

Peace on Earth #1
Called to be Peacemakers
Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 5:9 (NIV); Colossians 1:19-20
12/4/16

- You know I like to ask questions that require honesty and confession. Today is no different. Ready?
 - o How many of you have ever daydreamed or fanaticized of the day when you could really verbally zap someone? You know – someone who has really ticked you off or said something to you or done something and in the moment you can't think of any zinger of a comeback, but later you do? You think about all the things you would like to say to that person or how it would be kind of funny to see them slip and fall someday.
 - o I usually can't think of comebacks to say in the moment. Honestly, I think that is the Holy Spirit keeping me under control. Afterwards, though, I'm able to come up with all kind of things to zap back with.
 - o Winston Churchill, once the leader of Great Britain, was known for being able to come up with zingers to say to his critics. One day, Lady Astor said to him, "If you were my husband, I'd put poison in your coffee." Churchill shot back, "If you were my wife, I'd drink it."
 - o Another time a woman accused him of being intoxicated after disagreeing with his actions. She stated, "You, sir, are drunk." Churchill's comeback, "Yes. But you, madam, are ugly, and I shall be sober in the morning." He was good, right?
- You know, as human beings, we are going to have conflict between us in our relationships with others. There are conflicts of opinions and actions. There are conflicts about outlooks. There are conflicts just because someone didn't say what we thought they should say to us or because they didn't say "Hi" to us.
 - o And this propensity for humans to be in conflict carries over to nations and government structures. Oh how well we know this! One researcher has noted recently that in the past 4,000 years there has been less than 300 years of world peace.
 - o WWI was supposed to be "the war to end all wars." That didn't happen. Wars have not ceased we just build more deadly weapons and recruit more people.
- And, conflict brings out the very worst of humanity. If you want to see the reality that we are all born with a sinful human nature, look at how people respond in conflict. We can become dead dog dirty.
 - o For example, there are an estimated three hundred thousand child soldiers around the world. Every year the number grows as more children are recruited for use in active combat. Children are used in wars taking place in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo, Sudan, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan and Burma.

- With the development of lighter weapons - such as the AK47 – it means that boys (and girls) as young as eight can be armed. The boys are placed closest to the enemy. In war, they are said to be fearless. Children are often less demanding soldiers than adults. They are cheaper to keep as they eat less and are easier to manipulate. It is said that the unpredictability of small children makes them better fighters.
 - Some are sent into battle high on drugs to give them courage. In combat children are often captured and threatened so they will switch sides as they fight for whoever controls them in order to stay alive.
- We live in a world desperately in need of peace. We live in a time when we have seen so much conflict that sometimes it seems like peace may just be an impossibility. It might seem as though there is no place for peace.
 - And yet, thousands of years ago, knowing how conflict will continue to consume humanity, God promised to send someone who would change everything.
 - Read **Isaiah 9:6**.
 - This passage prophesies about the coming of One who would bring peace, true peace into the world. It prophesies what we are about to celebrate soon and what we should celebrate every day – Christmas...when Jesus came to bring us peace, and indeed, peace to the whole world.
- But, his peace is not the kind of peace that the world gives or even what we think of as peace. Oh no! We cannot talk about His peace complacently or somehow forgetting how completely awesome and transforming his peace is.
 - The purpose statement for our church is to “Share the PEACE of Christ.” That was not just something pulled out of the air because it sounds nice and churchy. It’s not just a nifty sweet little thing to say – our church shares the peace of Christ, isn’t that super?
 - That purpose statement embodies what Christ did first. He came to bring peace to a world in conflict, to people in conflict – with one another, within themselves and with an enemy who wants nothing more than to bring chaos through sin and destruction.
 - We are to carry out this purpose statement in such a way that brings peace here, to the community that we have been placed in by the Prince of Peace. This purpose statement comes from the Prince of Peace himself.
- In fact, it is our Christmas call to be peacemakers. See, Jesus was consumed with the idea of peace for his people and peace for the world. He was so consumed by it that he came as a humble baby, not as a big angelic uprising in the sky. He was so consumed by peace that he taught, touched and loved, not overturned, conquered or started a revolution. Peace so consumed him that willingly he sacrificed his life to pay the price for our sins rather than sought justice and payment from us for our sins.
 - And, he calls us to do the same. In fact, in order to be children of God, we must also be consumed with peace. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, tells us this in Matthew 5:9. I

want to read it from the NIV: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” The NLT version says, “God blesses those who work for peace.”

