

Blessed are the Peacemakers, the Daughters and Sons of God

Matthew 5:9; 43-49; Romans 12:16-18

He rode into Jerusalem, not on a war-horse but on a donkey, without a weapon, without armor. He came as a servant-king and a servant-Messiah, and he was strung up on a tree. But they sang hosannas to him that day:

Hosanna!

Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord.

Peace in heaven and glory in

the highest heaven.

We still do. “Blessed are the peace-makers”, Jesus said, “for they shall be called the daughters and sons of God.” He was a king of peace whose way we seek to follow today.

Jesus also said, with his last beatitude, “Blessed are those who are persecuted for the sake of justice and righteousness.” The road to peacemaking is sometimes bumpy; peacemaking and persecution too often go together.

His love poured out on a cross was a love made eloquent in suffering, and that love lives! And today we sing with Christians all over the world, “Hosanna, hosanna!”

## I

Today's beatitude makes peace-making our calling. It's how we become sons and daughters of God. Have you heard the old expression: "She's a spitting image of her mother! He's a spitting image of his dad?" I've never quite understood the image, but peacemaking is how we become the spitting image of God.

Peacemaking is most of all something we *do*. "Do unto others", Jesus said, "as you would have them do unto you." Or, as Wendell Berry expands the meaning, "Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you." We all live upstream to some and downstream from others.

As Muslim people begin their holy season of Ramadan, I recall the version of the Golden Rule in their Koran: "No person has faith until they love for the neighbor what they love for themselves." That may be where peacemaking begins.

So, in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus says loving your enemy is doing something, praying for them, doing good to them. This, Jesus says, is how you become "children of the Most High." For God, he says in Luke's version, "is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Then Luke closes the section not as Matthew does with Jesus saying "Be *perfect* as you *Abba* in heaven is *perfect*", but "Be *merciful* as your *Abba* is *merciful*." Mercy is how we imitate God.

All the beatitudes seem to circle back here: The poor-in-spirit, the mourners, the gentle ones, those famished for justice and righteousness, the merciful, the peacemakers, all brought together here in the spiritual path Jesus teaches and call us along.

## II

We might say, “Yes, but how do we pull this off?!” It certainly goes against the grain of the world.

We could begin here: Peace-making is not peace-keeping! It is not smoothing over things. Jesus did not say, “Blessed are the smoothers!” It does not paper over the cracks in the wall. Sometimes we try to keep a peace that is really not peace.

The prophet Jeremiah lamented the plight of his people:

The have treated the wounds of my people carelessly, saying “Peace, peace” where there is no peace.

Peacemakers tend with care to the wounds of the people. A wound not cleansed cannot heal.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was called a “disturber of the peace”, but he was addressing the wounds that were keeping peace from happening.

The Hebrew word for peace, Shalom, means not just the cessation of war but wholeness and healing. There is no peace without justice, without mercy, without equality and fairness.

Last week, April 4, was the anniversary of the assassination of Martin Luther King. Here is the moving poem by Gwendolyn Brooks entitled “Martin Luther King, Jr.”

A man went forth with gifts.

He was a prose poem.

He was a tragic peace.

he was a warm music.

He tried to heal the vivid volcanos.

His ashes are

reading the world

His word still burns the center of the sun

above the thousands and

the hundreds of thousands.

The word was justice. It was spoken.

So it will be spoken.

So it shall be done

“Thy kingdom come”, we pray with Jesus on earth as in heaven.

### III

It seems an urgent question: How do we love our enemy? How do we love across our differences?

The first step may be to love our enemy with our mind. We seek to know them and understand them. We look for the image of God in them. When asked how he could love his enemies who were doing him harm and meaning him harm, he said, “Because I believe that there is something of the best in the worst of us and something of the worst in the best of us.” We may want to raise our hands and say, “But what about...” Jesus won’t let us say, “But what about....” We are all *us*!

We all have this problem Richard Rohr calls “dual-thinking”, dividing the world into us and them. We have this urge to be, in his words, “separate and superior”, churches too! This may be our evolutionary biology, a need to differentiate us and them, me and the other, in order to stay safe. But Jesus calls us to transcend our biology toward a spiritual way that transcends difference that we may love our enemy, or those we think our enemy.

