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The Beatitudes – “Blessed Are the Peacemakers”

Intro to Worship

Each week of our series on the Beatitudes, we've been unpacking Jesus' words in this opening section of the Gospel of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. Some weeks, we've had deep a-ha's as we've learned that Jesus didn't mean quite what we've always thought! This week we explore the second to the last Beatitude, “Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God.” So now I invite you in to the mindset of peacemaking, to look deeply at your life and our world as we wrestle with where Jesus might be calling us to be peacemakers this day. As you open yourself to this journey, let us join our voices in the refrain printed in the bulletin, celebrating the blessings of our call.

1 Peter 3: 9-11

Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing. For “Those who desire life and desire to see good days, let them keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit; let them turn away from evil and do good; let them seek peace and pursue it.

Matthew 5: 9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

When I was younger, still living at home with my sisters, I prided myself at being the peacekeeper in the family. Whenever trouble was brewing, I would step in and try to help keep the peace between my sisters, whether it was a

sister to sister conflict, or tension between sisters and my parents, and eventually between my parents (that never went so well). With my sisters, I would insert myself into whatever conflict was brewing, trying to de-escalate the trouble because I couldn't stand to see people fighting with each other – especially my sisters. I would actually be happy if they ended up mad at me rather than each other, as long as THEY had stopped fighting! What I didn't realize at the time, being the youngest, was that sometimes, conflict IS a way of moving toward peace. Sometimes there are conversations that need to be had, issues that need to be discussed in order to clear the air and work on the health of a relationship.

Peace does not always mean a lack of conflict. Our Biblical understanding of peace encompasses justice and righteousness – a faithfulness to God's call to love your neighbor as yourself – which happens on a one to one basis, and in a larger community sense as well. The “peace at any price” mentality is far from any biblical command. Keeping the peace, does not mean appeasing people... you can never make everyone happy all the time. Putting our head in the sand, hoping that the conflict will end, only delays the inevitable. As uncomfortable as conflict can be, the person who glosses over the problems, acting as if everything is alright when it is not, is not a peacemaker.

Peace making – which Jesus calls us to in our text today – is more complicated than appeasing, avoiding, and glossing over the trouble brewing below the surface. When you look deeper at the words of our text, pulling apart the compound word, we find PEACE, and MAKERS – so let's take them each in turn.

The word PEACE is the Hebrew word shalom. Often used as a greeting or a departing word in much the same way we would utter “hello” or “goodbye.” It is a broad term related to health, prosperity, harmony, and wholeness. It means perfect welfare, serenity, fulfillment, freedom from trouble, and liberation from anything that keeps us from contentment. When a Jew said “Shalom” they were wishing on another the full presence, peace, and prosperity of all the blessedness of God. The famous Biblical benediction found in Numbers chapter 6 communicates this idea very clearly: “May the LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make His face shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace” (Num. 6:24-25). This peace, this shalom, is something we all need a bit more of these days!

Our second word MAKE in the term “peacemakers” comes from the Greek verb that means “to do” or “to make.” It is a word bursting with energy. It mandates action and initiative. Notice Jesus did not say “Blessed are the peacewishers or the peacehoppers or the peacedreamers or the peacelovers or the peacetalkers.” Peace must be made. Peace never happens by chance. A peacemaker is never passive. They always take the initiative. They are up and doing.

So when these two words are taken together, “peace” and “maker,” it describes one who actively pursues peace. The peacemaker pursues more than the absence of conflict; they don't avoid strife (in fact, sometimes, peacemaking will create strife); they aren't merely seeking to appease the warring parties; they aren't trying to accommodate everyone. Instead, they are pursuing all the beauty and blessedness of God upon another. As William Barclay translates this verse, “They are people who produce right relationships in every sphere of life” – peace with God, peace within one's own heart, and peace with and among others.

Peace with God and with self begin with reflection and prayer. With a willingness to look inward and see where we have missed the mark, where we have railed against or ignored God's desires for our lives and our world, where we have gone against our own better nature and inclinations to extend a hand of care to someone in need. Ghandi said “outward peace is useless without inward peace” – and it is only when we take time to reflect and pray – when we get right with ourselves and God – that we can find this deep inner peace.

This inner peace can be found and maintained even when the world is seemingly falling apart around us. This past week at the Bishop's Convocation, pastors from our conference explored together the principles of a resource called “The Anatomy of Peace” by The Arbinger Institute. We looked at what it meant to have a heart of peace as opposed to a heart of war – a way of looking at and interacting with the people around us as if they matter just as much as we do – which means treating them as people, rather than objects. We looked at the conflicts we were experiencing in our lives, family relationships, and within our churches and looked critically at the way people treat others, and how we respond when things are going wrong. The biggest takeaway I have from this conference is that peacemaking is always an option, even when it feels impossible. When we maintain a heart of peace, keeping true to ourselves and God's nudges in our spirit, treating people with respect, loving our neighbor as ourselves, we can set aside our warring attitudes and

behaviors, and live into God's shalom. In his book *Being Peace*, Thich Nhat Hanh wrote, "Because of our interconnectedness, or our inter being, when we have peace as an individual, there is no way we can help it from influencing and affecting everyone around us."

Which brings us to the second part of our beatitude. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God." One of the bedrocks of my theology and of our understanding as a church with a heart for social justice is that we are ALL beloved Children of God. I don't hear this beatitude challenging that... what I hear is that when we live and act as peacemakers in our lives and world, we resemble God – we're a chip off the ol' block – reminding others of God in action. We are reflecting God's love back out into our world, and we inspire others to think of God's ways, and inherit God's characteristics. We bear God's image, helping others experience the hands, voice, and heart of God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Children of God. Let us be people who are so blessed. Children of God that bind people together in love, lift one another up, and strive to live in peace. Amen.