

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday, February 13, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 5:9

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD'S KINGDOM #7 WAGING PEACE

Several years ago, Hollywood discovered a secret about Americans. We love superhero movies. It's something that companies like DC Comics and Marvel have understood for years. Their entire business model is based upon people purchasing comic books that have to do with good vs. evil. We like a good hero, especially one in a cool uniform.

In 2008, Marvel Studios produced the film Iron Man, starring Robert Downey Junior as Tony Stark, weapons mogul turned superhero. The premise of the film is that the Stark family has made billions supplying weapons to the governments of the world. When Tony Stark is injured by one of his own weapons and then put in prison by a group of terrorists, his world view changes, and essentially Tony Stark the weapons manufacturer becomes Tony Stark the superhero. His new role finds him as the ultimate weapon, designed to bring peace to the world.

Iron Man 2 begins where the original film left off, with Tony Stark bragging before congress about what he has brought to the world. Check out this clip. (Iron Man 2 Trailer Clip 0:27)

Wouldn't it be nice if bringing world peace was that simple? In the 1960's Charlton Comics created a new superhero. His name was "The Peacemaker," and he only lasted a couple episodes. His tagline was, "a man who loves peace so much, he's willing to kill for it."¹ Needless to say, the concept didn't work to well.

I found an interesting editorial written by a man named Austin Bay this week. It was written in December of 2003, a couple of years into the current conflict in the Middle East. Bay writes, "At this time of year, when we pray to the Prince of Peace, laud Peace on Earth, and wish one another cheer and goodwill, it is fair to (lament) our terrible condition.

The numbers appall: Depending on how one parses the combat, there are *at this moment* between 80 and 110 armed conflicts (a euphemism for wars grand and petty) occurring around the globe.

Several historical studies have attempted to determine how many years of peace have occurred in humankind's 5,000 years of recorded history. 'The results vary from a few hundred to a few dozen years of peace,' says James Dunnigan, military historian and

¹ <http://mightygodking.com/index.php/2010/01/07/thursday-whos-who-peacemaker/>

editor of www.StrategyPage.com. 'But these exercises always depend on how one defines peace. I would say there have been no years in man's recorded history where there has been no war.'

Why is conflict so endemic to our species? The Italian poet Petrarch wrote: 'Five great enemies to peace inhabit within us: avarice, ambition, envy, anger and pride. If those enemies were to be banished, we should infallibly enjoy perpetual peace.' Avarice, ambition, envy, anger, pride: Shakespeare made villains of them all. They reappear every 30 minutes on cable TV news.

Gen. Marshall observed: 'If man does find the solution for world peace, it will be the most revolutionary reversal of his record we have ever known.'

What is to be done? The eagle on our national seal casts his eyes toward the talons that clutch branches symbolizing peace; the other sharp foot clasps arrows. May God bless our hopes for a world without war. But given the strange mix of heaven and hell that we are, may we pray for the wisdom to prepare for both the worst and the best."²

The fictional Tony Stark found out that no one man can privatize world peace. In 5,000 years of recorded history a few hundred years at best to no years at worst have included true peace on earth.

So where is the peace on earth? And what role do Christians have in being instruments of that peace?

According to Jesus, we have much to do about peace. The next Beatitude in Christ's list appears in Matthew 5:9.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

This may be the most famous of the Beatitudes. President Clinton called this verse the most important words that Jesus spoke. He didn't get it quite right, but check out the clip (Bill Clinton - 0:16). It's not "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall inherit the earth," it's "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God." There is great significance in this, and we're going to dive into it.

Throughout the years, there are those, like President Clinton who would say that being a peacemaker is the essence of the Gospel message. They are correct in the sense that it is the essence of the Gospel, but wrong in the fact that they misunderstand what is meant by being a peacemaker.

I've told you before that Gandhi was particularly struck by Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. His own pacifism was informed by what he believed Jesus to be teaching here. In other words he felt that no war was worthwhile save for the war for peace.

² http://www.strategypage.com/on_point/20031223.aspx

Pacifists throughout the years have taken Jesus' teaching here in the Beatitudes along with Isaiah 2:4 to prove that there is no room for any type of war in this world. Listen to the words of Isaiah 2:4: "4 He will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore."

That will indeed be a great day? But, is this what Jesus was talking about when He spoke of being a peacemaker? Is being a peacemaker the same thing as being a pacifist?

Let's examine that. And once again, I'll defer to the Greek scholar, Kent Hughes: "Fundamental to understanding what Christ is saying is the precise meaning of the exquisite word 'peacemakers.' Taking the first half of the word, *peace*, we understand it to mean much the same as the Hebrew word *shalom*, which bears the idea of wholeness and overall well-being. When a Jew said, 'Shalom,' he was wishing another more than the absence of trouble, but all that made for a complete, whole life. God's peace is not narrowly defined. It is much more than the absence of strife; it encompasses all of the person – it is positive.

