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October 13, 2024

Scripture: Matthew 5: 1-12

Sermon Title: Blessed are the Peacemakers

Prayer...

Introduction:

Today our Scripture passage is Jesus' teaching from the first portion of the sermon on the mount called the beatitudes. The beatitudes refer to blessings. The word beatitude means blessing or happy.

Beatitude comes from the Latin word for blessing, which is beatus.

All of the blessings are thoughtful words from Jesus, but this morning as we continue our sermon series on peace, I want to highlight Jesus's blessing for peacemakers. Jesus says, blessed are the peacemakers for they are the children of God.

I imagine we all can agree that this season is a very good time in our world to reflect on the value of peacemaking. Who do you think of when you imagine a peacemaker? What qualities does that person

have? I wish to remind us that Jesus was a peacemaker. The Messiah, who we Christians understand to be Jesus, is described in Scripture as the Prince of Peace. The book of Isaiah 9: 6 and 7 reads, “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.”

Last week in my message we also were reminded that Jesus offers us peace. Jesus says in John 14: 27, “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you: not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.”

Of course, we also know that what Jesus embodies as a peacemaker is at the heart of our Creator God and the is the work of the Holy Spirit, so as we imagine God as Trinity (Creator-Mother/Father, Jesus the Son, and Holy Spirit), we can imagine God

as the one who leads us into peace. Our Trinitarian God is a peacemaker.

Let me share now a couple quotes on peace. One I found from the ministry of Richard Rohr who leads the the Center for Action and Contemplation. In a piece that Rohr wrote entitled God is a peacemaker, he quotes Archbishop John Wester of Santa Fe New Mexico who inspired partially from our passage today says these words, “In these teachings, Jesus says that God is a peacemaker, and since we are God’s sons and daughters, we are peacemakers too, not warmakers. He says that God practices universal love and since we are the sons and daughters of the God of universal nonviolent love, we practice universal nonviolent love, too.”

Rohr goes onto say in his article that the work of nuclear disarmament is one way to work for peace and that Christians need to have a conversation about “what it means to follow the risen,

nonviolent Jesus, who calls us to be peacemakers, put down the sword, and love everyone, even the enemies of our nation.”

When I think of a gifted peacemaker in history, in addition to Jesus, I remember Desmond Tutu. In the midst of South Africa’s crisis of apartheid, he called for peace. Here is one of Tutu’s famous quotes on peace, “There can be no future unless there is peace. There can be no peace unless there is reconciliation.” Tutu is wise in linking the work of peace, reconciliation and justice together. As we remember, Tutu was a successful peacemaker because he called for both justice and compassion. Forgiveness and true reconciliation.

As part of my meditation on our passage today, I reflected on what Jesus meant when he said, “Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they are the children of God.”

I think Jesus is saying that when we do the work of peace we are like children following the example of kind and loving parents. In this

example, Jesus is saying that God is our parent and when we do the work of peacemaking we are acting like God.

So then I wonder what does peacemaking look like in practice.

Like many of you from time to time I have friends send me encouraging notes or sayings. A friend recently sent me a quote from RUMI. If you do not know Rumi, he was a 13th century Sufi poet whose wisdom was so amazing that we still remember it today.

Rumi has some wise words that to me gives us some insight on how to be a peacemaker.

He says,

“See through

Eyes of compassion

Listen with

Ears of tolerance

Speak with

The language of love.” (Read Twice)

I like how in this poem Rumi inspires us to believe that peacemaking includes how we engage the world with our eyes, ears, and voices.

To be a person of peace, to follow the example of Jesus and others we need to see with eyes of compassion, truly listen to each other with tolerance and I would add with empathy, and then to speak in words of love.

The alternative to peacemaking becomes quite clear. When we fail to see with compassion or listen well or speak in loving ways, we fail to do the necessary work of peace.

Last week I spent a few days at a retreat for the Presbyterian Leadership Council of Cascades Presbytery. We worshipped together, enjoyed conversation, and discussed important issues related to our presbytery. Some of our discussions required peacemaking skills as we listened well to each other and built friendships with one another. I was impressed with our group because we acted with compassion and kindness.

One morning while going for a walk in Cannon Beach, I entered a bakery and noticed they had a saying on the wall. It read, “Kindness is free, sprinkle that stuff everywhere.” I know, what a perfect saying for a bakery. Kindness certainly is an important way to foster peace.

Listening also is an art form. Sometimes when we listen, we focus more on preparing for what we wish to say rather than really appreciating or hearing from another. Good listeners are focused deeply on a person’s words and thoughts and seek to truly understand and look for value in what someone is saying. Do you notice when human beings truly see each other with compassion, listen with empathy, and speak with a spirit of love and kindness, peace is often a natural outcome? One other awareness that came up in my conversations with presbytery leadership this last week, is that peacemaking work does not mean that we need to avoid conflict. Conflict when handled well is sometimes a necessary process in the work of peace. As I grow in leadership, I am learning

that conflict sometimes happens as part of the process of change and growth, but the best leaders keep a calm demeanor and a spirit of love and kindness as they work for peace.

So now that we have explored peacemaking, where might we live out the value of peacemaking in our lives? How about everywhere?

In our homes, among our friends, in how we care for strangers?

Peacemaking is what we as children of God are called to do. This is the way of Jesus.

Our church, Newberg First Presbyterian, is learning to make peace a more central part of our mission. Our Peace Garden is a big part of that as we provide a place of beauty and peace for troubled hearts who come to our campus for prayer and reflection, but we also embody peacemaking here as we seek to be a church that is compassionate and that combines genuine love for everyone with a commitment to social justice. There is a way of living out the gospel where we seek to foster friendship everywhere we go. I think we are

called to embody a church of love and compassion in our town that fosters peace. May God continue to show us the art of peacemaking as we act like children of God. We are created in the image of God and we join the Trinity in bringing peace to our world as we see with compassion, listen with tolerance and empathy, and as we speak words of love.

Let us pray...

Matthew 5:1-12

The Beatitudes

5 When Jesus[a] saw the crowds, he went up the mountain, and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. 2 And he began to speak and taught them, saying:

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 receive 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 for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 “Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely[b] on my account. 12

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