

Title: The Peacemakers

Text: Matthew 5:9

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

I find this anything but a peaceful text. It is one of the most disturbing words that Jesus ever spoke.

Inner peace is what we all want, and what is most certainly promised in the Gospel. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you." So, we come here in search of that peace. And we are not wrong.

But, if we think that the peace of which the Bible speaks is a soothing syrup of the soul to be taken once a week as directed, we are most terribly mistaken. If we think it is the kind of peace that is so often offered by the world, the peace that soothes us through forgetfulness, the peace of a temporary euphoria, the peace of a second martini, then we have not heard Christ speak: "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you."

The tranquilizers of the world are easily understood; but the peace of God that blesses us "passeth all understanding." For it comes through struggle; it comes through pain. It is the gift of the risen Christ in whose hands are still the marks of the nails.

As Studdert-Kennedy put it: "Peace does not mean the end of our ~~striving~~/ striving,/ Joy does not mean the drying of our tears;/ Peace is the power that comes to souls arriving/ Up to the light where God himself appears."

In other words, there is no quick way to this peace of God. The blessedness of peace is for the peacemakers.

PEACEMAKERS --- that is the disturbing word. "Blessed are the peaceful, the peaceable" --that is the way we would like the beatitude to read. For that is quite simple. People of a peaceful disposition are usually happy. But the word is not passive, but active. Blessed are the peaceMAKERS. There is a job to be done.

In a time of acute conflict - nation against nation, race against race, generation against generation, strife in the home, in the streets, in the schools, in industry - people as never before long for peace. The churches pray for peace. Everyone talks peace.

But how many of us are really peaceMAKERS? When we pray here for peace, are we enlisting as active servants of peace, or are we like the harassed mother of a large and squabbling family who cries: "For goodness' sake, give me a little peace"? Do we really want to face our responsibilities as Christians in a world of conflict, or are we simply seeking to be left alone in relative comfort and tranquility?

I find this word of Christ disturbing because it forces me to face the ugly questions and supplies no easy answers.

9 How would you make peace in Vietnam? It would be nice to forget about it, wouldn't it? It's far away. Let us leave it to the statesmen and the generals. But in a democracy all that is done in our name is our business. Who knows how soon in our world a distant spark may become a confrontation that engulfs us all? In the eyes of God a Vietnamese village is as precious as ~~Man~~ Porterville and a suffering child as important as a suffering child anywhere on earth.

How do you make peace? There are some Christians who give the radical answer: Refuse to fight; abandon all arms. But most of us are unconvinced that such a course would make peace. It could have the exact opposite effect.

A peaceMAKER has a more positive task than mere refusal to fight. The true peaceMAKER looks beyond the surface explosions to the great ~~y~~ unresolved problems of world poverty, hunger, and overpopulation.

How do we make peace nearer home, in a situation of racial tension and potential violence? Here, again, the temptation is to see the ~~blessed~~ blessedness of the peaceful rather than that of the peaceMAKER. But there is a situation on our doorstep that cries out for the attention of the peacemaker: murder, narcotics addiction, slum housing, crises in education - and with it all the most colossal public apathy that afflicts us all. Listen to the words of the prophet Jeremiah: "They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, 'Peace, peace'; when there is no peace." Are we the people who are healing lightly, saying, "Peace, Peace; when there is no peace"?

Let us look at another situation, still closer to each one of us. Tension and conflict are not just out there - in the world and in the nation. They are sometimes in our homes, our businesses, our personal relationships. I am talking about what modern jrgon would call "intra-personal maladjustment," but most of us know as a good, old-fashioned quarrel, brawl, fight, or disagreement.

It is worth noting that the first picture the Bible gives us of the family of fallen man is the story of Cain and Abel. The Fall is followed by a falling out. And that has been the story ever since. There is no home, no community, no group of people working, playing, or even worshipping together where there is never any moment of tension, never anything that could be called a quarrel or disagreement.

The temptation of the peaceable is always to withdraw from trouble. As long as we can, we pretend it is not there. When it is forced on our attention, we try to smooth it over, to "heal lightly."

But the peaceMAKER is the one who is willing to take the consequences of involvement, the one who wants to know the truth, and the one who gives himself with courage and with patience to the work of reconciliation. He is the one whom Jesus calls "blessed."

Come nearer home still. There is a question to be asked that underlies the tensions of the world, the nation, and of personal relations. Are you at peace with yourself? How much of the strife in our world is caused by men and women who are not really at peace with themselves?

Shakespeare, in describing the conflicting forces in us at a moment of great decision, says that "the state of man, like to a little kingdom, suffers <sup>like</sup> the nature of an insurrection." We all know how often the hostilities that break out between men are the result of civil war within.

If we are at times driven to acknowledge that the conflict exists, we strive in all kinds of ways to make our peace with God. We use this expression freely, but the N. T. has little to say about our making peace with God. It tells us of something infinitely more important and magnificently liberating: <sup>through Christ</sup> GOD HAS MADE PEACE WITH US.

This is why Christ came - to proclaim and effect our peace with God. "For he is himself our peace," says <sup>The Apostle</sup> Paul. In the conflict of the soul, in the turmoil of the conscience, in the torment of our guilt, he is the great Peacemaker. It was for this Christ came with the angel-chorus of "Peace on earth"; it was for this Christ lived as the healer of the bodies and souls of men; it was for this <sup>Christ</sup> he died - a living sacrifice, the just for the unjust - to bring us to God. And it was this peace that <sup>Christ</sup> he bestowed on his disciples when he rose from the grave.

This is no religious fantasy to be indulged in church. For the moment men and women like us received and accepted this message, they knew that there was a new power of peace alive in their world. They did not hug this experience of the peace of God to themselves as a kind of private satisfaction. They realized that the initiative of the Peacemaker was alive in them, and they saw the tension and conflicts of their day in a new light.

*That is Salvation*

There was, for instance, the deepseated hatred of Jew and Gentile. This was, naturally, the first point where the divine initiative went to work. "He is himself our peace," said Paul, and went on immediately: "Gentiles and Jews, he has made the two one, and in his own body of flesh and blood has broken down the ill will which stood like a dividing wall between them....This was his purpose, to reconcile the two in a single body to God through the cross, on which he killed the ill will."

The peace that Christ brings is not only between our souls and God, but also between the warring sections of humanity. The two are one. For we cannot claim to have peace with God as long as we are dividing the world into hostile groups, as long as we refuse to recognize that our neighbor, whatever his nationality or the color of his skin, is one with us in the reconciliation that Christ has made.

The peacemaker, then, in the pattern of Christ, is the one who takes the initiative, who breaks the circle of hostility, who is ready to share the cost of reconciliation. It is this person who shall be called the Child of God.

We know that, ~~when~~ we move in any way toward making peace in the circles where we move, in the city we live, in this world which is torn in conflict, we have behind us the power of the divine Peacemaker who has reconciled the world to himself, and we shall be happy to be called his children.

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