

THE BEATITUDES: JESUS' CALL TO HAPPINESS

Matthew 4:17-5:12

“Blessed are the Peacemakers...”

Matthew 5:9

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.”

Mother Teresa was once asked to attend and participate in an anti-war demonstration. She declined. Her disinterest puzzled many for her views on peace were well known. When asked why she would not participate she responded, *“I really do not want to be involved in any anti-type demonstration. However, if you choose to have a rally for peace, then I will attend.”* A subtle yet significant difference! Friends, we must ask ourselves do we really love peace or do we only hate war? When I examine the Christian scripture in light of Jesus life I have no doubt but that we are called to not only love peace but to help bring about peace—to be peacemakers.

Unfortunately, we are examining this beatitude—this call to happiness—during a time of war. Our country is at war. And this week we witnessed the 2000th death in the US military. Which of course is a small percentage of the total number of people who have been killed during this war—civilians and soldiers.

By the 21st century I would have thought that we would have learned better ways to deal with differences than through war. We are so advanced technologically in medicine, communication, business and science yet we still go to war—maiming and killing.

War, my friends, is violence on its most destructive level. However, when Jesus calls his followers to be peacemakers—to be people of peace—he is not only referring to global conflict—to war. Jesus is calling us to lay down all of our weapons that lead to violence, to destruction, and ultimately to death. Yes, we need to lay down our guns, bombs and knives, in war and on the streets; but so too must we lay down our other weapons of violence, prejudices, gossip, anything that leads to division, anything that can bring harm and destruction to others.

A peacemaker is one who seeks to establish right relationships between people. Right relationships cannot be established while gossiping. Right relationships cannot be established while verbally tearing another person to shreds. Right relationships cannot be established while feeling superior to others. Too often we are appalled at gun violence while feeling unaffected by gossip violence or by the violence of prejudice.

Frank Stagg, a Baptist theologian, once said, *“If Christians worked as hard to*

eliminate war as many Christians have to justify war, it could make a difference.” I agree. I am continually amazed when churches and pastors promote war—when they wrap the gospel of Christ in the American flag. Friends, God is not a respecter of persons or nations. And when we are killing our perceived enemy we are killing a child of God. We must stop the madness by embracing and practicing the principles of peace and peacemaking.

I do believe that Dr. Stagg’s comment on war can also be applied to conflict between individuals and groups. Consider this: If Christians worked as hard to mend their disagreements as they do at justifying why they have a right to feel resentful and vengeful it could make a difference. Jesus says, *“Happy are the peacemakers...”* He does not say, *“Happy are those people who hold grudges. Or, happy are the vengeful.”* In fact, I know that there is no happiness, no inner peace, to be found through grudges or retaliation. Jesus knew what he was talking about when he said, *“Happy are the peacemakers.”*

Jesus says that the peacemakers are called children of God. Peace, my friends, is an attribute of God. And just as children take after, or resemble, their parents, so one who is a peacemaker takes after, or resembles God. God’s children are people of peace because peace is an attribute of God.

Peace does not just happen. Just as war does not just happen, it is waged; so too with peace, it must be waged. There must be a strategy for peace or there will be no peace. Peace requires effort, initiative, sacrifice, devotion and commitment. Again, Jesus knew this. He said, *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* Many use this as a justification for war. But when one considers all of Jesus other peace statements it is realized that this is no war justification. Jesus knew that his message of inclusion and unconditional love would be met with resistance—and it still is. There are still churches that preach exclusion rather than inclusion; that preach conditional love. Jesus knew that his disciples would encounter verbal and physical violence as they taught love and forgiveness. However, according to Jesus, they were not to be deterred from their mission of peace because of the violence. They were to continue to wage peace, to promote peace, to be peacemakers; even in the face of war.

Waging peace means being willing to work at improving relationships, bridging gaps of misunderstanding, listening without preconceived judgments, correcting rumors, making some concessions or compromises, forgiving errors or mistakes, supporting rather than destroying those who are weaker, and surrendering some desires when it is for the common good.

In 1979 Mother Teresa was awarded the Noble Peace Prize "for work undertaken in the struggle to overcome poverty and distress, which also constitute a threat to peace." When she received the prize, she was asked, *"What can we do*

to promote world peace?" Her answer was simple: "Go home and love your family."

Peace my friends begins right here in the heart. Peace begins right here in this room among neighbors and family.

"Happy, at peace, are the peacemakers, for they resemble their heavenly parent."