch!

It so happened that right about that time, a stranger stopped at the house of the first rancher, asking for work. The rancher said, yes; build a fence along that ditch. At the end of the day, the rancher went out to see how the job was going. He was shocked. Instead of a fence, the stranger had built a bridge. He had also opened a channel by a nearby creek and water was already pouring through the ditch connecting down-stream with a river. He was about to get angry with the stranger when he suddenly heard the other rancher calling out, smiling as he came across the bridge with his hand out, saying, "What made you think of that idea? This is fantastic! With a little creek through here, our fields will never go dry!" As they continued to apologize to each other and compliment each other, they didn't notice the stranger walking off. The first rancher turned to thank him, but noticing that he was leaving, he called out, "Hey! I've got a lot more work for you to do!" The stranger turned and called back, "Yeah, but I've got a lot more bridges to build!"

Peace! Peace making!