

## **Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God (Matthew 5:9)**

An artist was commissioned by a wealthy man to paint something that would depict peace

- After a great deal of thought, the artist painted a beautiful country scene
- green fields with cows, birds flying in the blue sky, a lovely little village lying in a distant valley
- The artist gave the picture to the man, but there was a look of disappointment on his face
- The man said to the artist, 'This isn't a picture of true peace. It isn't right. Go back and try again.'
- The artist returned to his studio and after thinking about it carefully went to his canvas and painted
- A beautiful picture of a mother, holding a sleeping baby in her arms, smiling lovingly at the child
- He thought, surely, this is true peace, and hurried to give the picture to the wealthy man
- But again, the wealthy man refused the painting and asked the painter to try again
- discouraged, tired and disappointed, the artist was angry his work had been rejected but tried a third time
- When he had finished, he hurried to the wealthy man, who said, 'now, this is a picture of true peace'
- The picture showed a stormy sea pounding against a cliff, the fury of the wind whipped black rain clouds
- Which were laced with streaks of lightning, the sea was roaring in turmoil, waves churning
- the angry sky was filled with the power of a furious storm – and in the middle of the picture, under a cliff
- was a small bird, safe and dry in her nest, snuggled safely in the rocks – at peace in the raging storm

In the Bible, peace is total well-being, prosperity and security that comes from God's presence with his people

- in the Old Testament, such peace was conditional on Israel's obedience
- in the New Testament, peace comes in Christ and is experienced by personal faith in him
- pursuing peace is an important theme in the Bible and in the seventh Beatitude, Jesus says
- 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Sons of God'

The Sermon on the Mount is the greatest body of the teaching of Jesus that we have (Matthew 5-7)

- but on closer examination, however inspiring the Sermon on the Mount might be
- we cannot doubt that, by ordinary human standards, its teaching is impossible to achieve
- if we looked for a text on which Jesus was teaching in this Sermon on the Mount, where six times he says
- ‘you have heard that is was said but I say to you,’ (or similar) it would be hard to better his own words
- ‘A new command I give you: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another
- By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another’ (John 13:34-35)
- But if keeping the letter of the law in a limited understanding of the commandments was hard
- Keeping the spirit of the law as Jesus expounds it is harder still and at the climax of this passage he says
- ‘Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect’ (Matthew 5:38) – how can we be like God?

The Sermon on the Mount was addressed to disciples, those who had responded to the message of the Kingdom

- Part of that response was repentance (3:2, 4:17) which deals with the wrong in our lives
- The Sermon on the Mount is about both the forgiveness of sins and the transformation of lives
- It opens with ‘the Beatitudes’, a name that comes from the Latin *beatus* (blessed, still the best translation)
- ‘happy’ has been devalued and cheapened in modern usage and, in any event, the focus tends to be inside
- Whereas the focus of the Beatitudes is how we stand before God whose blessing rests on unlikely people
- So much so that the usual order of things is turned upside down or, more accurately, the right way up
- When we look at the Beatitudes individually some of them seem to be absurd
- (e.g. the meek seem the least likely sort of people to inherit the earth), instead we must view them together
- In the Beatitudes, a progression in Christian experience is being described, but what does Jesus mean by
- ‘Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called Sons of God’ – and what is this peace?

## I PEACE WITH GOD

The most important Old Testament word for ‘peace’ is one of the few commonly known Hebrew words

- *Shalōm* can mean the absence of conflict, but it also means the relationship of God and human beings
- *Shalōm* being the desired state of harmony and communion between covenant partners (God and man)
- And its absence showing the breakdown of that relationship due to unbelief and disobedience
- The Israelites looked forward to the time when the Messiah, the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6) would come
- This would be peace not only for Israel but also for the whole earth (Zec. 9:9-10)

Do you ever wonder what your name means? We tended to choose our children’s names for how they sounded

- We certainly avoided names that we associated with people with whom we did not get on
- Not as popular a name as it was in previous generations, *Irene* is the Greek word for peace
- It is just this word that Luke uses to record that angelic message of peace at the first Christmas (Lk. 2:14)
- But what of ‘peacemakers’ – a ‘peacemaker’ actively works to bring about peace and reconciliation
- Especially where there has been hatred and enmity – it is by working for peace, that we share in
- Christ’s ministry of bring peace and reconciliation – the powerful verses from Colossians (1:19-20)

‘For God was pleased to have all his fulness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.’