- I want us to note the active nature of this call. To be a peacemaker is active. To work for peace is active. It is not an idle thing that we can just sit back and watch happen just or talk about. We have to actively seek peace and actively work for peace – true peace.
- That’s why Jesus didn’t call us to be peace keepers. Being a peacemaker is different than being a peace keeper.
 - We have probably all heard the saying, “keeping the peace.” It means we aren’t riling things up. You know, we keep our mouths shut around our crazy family member when they are spouting off things because “we’re keeping the peace.” It’s not that there’s really peace. There is an underlying seething that is going on inside us that is anything but peaceful.
 - And, it’s not that we need to do anything to keep the peace. Usually, we just avoid doing something to spark a conflict.
- See, peace can be kept without true peace being present.
 - When Jesus was born, it was during a time when there was Pax Romana. That means Roman Peace. During that time, the Roman empire had conquered and controlled so much of the world that there was no one really left to rise against them. So, they were in a peaceful time. They were controlling most of the world and enjoying the benefits of that control.
 - Now, that didn’t mean the world was at peace. Most of the world was controlled by a foreign power that they would love to not be under, but were forced to because the foreign power was stronger and would crush any uprising.
 - Peace was kept – only if you submitted to the control of someone else.
- But, Jesus is not referring to being peace keepers in that you begrudgingly submit to something bigger or more powerful than you. He calls us to be peace makers, regardless of the current circumstances.
 - “To be a peacemaker means that we are to be active participants in seeking to make peace even in situations and social constructs that proclaim there is no place for peace here. God makes a place for peace” and he uses us to do so.
 - A peacemaker actively overcomes evil with good. Listen, some people are never happy unless they are fighting with someone. Don’t you know someone like that? I don’t understand that at all. But, there are some who are most happy in the middle of drama and conflict and complaining and fussing with that person and that situation. But, that is not the life Jesus wants for us. He wants to bring us peace in every conflict and situation.
 - A peacemaker finds great satisfaction in removing hostilities and effecting reconciliation between enemies. So then, instead of dreaming of being able to zing someone with our words or passive aggressive actions, we dream of removing

hostilities. Instead of thinking of all of the good comebacks we want to use on someone, we think of how we can reconcile the relationship.

- Peacemakers are those disciples who strive to prevent contention and strife. They use their influence to reconcile opposing party strife among individuals, families, churches, and the community. They change hostile attitudes to attitudes that seek the best interests of everyone.

Ya'll – peace making is hard work!

- And, this is a timely message for a lot of us here. Because I would wager that several of us, if not most of us, are in conflict in some way with someone. I will admit that there just might be a person or two that I would like to give a couple of well-worded zingers to! But, then, the Prince of Peace has something to say to me and to you, to us all.
 - He calls us to be peacemakers. So, let's continue to see the attributes of peacemakers that we need to work for in order to reflect the image of the Price of Peace who came to bring us that peace.
 - We're going to call it Peacemakers 101...Lessons in Peacemaking
- The first attribute of a peacemaker is that we understand the real definition of peace.
 - True peace is not absence of conflict. True peace is not simply two enemies who are not fighting.
 - Instead, it is an absence of conflict in which opposite sides are being brought together in righteousness, ending in a right relationship. The result of true peace is always a right relationship. Let me say that again – the result of true peace is always a right relationship.
- Before you can have a right relationship with anyone you have to first have a right relationship with the Source of Peace. So, the next attribute of a peacemaker is that we know that peace with Christ must come first.
 - Haden Robinson, writer of Salt and Light, wrote "No peace will exist between nations until peace reigns in each country. And no country will have peace until peace dwells with the people. And no people will have peace until they surrender to the Prince of Peace."
 - Peace on earth is not just a Christmas wish. When Christ was born the angels sang of peace on earth because he ushered in peace as a reality. Real peace, lasting peace, peace that creates right relationships between us and God and us and others can only begin with Jesus.
- Do you know why that is? It's because conflict is not just a human problem, but a sin problem. All of the conflict we are seeing in our present day between this group and that group, black and white, Republican and Democrat, conservative and liberal...is because of sin.
 - The reason that we do not have peace is sin. The reason that a man ran over students on the OSU campus this past week and then proceeded to stab them is

because of sin. And, there is no human intervention that will ever make peace possible because as humans, we are sinful.

