

***The Beatitudes' Worship Series: "Blessed are..." (Matthew 5:1-12)***  
***"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." (Verse 9)***  
***Matthew 5:1-11; Isaiah 32:1-8; 16-18; Psalm 85:8-13; Hebrews 13:20-21***  
***Salem United Methodist Church; August 19, 2018***  
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This summer we are progressing through the Beatitudes which are a preamble to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. Each Sunday we look at one of the Beatitudes in the order they are listed. Each Beatitude names a human condition and a divine promise. Today we are on the next to last Beatitude: "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God." Have you ever experienced peace making? Were you the recipient of peace making or the one who sought to make peace? What was the experience like?

Conflict is everywhere. Children squabble. Couples fight. Friends say or do things that upset the other. Families feud. Churches split. People take each other to court over a disagreement. Politicians create strife. And countries go to war. In addition to all this conflict, within each of us there is conflict waged between what we know we should be and what we actually are. The Apostle Paul admitted to this inner conflict when he wrote, "I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate" (Romans 7:15). Julian of Norwich, a fourteenth century mystic also identified this inner tension in her writing called *Revelations of Divine Love*, "Peace and love are ever in us, being and working; but we be not always in peace and in love." Conflicts within can stem from anger, hate, resentment, bitterness, fears, and self-centeredness and break out upon others creating even more conflict. If conflict is everywhere and in everyone, can peace become a reality? General Omar Bradley didn't think so. He wrote in 1948, "We have grasped the mystery of the atom and rejected the Sermon on the Mount. . . . Ours is a world of nuclear giants and ethical infants. We know more about war than we know about peace, more about killing than we know about living."

The purpose of this Beatitude is to offer a human condition where peace is created out of chaos and conflict. Jesus is well aware that the kingdom on earth is not a peaceful one. There was a lot of hate and hostility in the time of Jesus, as it is in ours today. Jesus lived in the midst of the Roman Empire which claimed *Pax Romana*, or Roman peace, through its military might. Jesus, also, experienced conflict with the Temple authorities. There was also squabbling within his group of disciples over which one Jesus liked the best! Jesus, the face of divine peace, the Prince of Peace, and of whom the angels proclaimed at his birth would bring "Peace on earth and good will to all" enters into a conflicted world to show us the peace that exists in the Kingdom of God. The divine peacemaker not only offers to us the ability to make peace with ourselves, peace with God, and peace with each other, but shows us how. We have the choice to live in peace, as well as the choice to become peacemakers or troublemakers.

Before we delve into peacemaking, we need to define, "peace." In Hebrew the word for peace is *shalom*. During the time of Jesus, people would greet each other with the word, *shalom*, as a means of offering peace to each other. In parts of the Middle East the word, Shalom or Salaam, is still offered as a greeting. The church's name, Salem, comes from the word *shalom* which means serenity, freedom from trouble, contentment, perfect and complete well-being, harmony with God, self, and others. What a great name for a church! Salem is a community of faith that seeks harmony with God, self, and others. Here we strive to create contentment and complete well-being among us. One person has said, "When I walk into this room, no matter what I've dealt with throughout the week, a sense of peace comes over me." That is quite an accolade for this community of faith. We who follow Jesus at Salem work at creating serenity. We listen to one another and seek understanding. There are times we may have to agree to disagree, but we can still offer, "The Peace of the Lord be with you," with a handshake or hug. We are a community of people who seek peace within ourselves, peace with each other, and peace with God. Salem UM Church is a community of peacemakers.

