

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

Matthew 5:9

By [Rev. Kevin Chiarot](#)

The famous historians Will and Ariel Durant said that “war is one of the constants of history, and has not diminished with civilization and democracy. In the last 3421 years of recorded history, they continue, only 268 have seen no war.” And, I might add, the 20th c. – despite all of our advances (because of) - was history’s bloodiest and most violent (more than all centuries combined). And none of this, even counts the rivers of bloodshed and violence that would not be classified as wars. Or the low-scale, unrecorded, dirty little private and local battles that scar the lives of individuals and clans and communities.

To write any history, of any era, in any place, is to write extensively about warfare. Peace seems like a human impossibility. After all, the problems are intractable. They seem insurmountable. Justice and order require – don’t they – the defeat of the other side? And that will – or at least may – require a resort to arms. Certainly, that’s what the audience (good chunk of it) Jesus is speaking to, in the Sermon on the Mount thought.

Many 1st c. Jews (esp. Zealots: political firebrands) had come to believe that revolutionary violence was the only appropriate way forward, given the oppression and abuse they had long suffered at the hands of Rome. It seemed self-evident. If you don’t fight for your liberties, so don’t deserve them. It was position which prevailed among the nation, and led, tragically, to a crushing defeat at the hands of the Romans, in the wars from 66-70 A.D. or so. And this beatitude – blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons/children of God - is aimed directly at the zealot-like spirit of political violence or revolution.

And, indeed, the teaching and the example of Jesus, is why the early Christians were vehemently opposed to war (just war theory is a later development), and it’s why they almost universally refused to serve in the military. (violence of this age & its kingdoms) This beatitude is the final one dealing with the character of the Christian person. (Persecution: effect of this character) As we’ve said, none of these virtues can flourish without all the others. But putting this last makes it something of a capstone – the summit of this glorious and demanding portrait of kingdom existence. With that, we will make two points: Peacemakers and Sons of God.

I. Peacemakers

First, then peacemakers. Often I like to expound a text, and then, toward the end, show how it points us to Jesus. But here, I don't think we can get anywhere, unless we direct our eyes to Christ at the outset. He is THE peacemaker. The peacemaker who makes us peacemakers. Starting here helps us to see two fundamental realities clearly.

First, is a sober assessment of the problem. Only Christianity, I assert, only Christianity, takes the full measure of the human condition, in all of its depth, with appropriate seriousness. War and hostility – forget the international kind – just fighting and wars among Christians in the church – this, James tells us, has its source in our lusts.

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight.”

The source of all human alienation and conflict, the root of violence, is not on the surface. Or even primarily in structures and institutions. Political movements. It is deep and entrenched in our disordered souls. It is that place of depravity and darkness and disease, that the beatitudes are seeking to cut down into, for the sake of healing us.

Secondly, we note that God is utterly committed to obliterating the roots, the branches, and all the tenacles of war and hostility and division. So much so that the Son of God, has, at infinite cost, descended into our flesh, into our disordered existence, our God-forsaken violence and inhumanity to make peace. Christianity alone assesses our condition without blinking.

And Christianity alone has a God who is willing to be publicly humiliated, and to take our violence on his own head to end violence and make peace. For the peace in view here is not a mere cold peace, or a cessation of hostilities, or a civil peace, or a negotiated compromise, it is shalom. Not appeasement, or being nice, or mere tolerance, or simply avoiding conflict – none of those things are shalom. Spoken of over 400 times in the Bible, peace/shalom means: well-being, flourishing, wholeness, deep and abiding reconciliation. Ultimately, it means Sabbath-rest, glory and joy in the new creation.

So, having assessed the root of violence, and being utterly committed to Shalom, the God of peace becomes man, in the One we call the Prince of Peace. The One who brings what Ezekiel (chapter 37) calls the everlasting covenant of peace. The One whose descent was heralded by angels singing of glory to God and peace on earth. And the One who “made peace” – same verb as peacemaking in our text-- the one who “made peace” through the blood of his

cross. There, in the disfigured One on the cross, and there alone, we estimate aright the predicament and the price of peace. That is what THE peacemaker does. That is what making peace looks like. Like dying. Defeat.

Indeed, we can go farther and say: he not only makes peace: he IS our peace.

“For he himself is our peace,” Paul says. Creating in himself one new humanity out of Jew and Gentile, thus making peace, and in one body, reconciling both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He is the God of peace; He came and preached peace to those who were far away and peace to those who were near.

He makes peace through the blood of his cross, and he leaves his peace with us. Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid. He sends the Spirit as the power of God to overcome enmity, to enable us to preach peace as he did.

How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of those who bring good news, who proclaim peace, who bring good tidings, who proclaim salvation, who say to Zion, “Your God reigns!”

That is Christ as THE peacemaker. Let’s look at what it means – in the light of Christ - for us to be peacemakers.

A couple of remarks to frame our calling here. The beatitude does not assume optimal or even neutral conditions. It assumes the conditions of the early church. Warlike conditions, oppression, injustice and looming persecution. Peace has to be made in the teeth of an atmosphere which is hostile and dangerous.

Secondly, this is a summons to action, to vigorous activity. Notice, it does not say: blessed are those who desire peace, or those with a plan for peace, or those who like peace, or even those who are peaceful. It says blessed are those who MAKE, who CREATE peace. This is a call for a passionate pursuit of wholeness. TO exertion: SEEK peace and PURSUE it, Peter says. Make EVERY EFFORT to live in peace with everyone – the book of Hebrews says. Ironically then, The peacemaker is a fighter. He or she WAGES peace. They are at war with slander, hatred, discord, with arrogance, with distortion, and every form of faction and division.

