



Today we continue our series of messages on the Beatitudes, with a message on the seventh beatitude – *blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Considering the events of the past week I would say that the timing of this beatitude is certainly, well, timely. I would say that except for the fact that it could be almost any week of the year and this beatitude would be timely. And, honestly, after so many acts of violence in our country and around the world, I feel as though I am running out of words on peace and the related topics.

In the previous six weeks we have read through all of the Beatitudes and will do so again this morning and for the final one next week. I hope as we have been doing so each week that these verses have etched themselves deeply into our minds, and especially deeply into our hearts and souls.

Matthew 5:1-12

1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him,

2 and he began to teach them. He said:

3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

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

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the

kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.

12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

As we have moved through the Beatitudes I think we can say that they have been building to this point. I wouldn't say that it is a step-by-step increase in difficulty from one beatitude to the next, but it's as though Jesus left the most difficult two for the last. Beginning with comfort, having our hunger and thirst for righteousness satisfied, receiving mercy, to being children of God, all of which can be difficult enough, Jesus shifts to the final two, which are much more difficult than the others, I think.

I will offer what I have this morning, and it will be from only one perspective –

Be A Peacemaker and Everyone Will Be Blessed.

I will admit that, sometimes, when I read the Beatitudes, I wish Jesus had given some more detail. Why didn't he, for instance, explain exactly what he meant by the *poor in spirit*? And couldn't we get some more detail about how *theirs is the kingdom of heaven*? And how is it that the meek will inherit the earth? As I have thought about this beatitude in recent days I wished a number of times that Jesus had given us more details about how not only to be a peacemaker, but to bring about peace. And as I think about it some more, I imagine that Jesus might say *I thought I made myself very clear. It's only difficult because you don't want to do what it takes to bring peace.* And that's true, I believe.

Everyone wants peace, but actually creating peace is a different matter entirely, because peacemaking is really, really difficult. One of the reasons why peacemaking is so difficult is because it is easier to assign blame than it is to find solutions. Even though we are only a few days from the tragedy in Florida, there is no shortage of blame as to why these tragedies take place. In the past few days, as so many people say *we must do something* we find that we can't even find agreement on what we should do. How is it that one person can be so certain they know the answer, while another person thinks that another person's answer is completely wrong? Just offering solutions can lead to very heated arguments and disagreements. The discussions about causes and solutions too quickly devolve into a good deal of contentiousness and finger pointing, which is not at all conducive to helping build a healthier and safer society. But that seems to be our lot now, unfortunately, as we don't seem to have any way to have conversations across our society.

To be a peacemaker is to do the work of God, because peacemaking is the work of reconciliation, which is at the heart of what God does. Paul writes in Romans 5:18-20, *God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting*

men's sins against them. And he had committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God.

So to be a peacemaker means that we take an active role in the healing and restoration, first, of our relationships, because peacemaking begins on an individual level. How many of us have a relationship that is waiting on someone to step forward and take that first step down the road of peacemaking and restoration? But we may resist and say, *I'm not the one that is at fault here. It's not my responsibility to try to fix this relationship.* But someone has to take that first step. You may not be able to fix things. The other person may resist to the point that it is impossible to fix the relationship, but a peacemaker is one who will take that first step of reconciliation. If we cannot mend and heal relationships between individuals, we cannot bring peace to the world. If we cannot step across our yard to our neighbor, if we cannot step across the hall to a coworker, if we cannot step across the living room to a family member, if we cannot step across the aisle to a church member, there is no hope for finding peace on a larger scale.

But at some point peacemaking must move beyond the personal and the individual to the corporate. By corporate, I mean the work of becoming a peacemaker in society, between groups of people. Peacemaking cannot remain only between two people. Peacemaking involves working in our communities, our social groups, and nations.

We begin by understanding that being a peacemaker means much more than simply reducing or minimizing conflict. The Hebrew word for peace, you may know, is *shalom*, which means *working for everything that makes for a person's highest good*. The Greek word used for peace in the Beatitudes is used only one time, in this verse, in the entirety of the New Testament. It does not mean a passive acceptance of the way that things are simply for the sake of keeping some kind of pseudo peace, but to work for the good of another person. Being a peacemaker, then, means far more than just reducing conflict or wishing for peace; it means engaging in the very difficult work of doing good to and for others. Peacemaking is not passive. Peacemaking implies action. It is easy to love the idea of peace; it is something else entirely to actually work for peace. If we only like the idea of peace, and are not actively working for it, we are not peacemakers.

