

August 22, 2021

*“Blessed are the Peacemakers”*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

Ephesians 4:26-27, 29, 31-5:1; Matthew 5:9

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*“Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children - sons and daughters- of God.”* This beatitude makes me think of something General Omar Bradley, a famous five-star general who served in WWII, once said: “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. We have grasped the mystery of the atom but we have rejected the Sermon on the Mount.” Now I’m quoting an army general because I think we all have a tendency to associate the word “peace” with meaning the absence of war. And I’m sure all of us want “peace” in the world, not war, with all the violence and killing we’ve seen in the past. And the situation in Afghanistan has probably caused some of us to think about conflict and war. But if we really think about it, we all know that “peace” encompasses much more than just not fighting wars. Yes, it would be wonderful to have peace in the world, but what about peace in the home, in the family, in the workplace. And, what about peace right here, within yourself, in your heart.

Perhaps that’s why Jesus has a beatitude about peace. “Blessed are the peacemakers.” I’m sure we all want to identify with this beatitude. But let me just say, there is a big difference between being someone who loves peace and someone who makes peace. Celebrities and politicians are notorious for telling us that they’re peace lovers, saying all the right things, standing up for all the right causes, everything that will make for the ideal peaceful society. But so often when details of their personal lives come to light, we hear of things that definitely don’t make for peace. In the past couple of months alone, Bill Cosby’s name, again, and Andrew Cuomo’s name, have made headlines. And there are literally dozens of sports stars that should be role models for society, who have been arrested for all sorts of non-peaceful offenses. Yes, many people want to “talk the talk” about peace and love and self-control in the world, in the culture, but they don’t “walk the walk” by acting morally or ethically or peacefully. So there’s a lesson here for us: mere words don’t qualify anyone as a peacemaker.

You know, it’s interesting that if you look throughout creation, it seems that of all creatures, God created humankind for peace and with a peaceable nature. I mean the shark has its teeth, the wasp has its sting, the snake has its bite, the bear and the lion their claws. Yet man comes into the world naked, unarmed, innocent, defenseless. So I think the original nature of man as God really wants us to be, is gentle, dependent on one another, loving, and peaceable. But something seems to have gone terribly

awry. Instead of peace and calmness and love in our lives, we often find the exact opposite. It seems like everyone – the person in the next car, at the restaurant, on the airplane, in the check-out line, our spouses, our children, our co-workers, our friends, and yes, even ourselves at times drive or walk around with a chip on our shoulders, so easily becoming irritated and angry with other people. And when it comes to treating our black and gay brothers and sisters with respect, it's gotten so bad that the culture now even has a pejorative name for those individuals who act in a privileged, selfish, racist, or homophobic manner... they're called a "Karen" or a "Ken." Yes, angry and obnoxious behavior is prevalent these days.

Now that's not to say we can't ever become upset or angry. We heard St. Paul tell us today, "Be angry, but do not sin." There is such a thing as 'righteous anger.' Anger over things like abuse, sex trafficking, child pornography, other injustices. Righteous anger is used as a motivating force for good, to make positive changes and to work for justice, as opposed to anger used in rage or for violence. Jesus turning over the tables in the temple is the leading example of righteous anger. He was angry at the religious authorities who were using God's house to profit and extort money from people. But for us, however, most of the time we do not have righteous anger, we have self-righteous anger. An anger that comes from being centered only on self. Focused on what we think is good for us. But ironically, this kind of anger can swiftly become self-destructive.

So let's look at why we get angry. We get angry because things didn't go our way. Someone didn't do what we wanted. Someone didn't pay attention to us. Someone said or did something we didn't like. Someone broke a trust. So we lash out. "Why did you do this to me? What's wrong with you?" Now old time comedian Phyllis Diller advised: "Never go to bed angry.....stay up and fight." But the better advice is what we heard today from Paul, "*Do not let the sun go down on your anger. And do not give the devil an opportunity(to make you sin).*" Because the devil loves it when we try to justify our rage, our anger. He prompts us to believe, "I have every right to be angry. I'm right and they're wrong. I'll make him pay - it's only fair." And we conveniently forget the words of God, "Vengeance is mine", says the Lord, "I will repay." We conveniently forget Paul's words, "Love bears all things, endures all things. Love is not provoked and doesn't take into account a wrong suffered." Unfortunately, for most of us, it's easier to follow the devil and justify our words and actions rather than be peacemakers - the ones to extend patience, mercy, forgiveness and love.

So given all I've said about anger, what's the answer? Well, the great philosopher Plato once said that our souls are like a charioteer who strives to control two horses, each pulling in a different direction. One horse is reason. The other horse is emotion. For Plato, the righteous soul learns to hold the reins in such a way that the horse of reason becomes dominant. You see, the peacemaker learns to keep the emotions - passion, anger, resentment, in check by tempering it with reason.

And that's good advice. Because if we allow anger to have free reign, it will eventually result in death. That's right, death. Because it will eventually kill you and the ones you love. For anger kills understanding, it kills joy, it kills peace. And so, give your anger over to God, so that you can do that which makes for peace. And my suggestion is to begin in your home today. Because if the bond of peace is not first established there, it will not be established elsewhere. And don't sit there thinking, "I hope my spouse or partner or child or friend is listening to this." This is for all of us. Every one of us is responsible for making peace. And it can be done in such simple ways. Maybe we need to change our tone of voice when something is bothering us. So that we create a sense of gentleness. Maybe we need to stop using sarcasm, since this results in hurt feelings. As Proverbs tells us, "A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." Maybe we need to bite our tongue, and not say what's on our mind at that particular moment. Maybe we need to ask ourselves what role we had in the argument. Maybe we need to offer forgiveness. Maybe we need to ask for forgiveness. Maybe we need to say, "I'm sorry." And maybe we need to let the past stay in the past. The Apostle James tells us, "Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger, for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God." Peace is the tie that binds together family members. And peace binds us together as brothers and sisters in this church, and on this earth. And when we live in peace with one another, then we can claim that title, that honor, of being sons, daughters, children of God. As Paul said today, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God, in Christ, has forgiven you. Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children." Dearly loved children who live in the image of the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ, who are not only peace-lovers, but peacemakers.

Yes, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons and daughters of God."