

# Blessed are the Peacemakers

Message #8 in the series, "Blessed (for Chaos)"

Matthew 5:9

St. Paul's United Methodist Church of Elizabethtown  
June 6, 2021

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<sup>3</sup> *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.*

<sup>4</sup> *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.*

<sup>5</sup> *"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.*

<sup>6</sup> *"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.*

<sup>7</sup> *"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

<sup>8</sup> *"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

<sup>9</sup> *"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

<sup>10</sup> *"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3-10)*

We are in the midst of a sermon series called "Blessed for Chaos." No matter what is happening around us, no matter what we might be feeling inside of us, we have been equipped to be a light for Christ in the middle of all of it. To illustrate how this is possible, this series has focused squarely on each attribute that the Bible refers to as the beatitudes—the qualities of a disciple. As we are all called to be Jesus's disciples, these qualities, these beatitudes, are meant to guide us, just as they were meant to guide the original twelve disciples, in a world that is more often than not fraught with disagreements, dissension and disarray.

Something that I've observed throughout this message series, and it is something I've learned throughout the years listening to our senior pastor David Woolverton preach, is that Jesus came to upend everything everyone knew at that time. Jesus took on the entire social order of his day and reordered it. In past several weeks we've seen this aspect of Jesus illustrated in Matthew 5 when he said things like:

***Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.***

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

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

Each of these statements create a profound juxtaposition—that is putting two things side-by-side that create cognitive dissonance; they just don't make sense together. Take this third example. On its face, how can a meek person inherit the earth. In the entire history of human civilization, it is the strong and the powerful that rule the earth, right? What Jesus reveals in this lesson to his disciples is that everything they had thought is now upended. A new order, a new way, had been revealed in the life of Jesus. And this new way would be further revealed in his death and resurrection.

Our message today is based on the second to last characteristic that Jesus mentions in his message on the beatitudes found in **Matthew 5:9** where he says, "*Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.*" Every word is measured so carefully in this message that Jesus delivers to his disciples and that certainly holds true in this one verse of scripture. The peace that Jesus is talking about is a complex idea. Jesus isn't necessarily talking about the kind of peacemaker that authors a cease-fire or amicable arbitration. No, Jesus is talking about the only true peace that exists in a broken and fallen world—the peace that comes through submission and total surrender to God and his authority over our lives. That's worth repeating....

**The only true peace that exists in a broken and fallen world  
Is the peace that comes through submission and total surrender  
to God and his authority over our lives.**

As we dive into God's word, please join me in prayer as we prepare our hearts for what God would have us hear today.

*Lord, what do You need us to see, what do You need us to hear,  
what do You need us to know, what do You need us to do. We are  
Your servant in Jesus's name. Amen.*

Earlier this month I, along with thousands of college professors, brought the 2020-2021 school year to a close. In their own way colleges and universities concluded their Spring semesters with yet another year of augmented or completely unfamiliar graduation ceremonies. For the first time in its 122 years in existence, Elizabethtown College held five small graduation ceremonies including one special ceremony for 13 graduating seniors on the Mens' Baseball Team who missed the other four ceremonies because they were playing in a national championship tournament. So, because we had already held four ceremonies for their classmates, the college administration, along with the players and their parents, decided to hold one more to honor their graduations too.

Words cannot describe how I feel now that the most challenging year in my career as an educator is now over. Now, I know that all of us that work have had to do things differently in the last year and a half, and I am by no means minimizing the ongoing struggle that everyone in the working world is still putting up with as we slowly, ever so painfully return to pre-2020 rhythms and routines. And I have to tell you... I am so glad this school year is over.

The 2020-2021 school year required every teacher to relearn everything they had mastered in their craft, regardless of the years of experience he or she had on the job. New platforms like Zoom, online collaborative white boards, document cameras, and digital learning management systems became our primary tools. Our old standbys like dialogue, collaborative learning, formative assessment and office hours just didn't work in this new environment. Every day, every week, every month we had to pivot, adjust, recalibrate and refocus. Some schools, like Etown College, adopted a flexible hybrid model for most of its on-campus courses. So, from week-to-week, you didn't really know who was going to be sitting in front of you in the classroom and who would be dialing in on Zoom. It was really difficult to

plan for. And, yet, as difficult as all of this was, in every single instance that I could see, the students rose to the occasion, they made the very best of a trying situation, and we made it. Together.

Two weeks ago as I watched the seniors walk across the stage in the dell on Etown's campus I felt something that I hadn't felt in almost 18 months. I felt relief. I might even say that I felt peace. After all that had happened in the last year and a half, there was no other way to describe it. Peace, brought on by the conclusion of a very chaotic and unrelenting season. At least, that is what I thought I felt. Peace after the chaos. It turns out, maybe by process of elimination, I wasn't feeling peace at all. Allow me to explain.

In preparing for today's message, I was a little perplexed. By opening the Bible to find what Jesus says about peace, one might think there is a conflicting message from Jesus on what peace actually is and how it applies to the Christian life. In our text for today Jesus says, once again, "*Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.*" On it's own that sounds pretty straightforward. As Jesus was talking to his disciples, one could probably assume that he was equipping and instructing his disciples to be the cool heads in the room when fight was about to break out, to be the voices of reason when heated debates began to get out of control, to be the arbiters when tensions between warring nations were rising to the point of battle. One might safely assume that is what Jesus was saying.

However, if we look closer into Jesus's story, we see a different meaning of peace, a peace that literally surpasses all of our understanding. Perhaps with this perspective in mind we will begin to see what it means to be a peacekeeper in a chaotic world.

