

Makers of Peace
Christ Church
26 Feb 2017

Blessed are the peace makers for they will be called children of God.

Making Peace is hard. It is not sunlight and rainbows and white doves and lovely flowers blooming wherever we look. Peace is difficult. It is work. Every day. And it's personal. It starts with me. And with you

As I'm writing this, I'm wondering if there is ever a single day when I don't feel at least a moment of angst.... of frustration.... of anger. I got a phone call from my dad at 7:45 yesterday morning needing some help. He had called my sister who lives 30 miles from them, and she said, "Call Glo." I'm 600 miles away, and I'm my parents primary go-to person. I am very grateful for the strong, loving connection we have. I'm their first child. Being a family care giver offers many tender, sweet moments. But overwhelming, frustrating times as well. Times when my own personal sense of peace is disrupted, even if only briefly. I must pause, breathe, consider the next right response or action. This is the daily work of Making Peace.

I sometimes need to prepare myself for an encounter or interaction. We travel down to San Diego to support my parents monthly now. I take time before arriving to get ready to leave my life behind temporarily and enter their home. I am there to assist them. This is the work of Making Peace.

Like most of us, there are some folks we interact with.... sadly even family members, whose behaviors and reactions and attitudes can trigger frustrations. Learning to love and accept even our enemies, even those situations and people that are difficult and challenging for us. This is the work of Making Peace.

When I mentioned to my Dad that I was preaching on being a peace maker, he said you tell them you're the family peace maker. He also acknowledged that

sometimes peacemakers are complimented and appreciated for their efforts... and sometimes they are not. Sometimes what they are advocating is a change. Making peace is not easy, and it's not pleasant or nice.

Peacemaking is not about an absence of conflict. In fact, often peace is most needed in the midst of a mess. Peacemaking is not about putting our head in the sand and hoping the conflict will go away.

So what did Jesus mean by peacemaker? Some believe that Jesus was implying that peacemakers must actively work to reconcile people to God and to each other. Conflict is all the more difficult when we have forgotten how to return to God and our fellow humans and to ask for help.

The word peace in Hebrew is shalom - a broad term related to health, prosperity, harmony and wholeness. It implies serenity, fulfillment, freedom from troubles, and liberation from anything that hinders these things. When someone says "Shalom" they are wishing well-being for the other. The familiar blessing from Numbers 6: 24-26 illustrates this - "May God bless you and keep you, May God make her face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; May God look with favor upon you and give you peace."

Peace for our faithful ancestors often was coupled closely with justice and righteousness.... doing the right thing. Without them, no peace is possible. *Make* is a very active word. We are called to initiative and action. Peace must be made and created. Peacemakers are always working at being in right relationship with their fellows and with the world. This is the work of Making Peace.

Being a maker of peace is an ever challenging effort. And it starts within us. We must make peace with ourselves.... with those expectations we have about how we are supposed to live and respond. Sometimes frustration or anger boils up within. The hard work of making peace demands that we acknowledge our feelings and accept that we may disagree or resist what's going on around us. We

are bombarded with news of scary things daily... People are grieving and worried. I am overwhelmingly sad when people are being hurt and I feel utterly powerless to change the circumstances. I must make peace with my feelings and breathe and pray and consider what if anything I can do in this situation. I know that an angry response is rarely the “right” action. Many of us forget in these difficult times to pause, and then anger is what spews out. When this happens, we must make peace with our anger, too. Anger in and of itself is not a bad thing. It is what we do with it that hurts or helps. It is a signal that something doesn’t feel right. That we are feeling hurt or disappointed or powerless. Even if we react initially, without thinking, we can still take a breath and apologize and try again. We can acknowledge the other person’s feelings. This is the work of Making Peace. Peace makers learn to respond with understanding and kindness. They also remember to lay their grievances aside to meet another person where he or she is. Peace makers do not talk with others about those who have hurt them. If they have a concern, they face it directly.

Peace makers work to make the world a kinder, safer, healthier place. Peace making also looks ahead and considers the needs of future generations... the needs of the planet. What can we do to insure that there are resources for all?

Jesus said, “For those who make peace shall be called children of God.” As followers of Jesus, this means we are ALL called to be peace makers. We have a mighty responsibility. As Children of God, we are part of the same family. We are called to live as reconcilers.... being God with skin on to family, friends, enemies, animals, the planet.

Some suggest that the opposite of peacemakers is troublemakers, people who create conflict. I don’t want to be a mean-spirited troublemaker.... But it is a very fine line, isn’t it. Sometimes as we strive to be peacemakers, we are called to stir things up. To advocate for others and to speak up for justice for all.

Frederick Buechner has said that

Jesus says we are to love our enemies and pray for them,

meaning love not in an emotional sense but in the sense of [wishing them all good things as] we also love ourselves. It is a tall order. African Americans love white supremacists? The longtime employee who is laid off just before he qualifies for retirement with a pension love the people who call him in to break the news? The mother of the molested child love the molester? [The man who was wrongfully imprisoned for many years who is finally released?] So, at least you see your enemies clearly.

