

5) THE PEACEMAKERS

'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.' (Matthew 5:9)

1) The challenge of Peace

Conflict happens within families, within communities and among nations. It is a fact of life. The question is, how are conflicts resolved? How is peace achieved? Is peace simply an end to conflict or a deeper state of being in the midst of a world where conflict is a part? What do we need in order to be at peace with ourselves, our lives, with those around us?

Think about places in the world where there is constant conflict – Israel-Palestine, for example. Think about protests against police and government brutality, racism and corruption. Think about how polarized we can become in our own nation and communities between different groups and races, over politics and moral values. Is peace truly a possibility? What would be required?

2) The bible has much to say about conflict and about peace. The book of Esther is a good example of how peace and safety is achieved for the Jews in a time of great peril. And yet, it is a peace that is achieved at a great price – violent revenge on their enemies. The book of Esther is the basis of the Jewish religious holiday called Purim. Peace comes after vengeance is enacted against all enemies of the Jews. It's kill or be killed. But is such peace ever able to go the distance? Is it based on reconciliation, mutual understanding or an acceptance of difference? So what happens when we can't come to such reconciliation, understanding and acceptance? How do we find and protect our safety and that of those we care about in the face of threat? Such negotiations and decisions are a constant reality for so many of us, as it was for the Jewish people at the time of Esther.

3) Matthew 21: 1-11, provides the story of Palm Sunday – the entry of Jesus into Jerusalem on a donkey. A donkey represents a gentle, humble leadership rather than a violent, militant one. In Matthew 10:16, Jesus also says: "See, I am sending you out like sheep in the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves." What is Jesus strategy and approach in a context where there is conflict and violent opposition?

One strategy is to run away from conflict and avoid it. Does Jesus do that? No he does not. Another strategy is to engage it so that we defeat our opponents and put them in their place. Does Jesus do this? No he does not, even though he is in constant conflict and argument with his enemies and he uses strategy to escape their traps (wise as a serpent).

So how does Jesus engage his enemies and deal with the conflict between them? What does the cross reveal as Jesus' way and God's way? What would that look like in our lives and in our world? Where do forgiveness and justice meet? How is conversion from hate and violent conflict to mercy and peace made possible? How is justice served rather than set aside in our struggle for peace? Where must we accept imperfection and compromise for the greater good of peace?

These questions are profoundly relevant not only in our world, but in our personal and more intimate relationships. Do we choose peace too easily, even if it involves setting aside justice, truth and right? Where are we prepared to compromise? Where are we prepared to choose the 'lesser of evils' knowing that there is no perfect or cost-free solution? Where should we be fighting for something better? Do we need to lower our expectations of others and just accept what is as it is? Or, are we copping out from wanting more out of others because we value our worth and deserve to be treated and loved better? Where is justice to be pursued whatever the cost, knowing there is no peace worth having without justice?

Why not spend this week pondering prayerfully before God some of these questions... focussed prayer and meditation always opens up pathways to answers beyond our existing horizons. Also, I'd be glad to engage with you on any one or two questions above that are questions you want to engage a little more deeply. I'm at hathan1964@hotmail.com (Dr. Harris)

FOR NEXT WEEK: Matthew 5: 6, 10-12 – hungering and thirsting after righteousness or justice and being persecuted for it. Also read the book of the prophet Amos (short book). Also, read: Matthew 16: 13-28, where Peter confronts Jesus.