

August 14

“Blessed are the Peacemakers”

Matthew 5:9

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



Special Music: “Let There Be Peace on Earth”

The Angel Choir

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=57-0i7qghhU>

THE PEACEMAKER

I stand amazed
As I gaze
Into the eyes of a child.
So many dreams.
So much hope,
Mild, wild and beguiled,
Daring me to try
To break their spirit
And become reconciled
To the status quo.

Without the peace
That allows release
That child will be bound
By tethered bonds
Consciously restrained
From the background
Forcing their minds
Into predefined
Fear, hate, & prejudice crowned
As the world responds

With bombs, rockets,
And empty pockets
To remove any glint

Of hope for tomorrow,
Dreams dressed in sorrow
As we squint
At our neighbors
While rattling sabers
Striking the flint
To each powder keg.

What gives us the right
To blot out the light
Of the dreams and the hopes of our young
Before they've begun
To bring about change
With their vision and tongue
Untinged by our hate
And endless debate
Over matters benign and far-flung
Devoid of substance.

Where are our peacekeepers
In the midst of the reapers
Who only seek truth in the past?
Can we not see
That the truth sets us free
Even with differences so vast?
God begs us to peace
As we fall to our knees

Negating the nature of caste
And embracing our neighbor.

I stand amazed
As I gaze
Into the eyes of a child.
Looking for dreams
And Looking for hope,
Mild, wild and beguiled,
But only to find sorrow,
And the loss of tomorrow
For in the eyes of that child
I only saw me.

More than 90 percent of the constables (the bobbies) in the UK do not carry guns. Nor do they want to. They have determined that carrying a weapon on the job actually increases the chance of someone getting hurt. Here in the U.S., it is difficult for us to imagine a policeman not carrying a weapon. There are all kinds of statistics from a variety of sources regarding gun ownership, but I don't put a lot of stock in statistics because, for the most part, people are unwilling to admit to something that they are either ashamed of, might be considered illegal, or just don't think it is anyone's business. This message is not about gun control. It's about Peacemaking.

I recently saw "Destry Rides Again" when the Fort Stockton Film Society showed the movie over at the Community Theatre. I hadn't seen it in a long time. It was first shown in 1939 and stars Jimmy Stewart and Marlene Dietrich. In the movie, Tom Destry, Jr. comes to Bottleneck as a new deputy to help clean up the town. But everyone is shocked when he arrives and isn't wearing guns, even though he is well known for his prowess with a pistol. And, to his credit, he gets through most of the movie, solving one problem after another before he has to eventually strap on his weapons.

That's pretty much the standard for a peacemaker. Someone who can solve most of the problems around them without having to resort to violence. However, they aren't afraid to use their skills with a weapon, if necessary, to keep the peace. The peacemaker does not make the weapon his first line of negotiation. He or she would prefer not to have to resort to it at all, but knows the option is there when lives are at stake.

When we look at the world today, it is unfortunate that many people believe that weaponry guarantees security. But it doesn't. It just raises the stakes for everyone concerned. Too many people are constantly on the lookout for the better weapons. The flint knife gave way to the steel knife and then the hunting knife, which gave way to the switchblade and the bayonet. The short sword used so well by the Romans, gave way to the long swords of the Middle Ages. The short bow gave way to the long bow, which gave way to the crossbow. The advent of gunpowder gave us weapons ranging from pistols to rifles to canon and artillery. Then came bombs dropped by planes which gave way to missiles that can be launched from anywhere in the world. When we once could lock eyes with our opponents and see the humanity, fear, and resolve in them, we now don't even have to be on the same continent anymore to kill each other.

And while we claim that we have a right to defend ourselves, how often does that right extend to taking action against the possibility of an someone assuming an offensive strategy. At what point did offense become a legitimate defense? Who is the protector when armies go rogue and start slaughtering innocents? Who are the peacemakers today? There don't seem to be any deputies arriving on the scene without guns the way that Destry did. What then, is the job of the peacemaker in a world riddled with violence, where children are targets of opportunity and the sanctity of churches is considered irrelevant?

Is it a contradiction of our Christian Spirit to carry and use weapons even in defense of others? Who gets to decide the nature of peacemaking? Can we trust the people around us with a weapon to know when to use it?

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

There are three relevant passages in the New Testament where Jesus talks about physical swords (or the lack thereof), and each one speaks to our verse on peacekeeping.

1. The first verse is found in Luke 10:1-4 where Jesus is sending out the seventy-two disciples. It reads like this:

- 1 **“After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go.**
- 2 **He told them, “The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.**
- 3 **Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.**
- 4 **Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.”**

In these verses, Jesus is sending seventy-two chosen disciples ahead of him and they are told not to take anything with them, no bag, no extra clothes, not sandals, no protection. Nothing. Just their blind faith that God will protect and provide for them. That takes an awful lot of courage and faith. He tells them, **“Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.”** He’s teaching them, in order to be peacemakers, they must first be Children of God. He is not saying

swords are bad. But there was a real possibility that if they had taken swords with them, they would lean into their own prowess with their swords rather putting their trust in Jesus who sent them.

The second passage can be found in Luke 22:35-38. In it, Jesus references the event where He sent out the seventy-two:

35 Then Jesus asked them, “When I sent you without purse, bag or sandals, did you lack anything?”

“Nothing,” they answered.

