

Blessed Are the Peacemakers

by Rev. Dr. John C. Tittle



"Peacemaker" by Teresa Kogut

Prayer of Illumination

God of peace, your word is our way of truth and life.
Create within us hearts that are clean and put your
Holy Spirit within us, so that we might receive your
grace and mercy and declare your praises forever,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

Scripture: Matthew 5:9 (NRSVue) – The Seventh Beatitude

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

*The grass withers and the flower fades,
but the Word of God endures forever.*

SERMON – Blessed Are the Peacemakers

We hear a lot of mixed messages about peace in society. Take for example the Strategic Air Command which used to be responsible for the Cold War command and control of our strategic nuclear strike forces in the United States. You see the knight in armor's hand holding an olive branch and lightning.



Their motto was first: "War is our profession—Peace is our product." Some were offended and it became "Maintaining Peace is our Profession." But then it was shortened to "Peace is our Profession." A decade later, other portions of our country in the sixties had a little different take: "Make love, not war." That just ended up being a cliché.

The nations of the world have had their interesting takes on peace as well. In the former Soviet Union, the Russian word for peace "*Mir*" was used not just for cosmonauts and space stations, it also included all the policies and programs of the Kremlin. So *mir-peace* described the interrogation and imprisonment of dissenters. When the word "*Mir*" is used in Russia today, many Russians think not of Jesus, but of Stalin, as the Man of *Mir*.

The words associated with *Mir* are lies, fear, propaganda, and military parades. But let's be totally honest here; even Jesus, the Prince of Peace, was cryptic at times about peace. Just five chapters after the beatitudes, Jesus says these words:

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's foes will be members of one's own household." Matthew 10:34-36

In other words, conflict is inevitable—even when you're committed to peace. "*Blessed are the peacemakers,*" says Jesus.

There's an ancient Jewish prayer not found in the Scriptures that Jesus may have been familiar with that went like this: *Blessed are you, O Lord, the maker of peace.* To be a child of God—a son or daughter of God—is to be like God, to take on the family resemblance. If God is a maker of peace, so should we be.

But peacemaking is easier said than done. Peace takes what's clear in Christian teaching: loving God and loving neighbor, loving your enemies, establishing justice for all, and translates it into action in the real world.

Let's try to do some translation work here. There are two poles to the magnetic field of peace. The negative pole and the positive pole. The negative pole of peace is the **absence of strife**. The positive pole of peace is the **presence of right relationship**. There are also different directions in the magnetic field of peace: Vertical (with God), Horizontal (with others). Peace is an attitude and an action—an inward position and an outward practice. To put it another way, peacemakers are like insulators or non-conductors around conductors: Peacemakers are like the section of wood that's placed between two pieces of metal to keep heat from traveling between them. So peacemakers are "non-conductors" or "insulators" of the heat of bitterness, rancor, rage, and evil speaking.

There are a lot of misconceptions about peace. Sometimes we can associate peace with weakness: appeasing, pacifying, or peace at any price. Or we might think making peace is just piling up trouble for the future. Or peace is ignoring the situation or refusing to take needed action, staving off the inevitable.

The prophet Jeremiah gives a piece of his mind about "cheap peace":

"They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying, 'Peace, peace,' when there is no peace."

But let's be clear: peace isn't just for peaceniks, progressives, or pushovers. We all need peace and we all suffer when it's lacking. Personally, I think we human beings and we Americans have often rushed into war too quickly in our history. When we're impatient and fearful, we have a tendency not to fully exhaust our non-violent peace tools before waging war. And let's be honest, looking back, we've started wars we shouldn't have started.

That being said, there are occasions we must choose necessary evils or "miserable necessities" as Augustine called them and use force to protect the assaulted and stop evil. Hitler couldn't be reasoned with. But this option needs to be used less often and not be rushed into. The heavenly peace that the Prince of Peace gives is not of this world, but it's for the world:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you," says Jesus, "I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

As Christians, Christ defines our categories, not the world. We allow Jesus to blow the world's assumptions to smithereens. Jesus is the final say, not politicians or parties. We don't take their bait. We don't buy the lie that the people in "the other political party" are evil, stupid, un-American, or wrongheaded. Who defines your world-view: politicians or The Prince of Peace?

Jesus' approach is very, very different. James, the brother of Jesus, says this, "Wisdom is first pure, then peaceable." The wise are people who sow peace, not strife. Peacemakers are careful who they listen to, careful how they talk about others. I've needed to be reminded of that this week. Like Jesus, we've got to be willing to identify with "the wrong crowd." And we welcome them. Accept rather than reject them. As peacemakers, we don't talk trash about Christians who are different from us or have messed up. We can hold our opinions, but we are not obnoxious about them. We can be circumspect. The ends and the means are very important: peace, love,

mercy, and justice. And the ends shouldn't justify the means. How we get to the destination—the journey—is important. But good Christian people will often have different roads to get to the same destination of love, mercy, and justice. Unity isn't uniformity. We have different routes. So don't turn your means into an idol – making everyone get to your end only by your means. In other words, peaceable people major in the majors and minor in the minors. We don't major in the minors. Or minor in the majors. Or to put it another way: In essentials, unity; In non-essentials, liberty; In all things, charity. And don't forget this essential: Jesus is our way. *I am the way, the truth, and the life*, says Jesus. But even our understandings of Jesus will be different. The peaceable can tolerate difference. They exhibit flexibility, fellowship, and forbearance.

For peacemakers, our social media posts aren't toxic. But peacemakers are willing to shake things up a little, too. We don't make the status quo an idol. The apostles in Acts 17 were described this way:

"These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also."