- Our problem is human greed, lust and selfishness, not political, economic or social. Those are symptoms of a deeper problem. It is sin and depravity in the heart of man. Until there is a change in the heart there will never be any solutions to the problems on the surface. The source of the problem is within man. Nothing but a new heart, and new man, will bring peace. What is in the heart of man inevitably comes out of him.
- There are those who believe that the only value of religion is their moral value and not salvation. What these people fail to understand is that we live by our values because of salvation. What these people fail to understand is that nothing we do will ever get us real peace. Only Jesus brought real peace when he came that first Christmas. And only Jesus can bring real peace to our lives through a right relationship with him by accepting the salvation he offers us through the sacrifice he paid for us.
 - That's why the apostle Paul said that if Christ was not crucified then our lives are in vain. Why? Because without salvation we will forever be in pursuit of something we will never attain – peace!
 - Our attempts to reach God or to attain peace have been many - treaties and truces, dialogues and diplomacies, programs and policies, education and establishing equal opportunities. And, look around – none of them have worked! We can't bridge the gap ourselves.
 - Proverbs 14:12 tells us why - "There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death"
 - Death is separation from God and what separates us from God? Sin. "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear," says Isaiah 59:2.
- In order to be a people of peace, we need to get to the root issue and dig it out. We need to do some ABC's.
 - We need to admit that we are sinful. Romans 3:23 tells us "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." You, me, all of us have sinned. And, there is nothing we can do to make it any better!
 - When we admit this, we can move forward to believe that Jesus is the only answer, he is the answer to peace. Romans 6:23 tells us "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Death is the end result of a life without peace. Death, which is separation from God, is the result of sin. The only One who can give us life is Jesus. Do you believe that this morning?
 - Do you believe what Romans 5:8 says that "God demonstrates his own love for us in this, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.:
- If you do, then confess him to be your Lord and your only source for peace in life.
 - Like Paul wrote in 1 Timothy 2:5, confess "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ."

- Make him your Lord. Make him your peace. God has provided the only way. Each person must make a choice.
 - We are only able to make peace with God because He made peace with us first through Jesus. The armistice has been signed in the blood of the Lamb.
- Then, when we have peace with Christ, it brings us inner peace with ourselves.
 - In one of the Peanuts comic strips, Lucy says to Charlie Brown, “I hate everything I hate everybody I hate the whole wide world.” Surprised, Charlie Brown replies, “But I thought you had inner peace.” Lucy responds, “I do but I also have outer obnoxiousness.”
 - How many here have some outer obnoxiousness or something that you don’t like about yourself? You don’t have to raise your hand!
- Listen, I believe in the value of counseling and self-reflection. I think most, if not all, people would benefit from some good Christian, Bible-based counseling! But, that will never take the place of what God can do in your heart to make you a better person.
 - Josh McDowell points out that we can only be truly comfortable with ourselves when we are at Peace with Jesus. This is because Peace with God frees up our perspective. It changes our world view because we are forced to look at ourselves as God looks at us.
 - You were created in His image formed by His hand. The bible says that we are all his workmanship. Only when we come to a right relationship with God can we begin to understand and accept ourselves.
- So we do not build our self worth on our successes or failures. We do not build our self worth on how many children we have, how much money we make. What kind or car we drive. We don’t build our self worth on what church we attend or how many community events we are active in.
 - Our self worth comes from understanding that you have value to God. That He wants to mold you and shape you and use you. I talk to people all the time who can’t stand something about themselves. I used to be one of those people! I can be very self-critical if I fail to remember whose I am, if I fail to remember the truth of who I am and the truth of how God sees me.
 - If you are in this boat this morning you need to give yourself permission to accept yourself by looking through the eyes of Christ and embracing his truth.
- Then, when we have a right relationship with God through the work of the Prince of Peace and we have peace within ourselves because of that relationship, as peacemakers, we must seek reconciliation
 - Let’s read **Colossians 1:19-20**.
 - This passage shows us that because of Jesus’ sacrifice, everything can be reconciled to God. This reconciliation brings peace to everything in heaven and on earth – including every relationship – if we allow it.

- It's important to know what reconciliation is. Because, like peace, it cannot come merely because we try to have it or want to have it. There is so much talk, especially in the church, about reconciliation. And, then there is this one-sided talk about how to bring about reconciliation as if it's something to check off your to-do list or some agreement that we make.
 - o But, reconciliation is not a merely truce or a treaty. We have a very visible example of that going on right now. In Standing Rock, there is a violation of a treaty and truce between the government and the Native tribe there. There hasn't been a treaty or truce made between the government and Native Americans that hasn't been violated. We know a truce or a treaty don't mean that peace is the reality.
 - o John MacArthur says "A truce just says you don't shoot. Peace comes when the truth is known, the issue is settled, & the parties embrace each other."
- Did you get that? It's when the truth is known and the issues are settled. The truth will never be known if we, as peacemakers, are too busy skirting around the issues rather than openly, honestly, lovingly talking them through. That's why most churches can't be multicultural – they won't talk about race or culture! So then, reconciliation isn't possible and worshiping together isn't possible.
 - o Issues can only be settled when we acknowledge the issues present. Issues can only be settled as we seek understanding for the other person's reality, experience and perspective. Issues can only be settled when we actively work to settle them.
 - o Peace making is actively seeking reconciliation. Not talking about it, but seeking it. Reconciliation is actively bringing together and actively restoring a relationship, no matter what it takes or how long it takes or how frustrating the process might be.
- Peacemakers, we actively seek reconciliation when we live where there are no "them." Instead, we refer to people as brothers and sisters and we actually mean it and live it. We use the term "them" too often in our society. We even use it in the church. I know I've probably done it. But, this term really serves to separate, never reconcile.
 - o There was a pastor who was talking about race relations. I happened to be the only white person in the room. As he was talking, he looked right at me and said, "You should know never to refer to black folk as "them" or "they" or "those people." We don't like that." I replied, "I don't think anyone likes to be referred to that way."
 - o Referring to someone as "they" do this. "They" are like this. It clumps people into a group that is different from your group. We should never have an "us" and "them" mentality in the church. We should never have an "us" and "them" mentality as Christians. We are all US. No matter our race, no matter our differences, no matter our background, no matter our culture, and no matter our sin.
 - o We are all created in the image of God. We are all sinners in need of grace. Because Jesus bestowed upon us – all of humanity – a way to receive that grace, we are all "us," together.