36 He said to them, “But now if you have a purse, take it, and also a bag; and if you don’t have a sword, sell your cloak and buy one.

37 It is written: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors’ and I tell you that this must be fulfilled in me. Yes, what is written about me is reaching its fulfillment.”

38 The disciples said, “See, Lord, here are two swords.”

“That’s enough!”he replied.

Jesus is telling the disciples that things are about to change. The events that He has been telling them would come about, have arrived. This is right before they leave for the Mount of Olives after the Last Supper. Here we find the reason that Peter has the sword, and we also see that Christ actually encourages him to have it. But Jesus also knew that this would become a teaching moment, a moment where choices had to be made by His disciples that should reflect His teaching.

For us today, looking back at those events, we find ourselves caught in a paradox. Jesus reflected peacemaking in all that he did. He embraced a segment of society that the religious leaders rejected. He was outspoken with regards to taking care of the poor, the needy, the sick, the prisoners, the sinners, the people that Jewish society deemed unredeemable. His actions were scandalous in the eyes of the Jewish leaders. He sought out ways to try and make people whole when the world was trying to tear them down. He preached a platform of inclusion in a world resolved to living lives of exclusion. In the minds of the Pharisees and the Sadducees, unclean people must be separated out in order for proper Jews to stay clean. They had taken the gavel of justice away from God and made it their own to crush any attempt to bring people together other than those who embraced their own warped sense of right and wrong.

And now, they were coming after Jesus to take Him away and destroy his message of love, grace, justice and peacemaking. So, yes, Peter had a sword. The only question remaining was “How was Peter going to use that sword?” Was he going to fight to prevent a perceived wrong? Or was he going to embrace the heart of his teacher who was given to peacemaking?

The third passage I would like to mention is found in both Matthew 26:52 and in John 18:10-11. It is a passage we are all familiar with. John tells the story this way:

10 Then Simon Peter, who had a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant, cutting off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.)

11 Jesus commanded Peter, “Put your sword away! Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given me?”

Normally, we don't even think about Jesus' disciples carrying weapons. But at the time, having a weapon on hand was common. Jesus and His disciples were on the road constantly, and there was danger all around them. We understand from this side of the cross that Jesus would have protected them from whatever malice came their way, but the disciples were still struggling and having weapons probably brought them some sense of added security. They had grown up given to violence.

But when we think about today's verse, we need to put focus on the second part of the verse, **“for they will be called the children of God.”** What does it mean to be a child of God? To start with, it means we take time to get God's input before we make a rash decisions. Sometimes, when we have a weapon available to us, we are tempted to use it without seeking the influence of our Heavenly Father. That weapon could be any of our choosing: a knife, a gun, or even our own tongue. “I am here, I have a weapon, I can save the day. Look at me cut off this soldier's ear!” But it wasn't necessary. And if Jesus had not been standing right there, the whole incident may have escalated to a point where people lost their lives. Peter truly believes that he is protecting his teacher. Unfortunately, Peter hasn't stopped to think about the absurdity of that. Jesus doesn't need protecting. Jesus calms storms with His hands. Jesus heals the sick and raises the dead. Luke tells us that Jesus explained to Peter that God could have called down twelve legions of angels to save Christ. But Jesus didn't

need saving. Jesus was fulfilling prophecy. And by his actions and his muddled thinking, Peter was trying to “Do the right thing” without the understanding that prophecy had to be fulfilled. But don’t fault him for that. His world was coming apart and he was doing his best to find his footing.

In spite of everything that Jesus had told them, the disciples were caught up in a moment that they did not understand. They couldn’t see that this moment in time was necessary for the completion of Christ’s work on earth. We are simply not equipped to see the endgame. And when we can’t visualize the endgame, we are likely to act irrationally, impulsively, and in direct contradiction to how God wants us to act. This is another reason that we need to pray without ceasing, so that we can have the Holy Spirit’s guidance at times when we find ourselves in a clutch situation needing to make the right decision.

That is where we need to focus as peacemakers. It’s not about waving a weapon around. It’s not about finding confidence in ourselves. Being a peacemaker in the Christian sense of the word, means we are doing our very best to walk in the footsteps of our example, Jesus Christ. It means that we allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us in times of crisis. All too often, in those times of crisis, we find ourselves praying to God for deliverance rather than asking Him what He needs for us to do. We scream “the sky is falling” and not “Lord, let me know what to do to help others through this time.” Peacekeeping is about bringing people together, in spite of their differences. Peacekeeping is color blind, theologically blind, age blind, health blind, gender blind, financially blind, and racially blind. It is standing up at the worst times in people’s lives and asking,

“How can I help?” Peacemaking is bringing a sword to the fight while praying that we will not need it. And if we do need to use it, that it will be used for the purpose God has set before us and not for our own considerations.

This week, I want us to focus on this beatitude regarding peacemakers and ask ourselves, “Are we peacemakers? Are we the keepers of God’s justice? Do we truly understand that we are the Children of God, which places us in direct authority under our Creator? Do we truly understand that our actions are bound to our relationship with God?”

As Children of God we are called to be peacemakers in a world craving violence and division. As Peacemakers, if our hearts are pure and our relationship with the Holy Spirit constant, we will be called “the Children of God.” I want us all to be able to look into the eyes of children in such a way that they know that we are doing the very best that we can to be peacemakers, that we are the servants of our Creator and are sent to do His work.

God bless you all.

AMEN

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