Who are the peacemakers? We might readily associate this with diplomats, Henry Kissinger and others

- But in the Bible, peacemakers are those who share in Christ’s ministry of reconciliation
- They are people, who bring others to the foot of the cross, so that they may be reconciled to God

## II PEACE WITH ONE ANOTHER

I think that you could easily guess that to be a ‘trendy’ person is not all that important to me

- All my clothes are very conservative and all my shoes are black brogues
- But trendy need not only apply to what we wear – I tend to avoid trendy language as well
- It is most unlikely that I will greet people by saying, ‘Hi guys’, take a ‘selfie’ or ‘twerk’
- And I often resist trendy language in church – phrases like ‘being church’ don’t appeal to me
- So please realise how significant it is when I say ‘being church’ is something that we must do

The Bible word (*ekklesia*) that we so often translate as church means ‘assembly’ or ‘congregation’

- In English we use the same word ‘church’ to mean religious building
- And so we have developed this concept of ‘going to church’ and it is so misleading
- Indeed, as far as I am concerned, going to church is neither here nor there unless we are ‘being church’
- But what does ‘being church’ mean? In the autumn of 2010 I was looking to respond to café church
- In one way, it was just another trendy idea – and trendy ideas don’t always count for much with me
- but I realised that whether what we were doing was traditional or trendy, the New Testament Christians
- were devoted to the Apostles’ teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer
- in ‘being church’ we had to be devoted to these too – and ‘fellowship’ is that much misunderstood word
- but it describes the life of God’s family – love, tenderness, compassion, humility (Phil. 2:1-4)
- when we are at peace with God, we should also be at peace with one another
- we should care for one another, support one another, guide one another, pray for one another
- the church is not perfect because it is made up of imperfect people but we should be peacemakers
- and not troublemakers – and I think we might honestly ask ourselves, which one am I?

### III PEACE WITH YOURSELF

The church year 2001-02 was a very difficult one for me – I felt the church had treated me unfairly

- we were disappointed to have left Wales after only five years when we would happily have stayed longer
- shocked to find ourselves in Scotland, thinking somehow the church must have had the map upside down
- and deflated that I felt we had no choice but turn down the big church I had been offered in North London
- we had therefore arrived in Plympton where I did not feel particularly suited to any of the four churches
- I was far from being at peace with myself – not least because of the people towards whom I felt bitter
- but in life it is not so much about what happens to us but how we deal with what happens to us
- with the help of family and Christian friends, I had to work through all that caused me not to be at peace
- it's easy to blame others, but often we cannot change the past and we cannot change them
- instead, therefore, we need to take responsibility for ourselves – and that is what I sought to do
- I enlisted the help of another senior, godly minister to talk about peace with God
- And I began a programme of righting wrongs with others – most of whom were remarkably gracious
- You have to be a peacemaker – and to do so you have to be prepared to say, 'I was wrong'
- It will mean repenting and asking for forgiveness, from God and from others
- It will also mean being, selfless, approachable, not standing on your dignity
- This is not possible simply by trying hard but by God's working in our lives

After kneeling at the communion rail, we are bidden to 'go in peace' – and rightly so

- But we cannot truly go in peace unless what is supposed to have been happening inside has happened
- Years ago, a member said to me, 'When I kneel here I feel so much better, when I go home I still feel bad'
- I replied, 'that is because you lay your burdens down, but then pick them up, why not leave them here?'

In a world characterised by sin, lawlessness, fractured relationships, disorder, chaos

- People are looking for missing peace – peace that comes from being right with God
- Peace that shows through being right with one another, peace that extends even to the inner-self
- It is this peace that marks the Christian's identity as being 'a Son of God'

People who are searching for peace can strive to change their environment

- they can hope for calmer, quieter neighbours, they can work for better international relationships
- but real peace begins and ends with God – God with whom grace and faith and peace go together
- In the words of the Apostle Paul to the Romans (5:1):

“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is possible to have a form of peace but it can never be complete until we are complete

- and we are not complete until we are right with God, which is made possible
- because of the death of Jesus on the cross who made reconciliation and peace through his blood
- This is the gospel; those who were formerly in a state of rebellion against God
- have now been reconciled to him by the death of Christ

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus' promise to his disciples was 'my peace I give you' (Jn. 14:27)

- this is an essential part of his mission as Messiah – to be the supreme peacemaker (Isa. 52:7)
- for the true model of peacemaking is God's costly peacemaking through the cross
- now that ministry belongs to us, as heirs of the kingdom of God, serving in the church and in the world