The second half of the word, *makers*, demands that we understand that the person is not passive but is a source of peace. As it is used here, it is a dynamic word bursting with energy. Both parts of the word 'peacemakers,' taken together, describe one who actively pursues peace in its fullness. He pursues more than the absence of conflict; he pursues wholeness and well-being.

Bearing that in mind, we can then understand what a peacemaker is not. A peacemaker is not, as is commonly supposed, the kind of person who is easygoing and *laissez-faire*, who does not care what anyone else does as long as it does not directly affect him. Neither is the peacemaker always tolerant – 'you do your thing and I'll do mine.' Nor is the peacemaker an appeaser – the kind who wants peace at any price.' Appeasement does not make for peace. It just puts off the conflict. The history of Europe during the 1930s is the classic example of this.

The true peacemaker, contrary to what most people think, is not afraid of making waves."³

The true peacemaker is not afraid of making waves. Does that sound like a peacemaker to you?

In our second sermon in this series, I mentioned a little book that I downloaded for my Kindle by A.W. Pink. Pink was a theologian and pastor, who died in 1952. After his death, many of the pamphlets and booklets that he had written were picked up by a number of publishing houses. Biographer Iain Murray writes, "the widespread circulation of his

³ Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 62.

writings after his death made him one of the most influential evangelical authors in the second half of the twentieth century.”⁴

Pink gives his readers some important guidelines for interpreting this text. He writes, “Three things must guide us in seeking the true interpretation: (1) the character of those to whom our Lord was speaking; (2) the place occupied by our text in the series of Beatitudes; and (3) its connection with the Beatitude that follows.”⁵

Great points! Pink nails it, as he does so often in his writings. A true scholar of the Word understands the context of the text.

Jesus is speaking to a group of Jewish people who are awaiting Messiah. Their understanding of Messiah is that Messiah will be a military ruler. Under the Old Covenant, Israel was to destroy their enemy. Jesus would change that. Remember the angelic pronouncement of Jesus’ birth? What was pronounced to the earth in Luke 2:14?

14 “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.”

Jesus came to bring peace. One of the names of Messiah in Isaiah 9:6 is “Prince of Peace.” Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker.

Pink is clear to point out the number of this Beatitude. It is the seventh beatitude. Seven is a significant number to the Jew and to the Christian. It is the number of completion. That Jesus made this the seventh Beatitude is significant. He writes, “Perhaps the fact that this is the *seventh* Beatitude indicates that it was our Lord’s intent to teach that it was this attribute that gives *completeness* or wholeness to Christian character. We must certainly conclude that it is an unspeakable privilege to be sent forth as ambassadors of peace. Furthermore, those who fancy themselves to be Christians, yet have no interest in the salvation of fellow sinners, are self-deceived. They possess a defective Christianity, and have no right to expect to share in the blessed inheritance of the children of God.”⁶

The verse really begins to make sense when we pair it with the Beatitude that follows. Take a look at Matthew 5:10-12.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

We’ll dive into this Beatitude in depth next week, but remember the Beatitudes are interpreted in pairs. The peacemaker knows that they will endure persecution.

⁴ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A.w._pink

⁵ Arthur Pink, *The Beatitudes, Kindle Edition*, (Public Domain), p. 397.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 411.

The person who is a peacemaker is actively involved in sharing Christ with others, aware of the persecution that may come as a result of doing so. He is even willing to share Christ with the enemy to the Gospel in hopes of seeing that person reconciled and brought to peace with God. We cannot call ourselves sons of God (the reward of this Beatitude) if we are not interested in seeing others come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

I think it goes beyond this. A peacemaker is someone who is characterized by being a person of truth. Look at the Old Testament book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a prophet. He was one who stood in the gap between God and man, delivering the truth, even when it was tough to hear.

In Ezekiel 13:10-12, the prophet gave a warning to those who say that everything is just fine when it really isn't.

10 "Because they lead my people astray, saying, "Peace," when there is no peace, and because, when a flimsy wall is built, they cover it with whitewash, 11 therefore tell those who cover it with whitewash that it is going to fall. Rain will come in torrents, and I will send hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth. 12 When the wall collapses, will people not ask you, "Where is the whitewash you covered it with?"

Peacemakers are honest. They tell the truth even when it hurts.

The prophet Jeremiah gave a similar warning about those who lie about the condition of our hearts toward God. In Jeremiah 6:14 he writes, "14 They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace."

Kent Hughes writes, "How true this speaks to real life! We tend to putty over the cracks. This is particularly a male tendency. Even in our most intimate relationships, men tend to act as if everything is OK when it is not. Men often avoid reality because they want peace. But their avoidance heals the wound only slightly and prepares the way for greater trouble."⁷

Think about this when it comes to sharing our faith. How many of us want to avoid speaking the truth. There is a God and there is a devil. There is a heaven and there is a hell. Those who are Christians will spend eternity in heaven. Those who are not will spend eternity in hell. We, who have experienced the grace of God, need to be honest. We need to speak the truth in love. Peacemakers are concerned with others experiencing peace with God.