Jesus tells us to *"make peace."* In other words, be proactive. Make peace happen. Be a catalyst. Sometimes that entails stirring things up. It's interesting. This seventh beatitude is the only time "peacemaker" is used in the Bible. Peacemaking is a divine work, a holy task.

In the Jewish culture, to be a son of something, was to take on the characteristics of that thing. To make peace is to be a chip off the old block. Son or daughter of God is to be son of Peace. You're being "Jesusy" when you bring peace to your relationships. One of the most godly things you can do is make peace. *Blessed are the peacemakers* because they're doing a godlike thing. We take on the family likeness. In fact, Jesus in the book of Matthew talks about two kinds of people who are children of God: those who forgive their enemies and the peacemakers.

We're to be known for these things: forgiveness, peace, and love. What are you known by? What is Immanuel known for? Peace is a gutsy word. It involves risk, faith. *"Seek peace, and pursue it"* the Scriptures say. Peace is counterintuitive: you can't have real peace unless you're willing to embrace uncomfot, tension, and turmoil. You can't get to peace without first going through conflict. Sometimes peacemaking involves forgiving another who wronged you. Other times peacemaking involves making amends—where we ask forgiveness.

We need both in our lives. It's a two-way road. If you only think you're being wronged in your life, you're wrong. Peace has the courage to wrestle with: tough and unpopular decisions, mistakes you've made. Peace gets us out of our fortress of solitude, Peace attends to your scared animal within. Peace talks about the elephant in the room. Peace is willing to have uncomfortable conversations. Peace tells the truth in love. The book of Proverbs talks about *"... the one who rebukes boldly makes peace."* This is important—peace also LISTENS to the truth in love.

Interpersonal conflict and connection coach Jayson Gaddis calls this LUFU: *Listen Until they Feel Understood*. LUFU needs to be applied to all our relationships. LUFU in love. *Listen Until they Feel Understood*. Be quick to listen, slow to speak. I know I can certainly grow in my LUFU levels.

But peace can also live with being misunderstood. Peace can handle not being liked when you've followed your conscience. Marcus Aurelius describes this as good leadership: willing to get a bad reputation for doing righteous deeds. Peace can handle being a lone voice in the wilderness.

Peace often involves standing up to bullies and sticking up for the little guy. Peacemaking also involves humility. *"If it is possible, so far as it depends on you,"* says the Apostle Paul, *"live peaceably with all."* (Rom. 12:18) Being a peacemaker is hard and humbling work. You have to be patient, self-disciplined, and Spirit-led. You have to slow down and walk with people, and listen. It takes time, you have to build trust.

Peacemakers not only mend fences, tear down walls, but they build bridges. In fact, you're a bridge when you're a peacemaker. And what happens to bridges? They get walked on. People will malign you for walking across the aisle, for consorting with the wrong people, for putting country before party, for compromising, being a traitor to your own. It's worth it to venture out of your box.

There's a cost to peace, a pain that comes with peace. The pain of apologizing. The pain of peeling layers of prejudice away. The pain of listening to very different points of view. The pain of being misunderstood. But it's so worth it – it's the blessed life. It's what God does, what we do. Make peace with all when you can, peace with those who are near (friends, neighbors, family, faith community) and peace with those who are far.

Don't be a peace breaker. You can be a peace "broker" but not a peace breaker. Don't be a warmaker, be a peacemaker, a peacebuilder. Wage peace. Engage in peacefare, not the art of war, but the art of woo. But first, you have to receive God's peace, before you can give it. Peace with God means you're reconciled to God. You have a restored relationship. Peace with God is salvation. Even though you were an enemy of God, God forgave you. When we have peace with God, we can have peace within. *"Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,"* Paul tells us.

You can't transmit or carry peace to others around you unless you yourself are at peace. If you're agitated or anxious or arrogant, it's easy to have a negative view about everything. But peace helps you to get a clearer picture. Peace like a river cleanses your soul. You can slow down, discern, and make better decisions. *"The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will keep your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."* You'll have the mind of Christ.

But don't keep your peace to yourself. Sow peace in your individual relationships. To be at peace with others is to be in right relationship with them. To create unnecessary drama, discord, and division is not the way of peace. That's not the Christian way. Peace sweetens bitterness, heals wounds, reconciles differences, preserves unity. Peace prays for and loves your enemies. *"Have salt in yourselves,"* says Jesus, *"and be at peace with one another."* (Mark 9:50)

Seek peace and pursue it in all aspects of life: internally in your family, in your workplace, in your school, here at church, wherever you find yourself.



Pastor R.T. Kendall was born in Kentucky in 1935 and he was the pastor for twenty-five years at Westminster Chapel, just down the street from Buckingham Palace in London. He proposes that peacemakers are friend makers. He says the peacemakers are the ones who bring together two people who are "poles apart theologically, culturally, socially, financially, politically, even sexually." Peacemakers make unlikely matches by saying, "I'd like you to meet this person" or "I want you to become friends with this person." Immanuel, join with me, and join with R.T. Kendall and let's be friend makers. Come with me across the aisle to welcome those who are different from us. Come with me across the aisle to make new friends and mend fences across political divides, theological boundaries, cultural differences, and racial divides. Let's leave our safe, cozy enclaves. For Jesus is clear: it's the pure in heart, the merciful, the meek, and the peacemakers who can clearly see the image of God in those very different from us. When we're like this, we're like Jesus.

So let's have the gutsiness and the audacity to hand out olive branches in the Spirit of Christ, wherever we go. "*Blessed are the peacemakers.*"

Amen.

Sermon Art: "*Peacemaker*" by Teresa Kogut

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