You see the lines in their faces and the way they walk when they're tired. You see who their husbands and wives are, maybe. You see where they're vulnerable. You see where they're scared. Seeing what is hateful about them, you may catch a glimpse also of where the hatefulness comes from. Seeing the hurt they cause you, you may see also the hurt they cause themselves. At least you see how they are human even as you are human, and that is a step in the right direction. It's possible that you may even get to where you can pray for them a little, if only that God forgive them because you yourself can't.

In the long run, it may be easier to love the ones we look in the eye, the enemies, than the ones whom we choose not to look at, at all.”

quote originally published in *Whistling in the Dark* by *Frederick Buechner*.

The work of Making Peace is about learning the hard lessons and practicing what it means to truly love others as we love ourselves. Like peacemaking, loving is not easy either. We are given countless opportunities to practice every day, and even here at church, in our meetings.... and as we do mission outreach work in the community.

Dae Shik Kim Hawkins describes a distinction between being charitable, offering support that helps to meet basic needs, and practicing justice which works to address the long terms effects of the injustices that create differences, and poverty, and exclusion. Both are needed, but deeper justice work goes further. With our weekly offering of food through Elisha's Pantry, basic needs are met. And when we get to know all of the patrons, and see all of them through the eyes and hearts of kindness and love, as fellow travelers, we are going deeper and doing the hard work of truly Making Peace.

Yesterday as I was finishing up this message, my bi-weekly copy of The Christian Century came.... with the theme of Enemy (hold up) Within there are some personal stories that illustrate the hard yet important work of Loving our Enemies and thereby Making Peace. I share this story from Sheryl Carle Fancher from South Carolina in her words -

I left the bank frustrated with the banker who told me he could do nothing to help me reduce some credit card fees. Now I was late for work and knew I would not find a parking space. I decided to leave my car and walk. Still thinking about the conversation at the bank, I took a shortcut through the dark alley to the back entrance of my office. I reached for the doorknob.

Suddenly I felt a hand against my back pushing me forward. At first I laughed thinking my husband who works nearby had slipped behind me. But the push became a shove as the person jerked my purse from under my left arm. This was no friend! The thief ran away with my purse.

I screamed in a voice I had never heard before: "You god-damned son of a bitch, I'm going to kill you!" The thief spun around to see if I had a weapon and for an instant we were face to face. I chased him and almost caught up with him when he slipped and fell on the snow-covered walk. What would I do if I caught him? I flagged down a

motorist who drove me to a gas station where I contacted the police. When the police took my statement they asked if I had money in my purse. “No money... only a credit card and a roll of film that’s important to me.”

Later that day I got a call from a man who had found my purse along the street next to his house. He offered to bring it to my home that evening. Everything was in the purse, except my credit card.

That night I couldn’t sleep, but kept reliving the incident over and over in my mind. I kept getting stuck on my angry voice, “I’m going to kill you!” *Why would I say such a thing?* I was a longtime peace activist, social justice advocate, and a minister’s wife! What was there in my purse that I was going to kill for: Yes, the family photos could not have been replaced. [I felt hurt that] the thief was stealing those precious moments. He became an enemy.

Two days later, my pastor talked about enemies. Who are our enemies? Why? Jesus preached compassion. “Could you see enemies differently? Could you see the face of Christ in your enemy?”

The words stopped my self-righteous feelings of injustice. Why would a young man attempt a theft in broad daylight? What desperation drove him? I remembered the fear on his face.

The next week I received a call from the credit card bureau asking if I had purchased a one-way ticket to Kansas City. The thief had left town.

While our paths have not crossed again, I continue to see the man’s face. It was not the face of the enemy; it was the face of desperation and despair. Now I wonder if the real enemy is the hate and vengeance I saw in myself.

Now, he was no longer the thief or an enemy. He was a man who was struggling. Her self reflection and awareness was the work of Making Peace.

For many within our Christian tradition, today is Transfiguration Sunday. Through the powerful experience of seeing Jesus glowing with light, the “inner circle” of His disciples now had a greater understanding of who Jesus was and the depth of his connection to God. Having walked with him and lived Jesus’ message of light and love and service, they had received a life beyond their wildest dreams. As followers of Jesus today, we too are called to be light bearers and peacemakers in this troubled world. We are called to shine God’s light into the world. We are called to be Makers of Peace and hope and love.

To truly be Makers of Peace, we must work at it every day. We must learn to pause long enough to see the person standing in front of us. How am I being called to respond?

As we turn the corner on this time of Epiphany, the season of light, and begin our preparatory journey through Lent, we conclude our study of the Beatitudes.... Anne has called them the Be-Attitudes..... with the children. What attitudes do we hope to nurture that can guide us in our daily living and choices? How can we humbly live with a pure heart, doing the right thing, showing mercy even in the midst of persecution and struggle? May we use the lessons of the Beatitudes daily as we do the hard work of Making Peace.

Let us pray together this prayer attributed to St Francis of Assisi

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace
Where there is hatred, let me sow love
Where there is injury, pardon,
Where there is doubt, faith
Where there is despair, hope
Where there is darkness, light

Where there is sadness, joy

“O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
To be consoled as to console
To be understood as to understand
To be loved as to love

“For it is in giving that we receive
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned
It is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.”

“May God bless you and keep you, May God make her face to shine upon you,
and be gracious to you; May God look with favor upon you and give you
peace.”