In the day of Jesus, there was the *Pax Romana*, which was the *peace of Rome*. The Romans were very proud of the safety and security of their empire. They were proud of the fact that a Roman citizen could travel throughout the empire with no fear of attack or violence. But the *peace of Rome* was not a true peace because it was established and maintained by violence and brutality, and because violence and brutality were the foundation and the maintenance of the peace, it bred bitterness and resentment and, in turn, violence. You can't have real peace if it comes about through force and violence. That is not peace; that is subjugation.

If we want peace, we must understand and address the root causes of conflict. I remember reading, years ago, an interview with a psychologist about violence among young people. The psychologist made a comment that I have never forgotten. She said,

when a young child says, "I hurt," that hurt must be addressed. If that hurt is not addressed, it will move from a description of their feelings to a predictor of their behavior. As I have been thinking about what it means to be a peacemaker, and about what happened in Parkland, Florida, and in so many other locations, I can't help but wonder, why is there so much anger in our culture and why does that anger so often manifest itself in violence? Asking that question, I must then ask, what are the root causes for that anger? Why are so many people so angry and turning to violence as a perceived solution? I can't help but wonder if at least a portion is not due to the fact that there are many, many people – especially young people – who hurt very deeply and profoundly and that hurt has not been addressed, causing that hurt to be turned outward and inflicted upon others.

We absolutely must do a better job of addressing why peace is so elusive. Jesus was not afraid of confronting some of the issues that kept peace from being attained. Jesus was neither afraid nor hesitant to speak out about the injustices and the difficulties of life that became incubators for violence and all things that undermined peace. Doing so is not an easy process because it means that we cannot live in a protective bubble, hidden away from the problems of the world. When Jesus took Peter, James, and John up on a mountain, where he was transfigured before them (Mark 9:2-32), Peter wanted to build some shelters so they could stay there. It was far more preferable to want to live in that moment rather than living at the bottom of the mountain, where need and struggle and hatred and violence were a part of everyday life, but Jesus took them back down the mountain and into the chaos.

We call this place a sanctuary, and sanctuary means a safe place. If we are not careful, however, it can become a place to separate ourselves from the world around us, where we can hide behind walls that will keep us insulated and safe from the problems beyond our doors. Like Peter on the mountaintop, we can desire to stay here in our safe place and avoid facing the problems of our community. So sanctuary must also be defined as a place where we gather to find encouragement and fuel for our mission of moving outside of these walls, where we find strength for the difficult and challenging task of peacemaking, and where we understand that there we are not called to stay in a safe place, but to go out and bring peace and safety to others.

Tanya, Nick, and I attended a wedding yesterday. When I go to weddings it is almost always to be the officiant, so I enjoyed sitting among the congregation and taking it all in. Weddings always make me feel more hopeful. As the music began, and the very young flower girls and ring bearers began to walk down the aisle I couldn't help but feel concerned for them. What kind of world are they growing into? Is it a world that will continue to be ripped apart by hatred and violence or will they be part of a generation that will finally help to bring about peace? And as the young adults who made up the wedding party began their procession down the aisle it was not hard to see the idealism and hopes and dreams that filled their hearts. And to see the joy of the bride and groom, beginning their life together, and to think that all around the world, on the same day,

other young couples were beginning their lives together, with the same hope for a good life, a peaceful life, a loving life. I hope it will be all that and more for them.

I hope our world will finally come to understand what true peace is. Peace in the kingdom of God is different from any other kind of peace. Jesus says in John 14:27 *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.* I will confess that I am often troubled and afraid. In fact, most days I find myself troubled and afraid, but when I hear Jesus tell me to not be troubled or afraid, and to be a peacemaker, I know I can – and must – do so.

Blessed indeed are the peacemakers, and blessed we all will be when peace truly comes.