

May our meditation this morning be positive and helpful, God and Father.

Over the last month, we focused our sermons on stewardship and the letter of Paul to the Philippians. Now we return to Jesus' beatitudes.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God." This statement from Jesus has rung through the centuries.

In some of the other beatitudes, the blessing responded directly to the problem. Think of "Blessed are those who mourn for they will be comforted." Comfort is clearly a valuable response to someone who is mourning in agony.

But for the peacemakers, the blessing is a name, "Children of God". One might hope that peacemakers would receive protection from trouble and this beatitude would read "blessed are the peacemakers for they will live in peace." But this is not the blessing. It is to be called the "Children of God."

Let's think about this for a moment. What's in such a name?

Here is a true story. In my former job I was responsible for research and I worked closely with the marketing department since nothing we invented would go anywhere unless marketing could find a way to sell it. Any new product required approval by the division manager, who treated research like second class citizen. We desperately needed his support and backing.

We came up with a product and a target customer, a paper company with several mills in a fifty mile radius. Then we came up with an elaborate scheme to show the target customer that they could profit by using large amounts of our product. My marketing counterpart presented this scheme to our division manager and the manager expressed his approval saying to him, "My son. What a good job!" He was saying that the scheme was just the sort of thing he would do; that we were acting like his own flesh and blood, like his son. He didn't say it to me but I felt included. What a jump; second class citizen to almost a member of the family. I didn't get a bonus, but I was invited along with marketing to help pitch the idea to the customer's top management. For a time, I felt like part of our division manager's inner circle. There was a lot of reward in being called "My son."

This is what it's like to be called "children of God." It means we are doing what God would do in our place. It means that God approves of what we are doing. It means God has accepted us as representing His mission. What an honor.

But why is this honor bestowed on peacemakers? Why, among all the roles people fill in the world, is this one picked out as acting like God's children?

## Who are peacemakers?

They exist at all levels ranging from leaders of nations to friends across the street.

Let's start big. Last week, President Obama announced that all troops would be withdrawn from Iraq in time for the Christmas Holidays. Is he a peacemaker? I don't want to get into a political debate about this specific war. But I want to look at what Jesus was saying about war and peace between nations in this beatitude.

Our Old Testament readings came from the millennium before Jesus. The first began, "It was spring, the time kings go to war." In that period kings were much like warlords. A major purpose was to lead their nations in conflicts. Conflict was considered normal. Everyone did it. Every spring. The first reading describes Israel attacking the capital city of the Ammonites, a neighboring tribe. Here's what happened. 1 Chron 20:2-3. "David took the crown of their king from his head ... and it was placed on David's head. And he brought the spoils out of the city, a very large amount." The purpose of the attack was to capture valuables. The account continues, "And David brought the people out of the city and cut them with saws and sharp instruments and with axes." After the city fell, its defenders were killed.

Go forward to the Old Testament reading from Jeremiah, who lived 400 years after king David. In it Jeremiah condemns the Ammonites and their rich capital city because they have conquered and are occupying part of Israel. The same two tribal nations. One century one is on top, some time later the other is on top. War was a way of life. Each felt justified because of the past atrocities.

In Jesus' time, many Jews still looked to war, with God on their side, as the way to restore the nation of Israel.

Is this what God wanted?

Here is a made up story. A man had two sons. He left them to manage his plumbing business while he traveled back to Germany to attend his great uncle's funeral. Upon returning, he found that his older son had killed the younger. The older son explained that it was necessary. The younger son wanted to steal the family savings and threatened to kill anyone who got in his way. In the resulting scuffle, the younger son was killed. The older son asked his father to celebrate his victory over the one with evil intentions. The father answered, "How can I celebrate the death of my child?"

What did the father feel? Did he rejoice because one son stood up for the right by getting rid of the bad seed in the family? No. One of his sons was dead and the other killed his brother. Better that the good rather than the bad son survived. But the major emotion felt by the father was profound sorrow.

This is how God sees war. People whom God created have filled the world that God created. And time and time again they fight and kill one another. Both sides are assured by their leaders that they are in the right. One side is more in the right than the other. But what does God feel?

According to Jesus' beatitude, God feels only sorrow looking at unnecessary deaths. It is those who seek peace who are God's children, not those who escalate to war.

Let's move to the other end of the spectrum, from nations to individuals. Our New Testament lesson returns to the letter of Paul to the Philippians. Listen to what Paul says to them. Beginning with chapter 4, verse 6, "Be anxious for nothing, but in prayer let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your minds and your hearts in Christ Jesus." Paul is saying that God wants us all to be free of anxiety. Not easy to accomplish. But then Paul offers help.

In verse 9 he writes, "The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things. And the God of peace will be with you." He asks the people to watch him and do what he does. Is Paul being a peacemaker? You bet. He is asking others to follow his example. Pray. Trust. Believe. Know that this world is not the end. Just like Paul.

Could we be such an example? Who among us can place our fears on Jesus' shoulders and find peace? Who can believe that whatever faces us is temporary because God has an eternal plan for us. Who can say to others who are afraid, anxious, or weighed down with worry, "You are not alone. I'm here. God is here. We all want you to have peace."? Who among us can be an example bringing peace to the terrified? Here among us, there are many.

Pastor Joyce tells a true story of her assignment as chaplain in St. Luke's Hospital. She needed to meet trauma patients and then notify and deal with their families. These are times of extreme anxiety and stress for families. One of the first lessons in her training was to never run in the hospital, even if she were pulled in several directions at once. Running conveys a sense of emergency and crisis that makes anxiety worse. The chaplain's role is to bring calmness and order into crisis. The chaplain's role is to be a peacemaker.

Peace makers. This is a hard role. When the flames of war are being fanned, it is difficult to counsel peace and withstand the charges of weakness, cowardice, lack of patriotism, and treason. When threat and danger is high, it is difficult to pray with trust and belief so that anxiety does not multiply. The role of peacemaker is difficult. But it is blessed. It is our role as Christians. It makes us the "Children of God." Amen.