

## THE BEATITUDES: PEACE AND PERSECUTION

Isaiah 2:1-4  
Matthew 5:9-10

Faith Community  
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### Introduction

In the side yard of their house a man and woman are arguing with each other. A neighbor, raking the leaves across the street, hears them and stops to see what's going on. Their shouting gets louder and angrier. Then the woman hits the man. He hits her back. The neighbor comes running across the street yelling, "Stop it! Stop it!" He goes between them to keep them from hurting each other.

Suddenly they both turn on him and begin hitting him. He was trying to break up this fight, and in a way he did. They stopped hitting each other and started beating on him. Peacemaking is never easy - or safe!

### I

When Jesus says blessed are the peacemakers, he doesn't mean those who live a quiet, peaceful, serene life. It's not blessed are the peaceful, but blessed are the peacemakers. Jesus means those who do the work of peace, those who try to bring about peace. It's not those who think peace is a good idea, not those who wait for peace to happen, and not those who wish there were peace. He is talking about those who work to make peace happen. Peacemaking is hard work. Norman Cousins once wrote, "We will not have peace by afterthought."

In Hebrew the word for peace is "Shalom." It means not just the absence of conflict, but peace and wellbeing for everyone in a community. Peace - shalom - means justice, fairness, caring for those in need.

For peace to happen we will have to stop savoring the grievances we have toward those who've offended us. You know, we relish recounting in our minds how terribly we've been treated. We recall the awful things that have been said to us and enjoy rehearsing what we're going to say to pay them back. We get upset and angry, and yet, we savor the experience. Frederick Buechner writes: "To lick your wounds, to smack your lips over grievances long past, to roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, to savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back; in many ways, it is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is your self. The skeleton at the end of the feast is you."<sup>1</sup>

### II

The peace Jesus is talking about isn't the enforced peace of a dictator. Jesus lived during the Pax Romana – the powerful rule of the Roman Empire. They forced people into line; they ended pirating in the Mediterranean; they put down conflict with force. There was peace because if you stepped out of line, you got clubbed.

Whether in the Roman Empire, the communist Soviet Union, or the dictatorial regime of Saddam Hussein, brutally enforced peace will only be temporary. Lasting peace will only happen

when it is accompanied by freedom, fairness, and openness. Maybe you have seen the bumper sticker, “No Justice, No Peace.” Violence cannot bring about lasting peace.

On September 17, 1978 Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin signed a peace treaty following twelve days of negotiations at Camp David. The leaders were called together and the negotiations moderated by President Jimmy Carter. This peace treaty has been in place now for 32 years. Those were long, difficult negotiations - at times at the breaking point - but the result has been a fair and lasting peace. Sadat and Begin received the Nobel Peace Prize for their hard work. But peacemakers are often persecuted; both leaders faced angry crowds in their homelands. Zealots from both sides thought their leaders had given in to the enemy. President Anwar Sadat was assassinated by a group angry about the peace treaty.

And yet, what a difference that treaty has made. How many wars have been averted in the last 32 years because of it? How many lives have been saved?

Peace is never easy. Martin Luther King spoke about what is needed for peace: “Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up.”<sup>2</sup> Peacemaking is hard work. It is difficult and dangerous.

### III

Jesus says, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God.” Think of it; Jesus says that those who work to bring about peace are the sons and daughters of God. When we work to make peace we are children of our Father. We know that Jesus is the Son of God; when we resolve conflicts, demand fairness, end violence, we are sons and daughters of God. I don’t mean that we are sons of God in the same way as Jesus, of course, but that is the phrase Jesus uses. When we act for peace we are showing the character of God in us.

James Howell says that we are children of God when we work for peace because we are seeing others “Through God’s eyes.”<sup>3</sup> We see the one who is angry with understanding and compassion. We see those who hate us as human beings whom God has created. God wants all people to have freedom, fairness, and dignity.

Peacemaking isn’t sentimental. It is difficult, frustrating, and tiring. It demands love, courage, faith, discipline, and creativity. But it is a behavior that is required of us. Maybe if we walk closely with God and if we practice regularly, it will become a habit.

### Conclusion

Mollie was a senior in high school and a member of the Austin Heights Baptist Church in Texas. She has been a peacemaker since she was very young. When she was in fifth grade it was the build up to the Iraq war. She and her youth group asked if they could put a sign in the front lawn of the church that said, “War is Not the Answer.” The church gave them approval, and they put up the sign. Instantly the church was bombarded with nasty, anonymous phone calls.

The neighbors immediately beside the church put up a row of American flags along the property line. I don't know, do you suppose they thought they were taking the opposing point of view?

On a Friday morning at the beginning of her senior year, Mollie's high school had a huge pep rally for the football game that night. At one point the cheerleaders faced off with kids dressed in the opposing team's school colors. The cheerleaders went behind those kids representing their opponents and tied their hands behind their backs. Then they made the kids kneel down on the floor. The cheerleaders then took out toy pistols and acted out walking behind the kids and executing them. They then dragged the "dead" kids into a pile as the crowd of students, teachers, and parents roared their approval.

Mollie was upset by what she had seen. She talked to her mother and they sent a concerned email to the principal. Then they went to see the principal. He dismissed their concern saying, "You and your daughter are the only ones complaining. No one else thinks anything was wrong with the skit."

Mollie was now more upset and went to work. She and a friend wrote a column in the school paper. The principal censored the column because it questioned the cheerleader sponsors as well as the administration for giving the go-ahead for the skit.

Then the local paper picked up the story and put it on the front page. Within a day the national news services called Mollie for interviews. The next week the school administration issued an apology on the front page of the paper, saying that the administrators were wrong and Mollie and her friends had done the right thing. It wouldn't happen again.

Making a difference for peace isn't just something that presidents and prime ministers work toward. Wherever we are, we have a chance to be peacemakers. It takes courage, determination, ingenuity, and hard work. It also takes a solid faith that believes that what Jesus said is true, and that with our lives we can help make a difference.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Frederick Buechner, *Wishful Thinking: A theological ABC*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1973) p. 29.

<sup>2</sup> Martin Luther King, *Strength to Love*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981) p. 53.

<sup>3</sup> James C. Howell, *The Beatitudes for Today*. (Louisville Ky: Westminster John Knox, 2006) p. 81.