

Beatitudes 7: MAKING PEACE

Ephesians 2:11-22, Matthew 5:7-9 [MW17-27]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai + Wellsford, Sunday 03 September 2017

For my seventh birthday I was given a “cap gun”

- you put a roll of “caps” in, pulled the trigger, and bang!
each time you pulled the trigger the roll advanced
it was state of the art
- shiny black with a white handle
it opened smoothly so you could put in another roll

The thing that really fascinated me though

- was this gun had a name cast on it: “Peacemaker”
even to my seven year old childish thinking
it seemed very odd that a gun could be called a “peacemaker”
- I asked my Dad about it
he said the American 'wild west' was indeed a wild and dangerous place
there were lots of bad guys around
and the good sherifs used guns like these to keep law and order
- I guess I ran off and loaded another roll of caps
but the oddness of guns actually making peace never quite went away

The kind of “peace” that comes through the barrel of a gun

- is an “enforced” peace
which if it's not too much of a contradiction in terms
seems to me a “violent peace”
- the kind of peace Jesus is talking about making in this week's beatitude
seems something entirely different
- so it would seem important to have an idea of just what “peace” is
I invite you to talk with someone or ones nearby
about what you consider “peace” is ... for 1 minute, literally 60 seconds

[space for discussion]

Any thoughts you'd like to share on what “peace” is ... ???

Thank you for that

- this gives us some context and framework
a setting in which to begin to explore this beatitude
- *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God*

The Hebrew word for peace is ... “shalom”

- and in Hebrew “peace” is never only a negative state
it never means only the absence of trouble
it actually includes everything which makes for a person's highest good
- in the east, when one person says to another “shalom”
it is not only a wish for the other to be free of evil things
it is also a hope that the other person will enjoy all the good things of life
- in the Bible peace means not just freedom from worry and trouble
but the enjoyment of all that is good

Then it is important to note what this beatitude is actually saying

- the blessing is upon the *peace-makers*, not necessarily on the *peace-lovers* there is a huge difference!
- one is active and the other is passive
Jesus is commending those who actively work for peace
- those who merely “love” peace may not actually instigate trouble but their inaction may allow it to grow

A person may allow a threatening and dangerous situation to develop

- because for the sake of peace they don't wish to take any action this can allow problems to pile up in the future because this person refuses to face the situation and take the action the situation demands

The peace which the Bible calls blessed doesn't come from the evasion of issues

- it comes from facing them, dealing with them and conquering them
- what this beatitudes calls for is not the passive acceptance of things because of the fear, pain or effort of doing something about them
- rather it calls for the active confronting and facing of people and issues making peace, even when the way to peace is through struggle

Jesus says those who make peace are blessed

- and they are indeed a blessing because they are doing the work of God the way this beatitude is written in calling peacemakers “children of God”, or in more traditional versions “sons of God” means those so described are doing a God-like work
- the one who makes peace is engaged in the very work which the God of peace is doing

This does not necessarily mean the absence of conflict, disagreement or trouble

- for there is a huge difference between being a peacemaker and being conciliatory just as the words “peace” and “appeasement” do not mean the same thing
- for the peace of God is not peace at any price
God made peace with us at immense cost: the life-blood of his only Son

“Peace” is a noble ideal, but it does not just drop out of the sky

- it does not come about by wishing and hoping

Our first reading, from Ephesians chapter 2, outlined this

- a people who were far away from God are now brought near in fact brought into the heart of the family
- two groups who were once bitter and violent enemies are now able to be friends
- how did this amazing transformation come about ... ?
through the work of the supreme peacemaker Jesus Christ who gave his own body

On the cross Jesus absorbed the brokenness, hatred, conflict, division, enmity, separation

- of our world and its people
so there could be a new beginning in which all people are daughters and sons of God
- Jesus made it possible for all people to be at peace with God at peace with each other and at peace with themselves
- this is indeed Good News ...

