

**“Blessed are the Peacemakers”**  
**by Rev. David J. Wood**  
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**First Congregational Church**  
**Camden, Maine**

**Matthew 5: 43-48**

[And Jesus said,] ‘You have heard that it was said,  
“You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.”  
But I say to you,  
Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,  
so that you may be children of your Father in heaven;  
for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good,  
and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous.  
For if you love those who love you,  
what reward do you have?  
Do not even the tax-collectors do the same?  
And if you greet only your brothers and sisters,  
what more are you doing than others?  
Do not even the Gentiles do the same?  
Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

**Matthew 5:9**

Blessed are the peacemakers,  
For they will be called children of God.

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

The Word “Peacemaker” only here in all of Scripture. Also, in Matthew, there are only two groups of people who are called children of God: here in this Beatitude and later in this chapter when Jesus says,  
“Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be *children of your father in heaven.*”

Peacemaking is close as one can get for gettin to the heart of God.

It ought not to be a surprise that for three centuries it was almost uncommon, if not impossible, to find Christians serving as soldiers. Beginning in the 4th Century, when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, it was hard to find an army that not populated by Christians. Running and Empire changes things.

The writer, Wendell Berry, observes:

*One cannot be aware both of the history of Christian war and of the contents of the gospels without feeling that something is amiss.*

My grandfather served with the Australian armed forces in WWII. He had a peaceable disposition. Although, I think it was his Christian convictions that inclined him against bearing arms. Out of a sense of civic duty, he signed up to serve as a non-combatant and he was assigned to the detail that provide food and other support services to the troops. We have one picture of him serving coffee to the troops on a beach somewhere in New Guinea.

My father said his father never talked about the war. But he did tell him one story...it was a story that, when passed on to me by my father, had a permanent impact on me. It was the one time my grandfather was ordered to carry a gun.

The Australian army was making advances on the Japanese forces in New Guinea. He would follow the soldiers as they fought their way across the battlefield...and when he came across a Japanese soldier who had fallen, he was required to ensure that the soldier was dead and, if necessary, he was ordered to use his weapon to do so. He was then required to search the body of the dead soldier for any valuable documents he might be carrying.

On one occasion, as he conducting one of those searches, in the breast pocket, he found a small booklet. As he took it in hand and opened it, he realized it was a New Testament. Inside the pages he found pictures of the soldier's wife and children. Apparently, my grandfather kept that Bible...as a witness against what he had done, what war had made him do.

For me, in that moment, on hearing that story, something shifted in me. It unmasked my own failure to grasp the meaning and making of war. Perhaps all this helps explain why I have had a poster that on my office wall for most of my 40 years of ministry.

On that poster are these words:

“A Modest Proposal for Peace:  
Let all the Christians of the World AGREE  
that they will not kill each other.”

I was sure to situate it so that anyone sitting across from me would see it over my shoulder. A good reminder to have in view when facing an enraged parishioner...

Modest indeed, you might say: what about those who are NOT Christians? Are Christians justified in bearing hostility to non-christians? Even, perhaps, killing them?

Well, it is a MODEST proposal after all. But when you consider how much killing has taken place between Christians, the proposal has a certain radical ring to it.

Think about it...If this proposal had been accepted it would have set the stage for a very different history of Christianity and of war over the course of the last two millennia. To name a few: the so-called Wars of Religion in the 1600's, the American Civil War (what if Christians had stood united against the evils of slavery?), World War II (what if Christians in Germany had stood united against the evils of Naziism?), in Northern Ireland (what if Protestants and Catholics had refused to participate in hostilities toward one another?)

It should not come as a surprise to us that some of the most vocal opponents of war are Veterans – some of the most passionate voices for peace, many of the most vigilant peacemakers are those who have suffered the ravages of war.

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

Those who are blessed, who are called sons and daughters of God, do Not JUST prefer peace, or await it, or love it, or praise, or cast their vote for peace....