What is a peacemaker? Often a peacemaker has a deep sense of peace within and walks closely with God. A peacemaker who has this inner peace will respond to conflicts differently than someone who reacts out of fear and anger. Have you ever known someone who had this inner serenity and could bring peace and calmness to just about any situation? The peace of God flows through them. They can take chaos, conflict, unhappiness and turn it

into tranquility. We want to be around them and absorb that peace. I knew of a woman like this. Her name was Edna and she lived on top of mountain. Edna had a deep inner peace and it flowed through her like water through a sieve. Many who were in turmoil would drive up the mountain to her very modest home to sit in her peaceful kitchen, and break bread with a cup of tea or coffee and a homemade baked item. In this safe place, one's turmoil could be released. Edna would listen and offer tissues. Everyone who walked out of Edna's place came down the mountain with a sense of peace and the courage to face the world again. Edna was a type of peacemaker, the type that makes peace within.

I learned another type of peacemaking when I was a preschool teacher. There were two preschoolers, Chip and John, who could not be in the same room at the same time without fighting. The teachers tried everything we knew. We kept them in different parts of the room, but somehow they would gravitate to each other and a fight would ensue. We tried to have them talk to each other about their feelings, but inevitably as we tried to broker peace, a fight would ensue. During this time, President Carter was trying to broker peace with Egypt and Israel. Brokering peace between Chip and John was very similar. Carter succeeded. We did not. The peacemaking of settling quarrels, negotiating disputes, and writing treaties is very difficult work and often a thankless one, too. Peacemakers are often unpopular. They are called names for trying to establish peace. Their lives can be threatened, and some have even been killed. If peacemaking was easy, we would not need to learn how to make peace, we would have peace.

Peacemaking is also not just about resolving conflict, but it is also about pursuing justice. The peacemaker sees a wrong, names the issue, and is prepared to sacrifice time, energy, money, and even one's life to right the wrong. The peacemaker always lines themselves with those who have been wronged. If a group's civil rights have been denied, the peacemaker aligns themselves with that group. If economic opportunity is denied for some and not for others, the peacemaker will work for equal opportunity for everyone. If poverty exists, the peacemaker works to banish poverty. If there are groups who promote violence and hate, the peacemaker will stand to oppose them. This is the kind of peace and justice the prophet Isaiah is talking about when he says, "An honorable person plans honorable things and stands up for what is honorable. Then justice will reside in wild lands, and righteousness will abide in farmlands...Then my people will live in a peaceful dwelling, in secure homes, in carefree resting places." Peacemakers seek to make the world a place of shalom through the healing of societal pains. They work to make the world a place of shalom for every person. They feed the hungry, care for the sick, clothe the naked, visit the lonely. Jesus said that when we do this to the least in our society, then we are doing it to him. Peacemakers who work for shalom for every person may be hated, called dangerous, and even unpatriotic. Jesus warned his disciples that they would be hated and rejected by the world, just like he was. Jesus was not a good patriot of his country. He served a bigger, more powerful, more just kingdom.

Peacemakers are also persons of prayer. In prayer we offer up the ills of the world. In prayer we listen for God's guidance and discernment. In prayer we work on our relationship with the Holy One. In prayer, we don't take sides, but pray for God's will. In prayer we seek humility and repentance. In prayer we pray for the one who has wronged us. In prayer we connect with the Peacemaker and the Peace-giver and find the peace that passes all understanding. Alan Paton was a South African anti-apartheid activist. Each day he began with this prayer. "May I this coming day be able to do some work of peace for thee." I offer this prayer to all of us to pray each day.

The lives of praying peacemakers begin to reflect the God of Peace by taking on the divine family resemblance as children of God. And thus, the promise of this Beatitude is fulfilled.

**Reflection Questions:** What disrupts your peace within and how does this affect your ability to make peace? How can you reestablish the peace within so you can regain your ability to make peace?

**Resources:** *The Beatitudes and Lord's Prayer for Everyman* by William Barclay; *Blessed to Follow* by Martha Stortz; *Beatitudes from the Back Side* by J. Ellsworth Kalas; *God's Psychiatry* by Charles Allen, *Blessings that Make Us Be* by Susan Muto; *The Beatitudes* by Ray Ragsdale; Richard Rohr's Daily Devotions-Sermon on the Mount: Week 2, Children of God.