For us, this has two basic prongs, or two spheres of action: preaching the gospel – for it is the gospel which reconciles and creates the peace in view here. We must not lose sight of this. Few of us will be called to be official mediators or negotiators, but we are all called to bear witness to the gospel of the Prince of Peace. And that witness will often be costly. Proclamation of the gospel is the

origin, the source of true peacemaking. The font of genuine, lasting reconciliation. First with God then with each other.

And secondly (or second sphere of action), we are summoned here to seek harmony and true peace in our relations, especially in the body of Christ. We might call this living out and implementing the gospel of peace.

Let's talk about what this life of pursuing peace looks like. First, it is brutally honest. It, as we said earlier, it assesses the situation in full. It refuses to say peace, peace when there is no peace. It does not, as Jeremiah said: heal the wound of my people lightly. This means that the peacemaker must be willing to risk being on the receiving end of a good deal of pain. Maybe an apology will be rejected. Maybe a rebuke will be met by a rebuke. To wage peace means to have your hopes dashed and deferred, often and repeatedly. People don't want peace.

Calvin says: This is no light declaration: it is a matter of toil and trouble to pacify those who are at dispute. Men of moderation, he says, are compelled, in their efforts to foster peace, to bear hearing the insults and complaints of both sides. Everybody wants the peacemaker to side with them.

The church has a great lack of people who can carefully, painstakingly, lovingly articulate both sides of an argument, or of a theological or doctrinal difference. I often say that no one should NOT critique any position, until they can so defend it, that one who holds the position, would say: Yes, yes, exactly, that's precisely what I mean! To not do this, and then to criticize, is an utter failure of love and a sin against truth. Don't criticize what you can't (or don't or won't) understand.

Peacemakers can see the world, with sympathy, from the other's point of view. They are people of extraordinary empathetic power and extraordinary objectivity (Fairness). They seek what James calls the peaceable wisdom from above. And thus, they reflect the heavenly wisdom. They are pure, gentle, reasonable, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. They bridle their tongue knowing that a gentle answer turns away wrath. And that rash, harsh speech cannot administer peace. They are Peacemakers who sow in peace and reap a harvest of righteousness.

In short, we can put it this way: the peacemaker must embody the shalom they seek to create. Turbulent, roiled people, people operating out of grievance or anger, or alienation, of fear, cannot create shalom.

Again, the peacemaker must embody – they must diffuse – the peace they seek to create. Their heart echoes the familiar but radical prayer of Francis of Assisi: *Lord, make me an instrument of your peace. Where there is hatred, let me bring love. Where there is offence, let me bring pardon. Where there is discord, let me bring union.*

In Augustine's words: they become the kingdom of God – the site, the location, where the peaceable reign of God is expressed. This is, like all the beatitudes, a summons we do not have the resources for, nor do we have sight of a clear way forward.

Far from the warrior Zealot's politicizing of everything, far from this-worldly notions of kingship, this is a summons to go the way of Jesus, the way of the cross, the costly way of him who is The Peacemaker. Peacemaking is by the blood of the cross. That is its price. First for Jesus, then, through baptism, for those who wage peace in his name.

II. Sons of God

That brings us to the second point. Sons (or children) of God. Here we can be very brief. Now, this is not talking about the doctrine of adoption, by which we become children of God.

The focus here – the reason peacemakers are called sons of God, is that they reflect, they imitate the Father. Just like you might say the sons of Belial for those who imitate evil. Or the daughters of Sarah for those who imitate her faith. So Sons of God means those who bear the family resemblance. Those who do what the Father does. Sons are those who image the God of peace. Of course, this is what THE Son of God, Jesus THE peacemaker, did on the cross, showing love and forgiveness to his own enemies, for the sake of reconciling peace. In that, he was imitating his Father. And he taught us to do the same: But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ *that you may be children of your Father in heaven.* (equivalent to the idea here of being sons of God). We reflect the traits of God when, like him, we pour ourselves out for peace and reconciliation.

Notice two things about being called children of God. First, its *passive* – we are called. Someone else designates us as children of God – and it's clear that here that someone else is God our Father. The world may or may not recognize us as children of God. That is beside the point here. The point is that peacemakers are designated, called by God, his children. He is not ashamed to be called their God.

The second thing about being called sons God is that it is *future* – they SHALL BE called sons of God. It is, finally, a reference to the eschaton. When what is now hidden with Christ in God, is fully revealed in glory. When the sons of God are revealed in splendor and openly acknowledged as such by God. And the creation – groaning and waiting for the revealing of the sons of God enters its eschatological peace. This is your calling in X. It is nothing less than overcoming the spirit of retribution and vengeance, of calculating and measuring, of wound

for wound, of insult for insult, the spirit that governs our natural fallen hearts, the spirit that governs the world.

And this “being called children of God” is your destiny. When Christ is revealed in glory, you too, you peacemakers, shall be revealed in glory as God’s ambassadors of reconciliation. And your labor, costly and often frustrating, will not have been in vain. For the prince of peace will judge between the nations and will settle disputes for many peoples. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore. Indeed, He shall make wars to cease to the ends of the earth. Peace shall triumph, and its victory shall be cosmic in the Sabbath-rest, the glorious peace of the new creation. Take courage. For the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. Amen.

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