I read a convicting old poem this week. The author is unknown. Listen to its words:

You lived next door to me for years
We shared our dreams, our joys, and tears.

⁷ Hughes, p. 63.

A friend to me you were indeed...
 A friend who helped me when in need.
 My faith in you was strong and sure
 We had such trust as should endure.
 No spats between us ever rose;
 Our friends were like...and so our foes.
 What sadness then, my friend, to find
 That after all you weren't so kind.
 The day my life on earth did end
 I found you weren't a faithful friend.
 For all those years we spent on earth
 You never talked of second birth.
 You never spoke of my lost soul
 And of the Messiah Who'd make me whole.
 I plead today from Hell's cruel fire
 And tell you now my last desire.
 You cannot do a thing for me...
 No words today my bonds will free.
 But do not err, my friend, again;
 Do all you can for souls of men.
 Plead with them now quite earnestly,
 Lest they be cast in Hell with me.⁸

Peacemakers are honest about the true status of peace.

They are also willing to risk pain in order to pursue peace.

Hughes writes, "Any time we attempt to bring peace personally or societally, we necessarily risk misunderstanding and failure. If we have been wrong, there is the pain of apologizing. On the other hand, we may have to shoulder the equally difficult pain of rebuking another. In any case, the peacemaker has to be willing to 'risk it.' The temptation is to let things slide. It is so easy to rationalize that trying to bring true peace will 'only make things worse.'

These two qualities of the peacemaker – honesty about the true status of peace and a willingness to risk pain in pursuing peace – beautifully anticipate the next quality, which is a paradox: *the peacemaker is a fighter*. He makes trouble to make peace. He wages peace.

God's Word enjoins such peacemaking, telling us to 'make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace' (Ephesians 4:3) and to 'make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification' (Romans 14:19), 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone; (Romans 12:18). St. Francis of Assisi understood this call to the active pursuit of peace: '*Lord, make me an instrument of Thy*

⁸ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/w/witnessing.htm>

peace. Where there is hate, may I bring love; Where offense, may I bring pardon; May I bring union in a place of discord."⁹

The peacemakers reward is that they and they only are called sons and daughters of God. One of the senses in which this word is translated is that we take upon ourselves the characteristics of God. When we are peacemakers we are like Christ.

The world may think you a fool for trying so desperately to bring the peace that you have experienced between you and God to them. Christ tells us that we are to go and make disciples of all nations. He tells us that it will be difficult, but He is with us. He is the ultimate example of being a peacemaker. Our life is not just about today. Peacemakers will be called sons and daughters of God for eternity. May your life reflect Him!

This is the last of the Beatitudes that talk about the character of the citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. All of the other Beatitudes have led up to this point. Followers of Jesus recognize our spiritual poverty; there is nothing in us to merit God's grace. We mourn over our sin as we recognize the condition of our hearts and the price that Christ paid to redeem us from sin. We are meek in our dealings with other people, valuing them more than we value ourselves. We hunger and thirst for righteousness, wanting more of God and less of the world. We are merciful in our dealings with others treating them with grace and love. We seek to live lives that are pure, recognizing that a pure heart comes from the Holy Spirit's work in us. And now, we, having "having been so infused by Christ's peace and the character of the kingdom, are peacemakers."

Hughes writes, "Peacemakers are those whom the entire Beatitudes course again and again – sometimes in order, sometimes out of order, sometimes singly, sometimes all together. They have the character of the King – they are peacemakers."¹⁰

I close with this story from ancient Rome.

Telemachus was a monk who lived in the 4th century. He felt God saying to him, "Go to Rome." He was in a cloistered monastery. He put his possessions in a sack and set out for Rome. When he arrived in the city, people were thronging in the streets. He asked why all the excitement and was told that this was the day that the gladiators would be fighting and killing each other in the coliseum, the day of the games, the circus. He thought to himself, "Four centuries after Christ and they are still killing each other, for enjoyment?" He ran to the coliseum and heard the gladiators saying, "Hail to Caesar, we die for Caesar" and he thought, "this isn't right." He jumped over the railing and went out into the middle of the field, got between two gladiators, held up his hands and said "In the name of Christ, forbear." The crowd protested and began to shout, "Run him through, Run him through." A gladiator came over and hit him in the stomach with the back of his sword. It sent him sprawling in the sand. He got up and ran back and again said, "In the name of Christ, forbear." The crowd continued to chant, "Run him through." One gladiator came over and

⁹ Hughes, p. 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

plunged his sword through the little monk's stomach and he fell into the sand, which began to turn crimson with his blood. One last time he gasped out, "In the name of Christ forbear." A hush came over the 80,000 people in the coliseum. Soon a man stood and left, then another and more, and within minutes all 80,000 had emptied out of the arena. It was the last known gladiatorial contest in the history of Rome.¹¹

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

¹¹ <http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/p/peacemakers.htm>