### IV

We must talk for a moment about the church and peacemaking. Since the church and emperor Constantine made a deal in the early 4<sup>th</sup> century, the church has too often backed the wars their nations have waged. The Russian Orthodox Patriarch backing Putin and the invasion of Ukraine is a case in point. Tragically it is less the exception than the rule. Through the centuries the “peace-church” has existed, but mostly as a minority-church. We seek at Grace to be a part of that historic “peace-church” as we affiliate and support the Baptist peace Fellowship of North America. And as we go on our Peace Walk this Good Friday.

We Baptists began as European Anabaptists, persecuted for our beliefs in “believer’s baptism” and pacifism. We took seriously the Beatitudes and the Sermon on the Mount.

In 1569 Dirk Willems, an Anabaptist leader, was facing punishment for his beliefs. He fled his captors. One pursued him onto a frozen lake. The ice began to break under the captor’s feet and he went under. Willems turned back and pulled him out of the icy waters and saved his life. When they went ashore he was arrested and sentenced to die by burning at the stake.

I never heard about that part of our heritage. Our saints were Lottie Moon and Annie Armstrong, not Dirk Willems! May we revive that part of our history as we follow Jesus’ beatitudes, “Blessed are the peacemakers”. Maybe we should have a Dirk Willems Sunday!

## V

Now let's move to the part of the sermon I've been avoiding: peace-making in the most personal and relational dimension, making peace with people who have hurt us, people whom we've come to dislike, those who tempt us to return evil for evil.

In his book on the Beatitudes "The Nine-fold path of Jesus, Mark Sandrette describes spiritual exercise he uses when teaching this beatitude. He asks everyone to write down the list of anyone who gives them an *ugh* in the stomach. Like the one I'm feeling now as I talk about it!

There are many reasons we may feel this *ugh*. It may be something you've done, or they've done. It may be your stuff or their stuff. It may be a terrible misunderstanding that could be cleared up. It could be something you've heard that is not true.

Jesus said, "If you're making your gift at the altar and remember your brother or sister who has something against you, leave your gift at the altar, go be reconciled, then return and make your gift." If a church tried that it might go broke! The issue here is: if you know you've done something wrong to another, go, own up to it and make peace. It does not mean to go confront everyone you have a problem with!

I think Jesus is asking us to take what my professor Glenn Stesson called “Peace-making initiatives”, taking the first step toward healing estrangement.

A beloved professor in one of my former church came to me and said, “My glasses are a bit clouded when I look at you and I want to cleanse my lenses.” “What do you mean?” I asked. He recalled a meeting we were in together recently and how I had said something that took him aback and was clouding how he looked at me. When he recalled what I had said, I acknowledged I had been off-base. The conversation secured our friendship. Many year later he asked me to travel across miles to lead his funeral service.

I had a pediatrician friend in a church long ago who had a colleague he had begun to hate. “I hate that S.O.B”, he said, then told me what he’d decided to do about it. He said, “Every time I wash my hands during the day (that’s a lot of washing of hands for a physician) I am praying for him.” His animosity began to subside. It’s had to keep hating someone you are praying for.

Our best efforts to heal an estrangement and make peace may not work. Paul knew this when he wrote to the Romans:

Live in harmony with one another. (Harmony is not the same as unison!)

Do no be stuck up (as young people would say, don’t think you’re “all that”) and do not think yourself wiser than you are. (Pretty good advice)



And then he said,

*If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all*

We make our tiny (sometimes scary) steps toward reconciliation, and leave the rest with God.

## VI

On this Holy week, Jesus entered Jerusalem on a donkey. People excitedly waved palms. He ate a meal with Martha and Mary in Bethany, and Mary anointed his feet with the most expensive perfumed oil.

Religious leader tried to trap him with their questions.

He ate a meal with his disciples and washed their feet, beginning a meal that has never ended.

He went to the garden and prayed to his *Abba*, that the cross be avoided, then yielded his will into his *Abba's* hands.

When the soldiers came to arrest him, one of the disciples struck one of them and cut his ear off. Jesus healed the man's ear and said to his disciples: "No more! Those who live by the sword die by the sword."

On the Roman cross he prayed, “Abba, forgive them for they know not what they do!” He was praying for us. We never know all we’ve done to others, not fully.

In all these ways Jesus was showing us “the things that make for peace.”

And we today join with those who have been singing these words for over 2,000 years:

Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna! Hosanna!  
Hosanna!

And if we don’t... “The very stones of the earth will cry it out.” If you listen closely, you can hear them.

Amen