

Title: The Peacemaker  
Text: Matthew 5.9  
Theme: Reconciliation with God and with others  
Series: Matthew #19  
Prop Stmtnt The dangerous calling of peacemaking puts Christ on display.

You are in between classes with hundreds of other classmates, when someone yells, "Fight!" What happens? Immediately kids start running to the scene. Within seconds, if the two opponents are in a stand-off, people start provoking them, pushing them, taunting them to hit the other person. If blood is going to be shed, we want to see it. We want to be able to tell others a first hand account of what happened. Why? Why does war attract so much attention?

Your cousin calls and wants to know if you have heard the latest. Her son's future mother-in-law just disinvited her sister to a wedding shower that the mother-in-law was hosting because of something that her sister put on Facebook about the wedding. Your cousin knows every detail. It is only the latest eruption in a family that is constantly in conflict and she is telling you every thing. Every infidelity, every arrest, every betrayal, every fight at birthday parties and family reunions and you let her. In fact, you want to know more. Why? Why does war attract so much attention?

A friend of yours recommends a particular preacher for you to listen to. You go on-line to download a sermon, but when you google his name, you see a site that says something like, "the real story of Pastor \_\_\_\_\_." Instead of listening to the sermon, you spend the next 57 minutes reading blogs and hit pieces accusing this man of pride, stubbornness, hypocrisy, and materialism all by nameless individuals, or people who know someone, who knew someone who heard this somewhere, so it must be true. Why? Why does conflict attract so much attention?

Read Text:

This statement by Christ (v.9) is one of the most powerful statements that has ever been uttered by anyone at any time in any place. I have said to you before, that if you want to make a statement for Christ, if you want to stand up and be radically different than your world, you do not need to sit in the end zone of a football game with rainbow color wig and hold up a John 3.16 sign (remember that guy?), or put a WWJD (drive) sticker on your electric car. (answer: he walked every where, even on water) If you really want to stand out, don't complain. "*Do all things without grumbling or questioning that you may be blameless, innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world...*" (Phil. 2.14-15) Paul says that if you want to shine as a light in this world, it really isn't complicated. Simply do not complain. If you do not complain, you will be utterly different than almost everyone in your world. What Jesus is saying here, is another way of being absolutely radical for the gospel. Let's dig in and figure out what it means to be a peace-maker.

## **I. Peacemaking is not appeasement.**

Appeasement or peace-faking is driven by a desire for comfort or convenience. It is like mom at the family reunion who just wants everyone to get along, no matter how much unresolved conflict is present. "Just act like you like each other." But, appeasement is in reality playing make-believe or pretend. When you try to pretend that the problem does not exist, you are living a lie. You are trying to deceive yourself and you are acting like there is no problem, when there is a problem.

Question: Does God want you to tell a lie? Of course not. Does God want you to live a lie? Has God called you to live a life of pretend? NO!!! The person living in denial tells others that everything is going fine, when in reality their marriage is a mess, or their spouse is angry, or their parents fight all the time, and yet, they are saying – hey, I'm fine. Peace-making is not appeasement. Denial usually leads to avoidance.

"Look, I don't want to talk about it." "I have nothing to say to them." "Let's just drop it." It's a big church. They can sit over there; I can stay over here. We can be cordial, but we do not have to be friends. In other words, since I am not actively pelting this person with rocks, or pounding their face with my fists, then you ought to be satisfied. I could be responding so much worse. Ok, as long as you are not outwardly fighting. Seriously, is that ok? Listen, cheap forgiveness will only purchase a cheap peace.