- Even beyond that, when we accept his grace and his forgiveness through salvation, we become even more than “us.” We become a family. You then, become my brothers and my sisters.
 - o I may have told this story before. I know some people here have heard it. When Wil and I were in seminary and had gotten engaged, we were walking down the hall one day and stopped to talk to a fellow student. This black student was from a country in Africa.
 - o He congratulated us on our engagement and proceeded to tell me, “So, I guess now I can call you sister.” That comment took me back. I knew what he meant. He meant that I was now accepted into the black brotherhood and sisterhood by means of my relationship with Wil.
 - o What he failed to understand was that me marrying a black man did not just now make me this fellow Christian’s sister. Instead, it was back when we entered into a relationship with The Man, Jesus Christ, that made us brothers and sisters. Jesus brings reconciliation. What race can’t do, Jesus can.
 - o Here’s the truth – everyone is a potential brother or sister. Once they make that decision to accept the Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, they are immediately our brother or sister. We don’t have to know them. We don’t even have to like them. But, we better love them because they are family and God, the Father, has adopted them into His family just like he adopted us – through the shed blood of his son, Jesus.
- The final attribute of a peacemaker is that we must actively set the example. We have to set the example by living a life marked by peace. You have to set the example in your relationships between you and others.
 - o If we say we know Jesus, but most of our relationships are marked with conflict, contempt and drama, there’s a problem. Somewhere, there’s a disconnect. People will know we are disciples of Jesus, followers of Jesus by our love – that’s what Scripture says. If they don’t see our love for others and peaceful relationships with others, what would ever make them think we are Christians? Just because we say it? Or just because we post it on our Facebook status. Please.
 - o Here’s the deal – Peace Dale First Church of God - we can’t convince people that we are a church that really shares the peace of Christ if we continue to be in conflict with others. Oh we can put it on a banner, we can print it on t-shirts, we can have our purpose statement on everything we do. But, if doesn’t line up with how we all act outside of this place and within this place, people look at us and roll their eyes. Because that is the definition of hypocrisy – saying one thing, but living another.
- Instead, we are to be setting the example of peace by being people of peace in our relationships and by bringing the peace of God to others. That requires courage, compassion and a commitment to show Christ in and through all you do so that in every interaction you have with someone, they see something different in you than what they see in the world. They see a peacemaker called by God.

- In the original Greek, the word “called” means to give a name to...to bear the title of. That passage in Matthew that we read earlier says that in order to be called children of God, we must be peacemakers.
 - Are you living up to your name?
- Let me close with a story. When Alexander the Great ruled nearly the entire known world, it was his policy to allow anyone charged with a crime, to appeal to him. When the appeal was made, his judgment was final. He was known as fair but ruthless, so appeals were not often made to him.
 - However, one young soldier was brought before him on appeal. The young man wore the tunic of Alexander’s army. "With what is he charged?" asked Alexander. "He is charged with cowardice in battle," answered the prosecutor.
 - A hush fell over the assembly at the judgment hall. They knew Alexander as a general who expected his men to be gallant and brave, since he, did not push his soldiers but led them himself, bravely into the thick of battle.
 - Alexander looked at the young soldier who was a mere youth. "What is your name, soldier?" asked the king. "Worthy King," responded the youth, "My name is Alexander."
 - Alexander the Great replied angrily, "You say your name is Alexander? You are found guilty of your crimes and must pay the penalty. I sentence you to either change your conduct or change your name. For no man can bear the name Alexander – my name – and do the things you have done."
- Maybe today God is saying to you, “Christian, you need to change your behavior for you bear the name of my son, the Prince of Peace. So, you, too must be a peacemaker.”
 - Or perhaps God is saying to you that you need to change your name for you are not accepting his call of peace making.
 - Either way, God can change you. He is in the heart changing, behavior changing and name changing business. He is in the reconciling business. He is all about making peace. Are you?