

Sermon Text for July 20, 2025

By Guest Minister Rev. Simeon Harrar

“Blessed are the Peacemakers”

Scripture Text: Matthew 5:1-10

In Luke 2 the angels appear after the birth of Jesus and they declare, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men. The first thing we learn about Jesus is that he is all about peace. The marker of the in-breaking of the Kingdom of God is peace. Heralds would be sent ahead of a king before he entered a city and they would proclaim his praises and let everyone know how great he is and what the king is all about. This is what the angels are doing. They are the heralds declaring that this new king, Jesus, is going to be a king who brings peace. His will not be a kingdom marked by war and power and greed. To be a part of building God’s kingdom means that we are a people who strive for peace, because we serve the prince of peace.

My word for this year is peace. I wanted something more exciting. Something like justice, transformation or victory! The Hebrew word Shalom in peace means to be whole and to be complete. It means harmony with ourselves, others and God and our society. The invitation of the Kingdom of God is to live a life that is whole and complete and in harmony. In a world that is filled with dissonance and tension, we are called to bring resolution and harmony.

Being a part of the Kingdom of God, being a child of God is not an invitation to a life without challenges, without tension and dissonance and arguments. The way of Jesus is the difficult path of working for peace in the midst of the chaos and cacophony of life. It’s why the incarnation was so important. Jesus waded into the messiness of humanity to bring peace. Our job is to listen and learn from the Prince of peace so that we too might be bringers of peace in our overly anxious world.

This brings us to our passage today where Jesus begins to lay the foundation of the Kingdom he is building. A kingdom of peace. A peace that passes all understanding that stretches from now into eternity.

In our text Jesus’ disciples and a large crowd have followed Jesus up the mountain and sit at his feet as he begins to teach them. He starts with the word, “Blessed.” These rules, these instructions are to be a blessing to those who follow them. They are not heavy weights to burden and bind the people. They are words of blessing and hope meant to move people out of anxiety and legalism and dissonance and into peace and harmony with God and with one another. The image that I have when I think of the beatitudes and the teachings of Jesus is that of a trellis.

When Ali and I first bought our house as a young couple one of the things we were most excited about was planting a garden. We built a nice white picket fence in the backyard and tilled the soil, but we didn’t really know what we were doing. We planted tomatoes because Ali wanted to can them. We planted rows of tomato plants, and Ali’s parents, who have been gardening for decades, advised us that along with plenty of water and sunshine the tomato plants needed a support system. Without support they would fall over and the tomatoes would rot on the ground and our crop of delicious tomatoes would be ruined.

You and I are like tomato plants in need of a good sturdy trellis to provide structure and shape and support, so we can grow. The rules and teachings of Jesus in the beatitudes are designed to do just that, to help us thrive and bear fruit. This is why when we listen and ingest and live out the teachings of Jesus we are blessed because we are transformed to be a people marked by love, joy, peace....

Jesus knows that the people he is speaking to on the mountain are poor, some are sick, all are subjects of an oppressive foreign power. He wants them to know that the Kingdom of God is for them. It’s not just for the rich and powerful and overly spiritual. It’s not just for the deacons and elders and pastors and those who give lots of money to the church. The Kingdom

of God is intentionally designed to be accessible for imperfect people which is really good news, because that means it's for us.

There is hope for peace even in the midst of our broken relationships and our broken world. There is hope for reconciliation and healing. There is hope for us because we have a King that sees us and loves us. We have a Savior who joins us in our small, medium and large sufferings and weeps at the injustices of the world. And his name is Jesus. And he has declared that the Kingdom of God is here. It is now. Peace is possible, love is possible, forgiveness is possible BUT these don't just magically happen.

Which is why when I began my journey of exploring peace this year, this text stood out to me. Blessed are those with a calm. Blessed are those who do yoga and meditate. No! He said blessed are the peacemakers. The peace builders. The ones who work for peace.

Being a peacemaker rarely makes the headlines. It is not exciting or fun work. It often means you get stuck in the middle of difficult situations. When I think of peacemaking I think of my mom. Station Wagon- My mom was the peacemaker between us kids in the backseat. At first her voice was calm. The tone changed. Threats were made. Adventures in Odyssey was turned off. We were unruly passengers quick to fight back against her attempts for there to be peace and harmony in our vehicle. When things really got bad my dad would get involved, and that's when I learned about the fear of the Lord and also that there was a weird little back seat in the rear of the station wagon which was sort of like a temporary purgatory when you'd really been bad.

My parents worked hard to create peace in our home and we often worked just as hard to make sure there was chaos. What I have come to appreciate about my parents now that I too am a parent and we just did our first long road trip as a family is that their commitment to peace was ongoing. The deep desire of their hearts was that the three of us siblings would come to see the inherent value in one another. That we would learn to love each other in spite of our differences and live in harmony. That we would choose not to pinch my sister out of love for her rather than fear of being put in purgatory or being banned from getting slushies.

They realized that for there to be peace in the station wagon there was good work that had to be done outside of the station wagon. The work of peace is not the work of putting out fires to create temporary calm. The peace, the shalom, that Jesus calls us to is much deeper than that. Peace is something we build little by little. One day, one decision at a time. And that is what my parents did.

I was talking to my sister the other day who is a therapist and does a lot of marital counseling and one of the biggest problems she sees is that couples don't know how to handle conflict. Many of them now only engage in conflict over text! And as you can imagine, that doesn't go well. They haven't built mechanisms for healthy conflict. They haven't learned how to engage and work towards peace so the result is the opposite of peace; tension, bitterness and oftentimes separation.

So my challenge for you is this. Peacemaking is a skill that has to be developed. You and I are called to be builders of peace. Even though it's hard. Even though it's messy. Even though it's awkward and means having difficult face to face conversations.

Peace is not something simply to be found or stumbled upon by happenstance. It must be sculpted and curated and worked for. Peace is not passivity or avoidance. It is not the naive hope that peace will someday, somehow fall from the sky like rain or that the brokenness in our relationships and in our world will up and disappear and sinful men will suddenly start loving their neighbors.

There is a necessary commitment and action required for us to be peacemakers. There is a riskiness to it, because we won't get it right all the time which means we have to be humble and ask for forgiveness and keep trying and learning and growing. Achieving peace cannot be completed in an hour or a day or even a year. You can't check it off your to do list. Peacemaker Check! **The undertaking of Shalom is a whole life lived in the direction of peace in a world that is often divided and dissonant.**

Building peace is like Noah building an ark. It is the work of a lifetime, an act of faith. A belief that God knows what he is up to. But if we commit to it. If we give ourselves to the work of peacemaking this is what Jesus says. Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God. When we work for peace Jesus looks down and says "Yes, that's my son. I'm so proud of him. Do you see him working to control his temper and not just snap. That's my daughter, do you see her working to diffuse a tense situation between colleagues at work.

Another way to translate the word blessed is happy, and I think there is something to this. Happy are you when you aren't wound so tight that you snap at the slightest thing. Happy are you when you can take a deep breath before wading into kids fighting. Happy are you when there is peace in your marriage because you've committed to handling conflict together rather than running away from it or just blaming your spouse. Happy are you when you commit to working for peace. Happy are those who make it a habit of sitting at the feet of Jesus and listen to his teachings and realize that they need support and guidance and a trellis they cannot build on their own if they are to flourish. Those who live in this way prove themselves to be children of God. May we too commit ourselves to being peacemakers. Let us close with a prayer from St. Francis.

"Lord, make me a vessel of your 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;
And where there is sadness, joy