In John 14 Jesus, always the teacher, is preparing his disciples for the time in which he would be leaving them. If you read through this chapter of scripture, you can almost hear the anxiety in his disciples' voices as they appeal to Jesus for more information. They have so many questions and in verse 27, Jesus says:

***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.***

From this small piece of scripture, we see that peace, true and eternal peace, is something that comes from God. Peace isn't found in a new relationship, a new address, a new job, or a new set of circumstances. It isn't found in a bottle, on a website, or in stacks of money. And, much to my chagrin, it isn't found at the end of a chaotic sequence of events and periods of challenging problems. We can look for peace in all sorts of places, but the truth of the matter is,

**Peace comes from God.**

In honest reflection, I think this is a reasonable image that we all have of Jesus. In times of high anxiety, he speaks of the peace he brings. However, as soon as we

adopt this idea—Jesus is peace-- scripture reveals something that we then have to reconcile.

In Matthew 10 there is another reference to peace that might, on its face, look to be in conflict with what we just read in John 14. In Matthew 10:34 and the following verses, Jesus says to his disciples,

**<sup>34</sup> "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup> For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; <sup>36</sup>and one's foes will be members of one's own household.** (Matt. 10:34-36)

When you go home today and talk to your loved ones about the service today, you can tell them this is where Pastor Matt lost control of the message. Because, as you can see, after establishing that peace, true peace, comes from God, we see Jesus saying in a different gospel account that in fact he didn't come to bring peace to earth... Perhaps there is more to this passage.

If you zoom out and look through all of John 14, you'll see that Jesus is preparing his disciples to go out and walk from town to town, healing people and telling everyone the good news. The Messiah has come. As a result, Jesus also tells his disciples in John 14 that they will be brought before the governors of these towns. They will be apprehended. They will be flogged in the synagogues. In these moments Jesus tells his disciples not to worry about what to say or do because each will be guided by the Holy Spirit. Then, as he concludes his words of reassurance to his disciples, Jesus drops this line about not bringing peace to earth, but a sword. What follows is an interesting reference, a direct quote actually, from the prophet Micah in which he says in chapter 7:6

**<sup>6</sup> for the son treats the father with contempt, the daughter rises up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; your enemies are members of your own household.** (Micah 7:6)

Interesting... Why would Jesus quote Micah?

Micah said these words in his prophecy to the Israelites roughly 600 years before Jesus was born. These words were his lament because the nation Israel was living in captivity at the time and the people of God were living in great conflict with one another. They had turned away from their God and king and when Micah looked around he couldn't find another holy and just person with whom he could relate. Amid all of the brokenness, Micah says in verse 7,

**<sup>7</sup> But as for me, I will look to the Lord, I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me.** (Micah 7:7)

The prophet Micah saw what ultimately Jesus would see over 600 years later. God's people had lost sight **of who they were, why they were here on Earth, and where they were going.** They had dedicated themselves to a legalistic relationship to hundreds of laws and mandates and had forgotten why those laws were brokered. They were looking for peace and reassurance in the law when they should have been looking for peace and reassurance from God who had delivered them time and again from the bounds of injustice and persecution.

Now, I believe the reference to a sword in this passage is meant to be metaphorical. A sword cuts and it separates. What was Jesus cutting? Remember, Jesus came to earth to turn everything we know on its head. He came to reorder everything so that we would, in turn, realign our hearts to God. **What needed to be separated? Us from ourselves.**

Peace, the kind of peace that Jesus makes, is not best characterized as the kind of peace that brings a ceasefire between nations or an arbitrated agreement between disgruntled parties. These are not examples of peace but merely a pause on aggression. In each case grudges will smolder until the time when battle breaks out once more. **We find peace when we separate ourselves from what we want and pursue what God wants for us.** Every ounce of anger, every expectation, every missed opportunity and regret, every lie we've ever told ourselves, every hurt that we continue to carry, and every moment of mourning that we can't seem to shake. Every fear. Every doubt. Every accomplishment and achievement. Every question. Every single question. When we surrender all—when we are separated from all of it—**when we finally say to God, "Not my will, but your will be done"—we find peace.**

In his lesson to his disciples, taking the posture of a teacher, Jesus speaks to his closest friends, his students, and says,

***"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God."*** (Matthew 5:9)

A disciple is a wholly devoted follower. One who enters into a lifelong journey to learn at the arm of the teacher. To be guided, formed, equipped and prepared for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. If at any point you have said yes to Jesus you have been prepared to be a peacemaker. No matter where you are on your journey today you can make peace.

To make peace it is first important to remember that **true peace**—the kind of peace that will finally give your heart and soul the rest it so desperately desires—**comes from the Heavenly Father.**

To accept the peace that He gives, **we must surrender to God.** That means we must let go of every grudge, every disappointment, every annoyance and missed opportunity. I don't know what it is for you, but if it is the one thing you are holding onto while God is calling you to Him, let go. Those things we are holding on to will ultimately weigh us down.

To make peace we ultimately live in the beautiful grace that God provided so many years ago in his Son Jesus Christ. Who died for our sins so that today, on this very day, we would be forgiven. I don't know where you are today, but if you have never asked God to forgive you of your sins—the things we do that separate us from God—I invite you to take that step, to invite God into your heart to start building a new life with Him.

To be a peacemaker, to make peace, we recognize

- **who we are?** Forgiven children of God,
- **why we are here?** To make disciples for Jesus Christ, and
- **where we are going?** To share in the Kingdom of God.

Therein lies our peace and our true victory. Amen!