Those who are blessed, who are called sons and daughters of God are those who MAKE peace...they are the ones who make peace where otherwise there would be no peace. Peace is not passivity or acquiescence ...it is active, resistance to hatred, bitterness, and enmity...

As William Sloane Coffin put it,  
*Peace does not come rolling in on the wheels of inevitability. We can't just wish for peace.  
We have to will it  
fight for it  
suffer for it  
demand it from our governments  
as if peace were God's most cherished hope for humanity...  
as indeed it is.  
Peace is not simply a desirable option.  
It must be a compelling imperative.*

Make no mistake, the kind of peace Jesus is talking about here is not the kind that keeps the peace at any cost....it is not the kind of peace that makes peace with injustice; it is not a peace built on fear or intimidation or violence...

My friend Susie is visiting this weekend – she lives in Evanston, Il., a suburb just north of Chicago. If you have been listening at all to the news, there is a lot of reporting out of Evanston about the ICE raids taking place there. It is a hostile environment...people being abducted by masked agents – there are no rights being read. According to one report, “More than 3,000 people have been abducted by ICE across Chicagoland since early September.”

People are showing up for their neighbors in remarkable ways. Whistles are being used to alert everyone nearby that an ICE raid is underway or about to take place...people have been seen running out of their homes in pajamas to do whatever they can to intervene...to bear witness....often times on behalf of people they do not know. Many are putting their bodies and safety on the line...as one writer put it, folks "are running toward danger, together, and loving each other more fiercely than they ever knew they could."

What we are seeing is "that solidarity can overcome fear and can give people the courage and tenacity to fight for each other....they have embraced the unknown as an opportunity to actually shape the future they dream." (Blogpost by Kelly Hayes, "We Run Toward Danger Together."). There are stories of parents, after being alerted that ICE vehicles are approaching the local high school, rushing to the high school to form a human line of protection around the school.

While all of this is going on, an urgent request for food to provide for families in Evanston whose SNAP funds had been cut off. Enough food showed up to fill an entire field house to overflowing...100s of cars were lined up for block after block waiting to drop of supplies. As one person in line put it, "It's all you can do when you feel so hopeless."

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for they will be called children of God.*

This beatitude is in some ways a summation of the six before it. Peacemakers are those who are feel poor in spirit, the meek, the mourners, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, the pure in heart...

Jesus is talking about a peace that disturbs a false peace that all too often passes for peace in this world.

On one occasion, Martin Luther King spoke of the importance of living well-adjusted lives...

*But I must honestly say there are some things in our nation and the world to which I am proud to be maladjusted and wish all people of goodwill would be maladjusted...*

*HE GOES ON....*

*I never intend to adjust myself to segregation and discrimination. I never intend to become adjusted to a religious bigotry. I never intend to adjust myself to economic conditions that will take necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few, leaving millions of people smothering in an air-tight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society.*

*I never intend to adjust myself to the madness of militarism and the self-defeating effects of physical violence...*

*I intend, he concluded, to be as maladjusted as Jesus Christ, who could say to the men and women around the Galilean hills, "Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Pray for them that spitefully use you."*

It is often said that we humans have tendency to *stretch the truth*. While that may be true, I think, when it comes to peacemaking, we Christians face a temptation to *shrink* the truth.

We shrink the truth when we make it manageable, compatible with the status quo of what is possible, practical, doable, reasonable...we even talk of accommodating ourselves to *necessary* evils.

When we make peace with walls of hostility and divisions of enmity in the name of facing up to reality...in our personal lives and in our life in the larger world... We don't just shrink the truth, we shrink our souls...we become estranged from the one who made us for peace.

**Here in this place, we do not stretch the truth.  
We come here to be stretched by the truth...**

In the 8th chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus says to his followers, "You shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." One theologian rephrased that saying of Jesus this way: *You shall know that truth and the truth shall make you odd.*

Whenever we feel at odds with the world...perhaps that's when we come closest to knowing the truth that sets us free...and it's not just who is set free, but no less the world in which we are called to be makers of peace...

*Blessed are you who are peacemakers...for you will be called children of God. Amen.*