Jesus did the work, paid the price, and we have the gift of peace

- however Jesus calls us to be involved in this same work of peacemaking which means we too may be called upon to pay the costs ...
- peacemaking takes time and energy
we may be misunderstood, abused, hurt
find ourselves doing or saying things that are painful
- and ultimately our efforts may all be for nothing as people refuse to make peace
- yet Jesus says peacemakers are blessed because through them and what they do the kingdom of God enters our world here and now
- people who are “peacemakers” are signs of God's kingdom and that it is real, and is making a difference

William Barclay describes it like this:

... there are people in whose presence bitterness cannot live, people who bridge the gulfs, and heal the breeches and sweeten the bitteresses. Such people are doing a godlike work, for it is the great purpose of God to bring peace between people and himself, and between people and people.

I invite you to think of, recall, one person you know who you would describe as a “peacemaker” ...

- you may have been in a conflict situation and someone helped you or your group work through it
- what are some of the characteristics of a “peacemaker”?

[?answers]

Jesus says such a person is blessed and a blessing

John Stott in this week's Bible study wrote:

Every Christian, according to Jesus, is meant to be a peacemaker, both in the community and in the church

We come here to church on Sunday morning

- and have the opportunity to confess when we may have caused “unpeace” and receive forgiveness
- we can also hand over our annoyance and frustration, perhaps even anger for things that have not worked out and people who may have hindered and abused us
- then we can be refilled, refreshed, recharged for our calling to be a peacemaker however and wherever we find ourselves in the coming week

This may help, encourage, challenge, inspire:

a reflection on “peace” by Philip Gulley, a Quaker Minister in small town USA

Probably by the time you go through a war you hope the rest of your life will be routine and nondescript. Mr. Ellis was as predictable as the clock above his classroom door - white shirt, red tie, gray slacks, and a quiz every Friday. Shooting at other people must have gotten to him, for he was a tremendously tender man who seemed bent on pacifying whatever gods he might have offended with his warring. There is a tendency among certain veterans to spend the remainder of their lives rebuilding the world they had once torn asunder. Olaf Ellis was one of these. After the government told him he could stop shooting at people, he came home and taught them; teaching became his medium of restitution.

The Vietnam War was rattling to an end when Mr. Ellis was my teacher. We never talked about Vietnam since it wasn't yet classified as history. I had a current events class, but we didn't talk about it there, either. I come from a people who hope that ignoring tragedy will cause it to disappear. Thus it came as a surprise, to myself as much as anyone, when I became a Quaker pacifist and began marching for peace, raising a loud sign against tragedies of the early 1980s - the proliferation of nuclear bombs and other assorted evils. I might well have been the first person in my town ever to carry a protest sign.

There is no luxury as sweet as youthful certainty. When I was twenty-one, the world's problems were clearly understood and easily resolved. People like Mr. Ellis who went to war were absolutely wrong, and people like me who marched for peace were absolutely right. But then Afghanistan and Burundi and Bosnia came along, and my certainty hit the road. I look at pictures of slain children and catch myself hoping the person who caused their deaths meets a similar end. Such a thought shocks me, for I am, after all and absolutely, a Christian pacifist.

I have laid down my sign. My slogan-truths, my mini-truths, and my shadows of truth have had to make room for other pieces and variations of truth ...

... I am a pacifist not because people are pure and will choose peace if given the chance, for certain folk have their investment in hate, no matter what. I am a pacifist by divine imperative. I am called to a peace that does not collapse when human goodness fails. Rather, it endures, for it is rooted in One whose goodness endures - Jesus Christ - our alpha and omega, our beginning and end.

This peace is not about words on a sign. It is about the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. These are the first casualties in all our wars, both the wars that rage within and the wars that rage without. [*Hometown Tales*, p.79-81]

The so-called “peace” that comes at the end of a gun barrel is no peace at all

- the peace Jesus calls us to be involved in making
is sometimes hard, painful and costly
but it is the true peace that is able to reconcile and heal
- once again, as with all these darn beatitudes, there is no 'middle ground'
you are either a peacemaker
or by your action or inaction you are contributing to the problem
- Jesus invites you to be a flesh and blood peacemaker

The “homework” or “take home thought” this week is to reflect on this

- how are you being a peacemaker?
how will you be a peacemaker?
- and then look for opportunities to be a peacemaker

Let us have a pause for reflection, then I'll pray