## **II. Peacemaking is not a forced surrender.**

You are ready to go on a little trip with your kids. Everyone is buckled into their seats, you have managed to load the car with the luggage, food, games, toys, drinks and videos, without killing each other. After repacking the luggage three times because of what needs to be accessible, and re-checking the house to make sure the coffee pot was really turned off, you are finally ready to get out of the driveway. Of course, it is 90 minutes later than what you were planning and it is just in time for rush hour. Sure enough, a wreck combined with a new construction project that has the freeway down to one lane means that, at this pace, you are going to get to your destination on the day that you are supposed to be home, when in the back of the van, you hear, "Dad, he's looking at me." You try to ignore it. If you ignore it, it will go away. Dad, he's looking at me. "Well, look the other way." ... "Dad, he's poking me." "Dad, she's kicking me." And by this time, you are doing your imitation of Mt. St. Helens and the Incredible Hulk. You pull off to the side of the road, open up the sliding door, knock over the cheerios, and drinks and proceed to share some things with your kids such as "YOU WANT SOMETHING TO FIGHT ABOUT? I'LL GIVE YOU SOMETHING TO FIGHT ABOUT!!" Of course, now the baby is crying, you've lost your place in traffic, you are feeling incredibly ashamed at this out of body experience that you have just had. But, at least your kids stopped fighting – right? Is that peace?

What did you do? You did not make peace; you simply forced submission with the threat of annihilation. You know what? Those kids are growing up. One day they will be bigger than you, faster than you, stronger than you. The threat of annihilation will not work. You can only demand submission when you have the power to enforce it. But, the absence of open warfare is not the presence of peace. The absence of open warfare only means that people have stopped to reload their guns.

When Jesus talks about peace, he is referring to the Hebrew concept of shalom. Shalom means to actively seek reconciliation so that harmony is experienced by all. But, when you actively seek reconciliation, you are putting yourself into harm's way.

### III. **Peacemaking is a call to war.**

Police officers will tell you that the calls they generally dread the most are those of domestic violence. For one, it often starts with, "Well we had a few beers..." (By the way, have you ever noticed that what comes after "well, we had a few beers" is not, we discovered the cure for cancer, or we solved world hunger, or anything that remotely resembles something noble.) What happens? A guy is beating up a girl, she calls the cops, the cops start to arrest the guy and the girl starts attacking the cops.

Like a cop, if you are trying to help bring about a reconciliation between two people, you are choosing to step into the middle of a conflict. That is not a pleasant place to be. One or both sides may get angry with you. When you choose to step into conflict you experience the pain of listening to the wounds of others and you carry them on your soul. You experience the war that rages in your own heart as you have to fight against your own prejudices, knowing that you are risking failure, risking being accused of incompetence, or not understanding. When you get involved in peacemaking, it does not always end pretty, and you are not always thanked.

And, if you are one of the people involved in a conflict and you are attempting to make peace, you know that there is going to be pain involved. You will either experience the pain of humbling yourself, acknowledging your sin and asking forgiveness from the person you have injured, or you will experience the pain of rebuking the person who has injured you.

So, why would you ever choose to step into a conflict in an effort to affect reconciliation? Because...

### IV. **Peacemaking is following Jesus.**

Colossians 1.19-20

#### **A. Jesus made peace between God and man.**

Paul tells us that Jesus reconciled "*to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*" Notice that Christ died in order that

he might be able make peace between God and man. Christ stepped into the battle. Christ got into the mess. Christ chose to set aside his comforts and privileges because he considered our need of reconciliation to be more important than his privilege. Christ died on the cross in our place. Christ took upon himself all of the hostility of the righteousness of God that we deserved to endure. Christ absorbed the wrath of God against our sin so fully that there is nothing left for us to pay. The war was over when Christ said, "It is finished."

Notice what Christ did. Christ confronted our sin with an offer of reconciliation. If Christ had not confronted our sin, then our injustice against God would have gone on and on. But, the offer of reconciliation was not cheap. It cost Christ, his life. And, in order for us to accept the offer of reconciliation, we had to admit our failure by confessing it to him and accepting his terms of reconciliation which was to embrace the death of Christ for our sins. This was not cheap peace because it was not cheap forgiveness. But, reconciliation was possible because the offended (God) was willing to reconcile and the offender (us) was willing to agree to the terms. Christ was the peacemaker as well as the terms of peace. The wrong that was done was confronted and acknowledged and dealt with. Therefore, reconciliation was possible.

At the same time, Christ's mission is very informative as well. Because, even though his death on the cross secured the salvation for every single person who would ever believe in him, the majority of people who live in this world refuse to accept his offer of salvation. But, even though the majority would not accept his offer of salvation, Christ still came. Christ still got dirty and messy. My point being, there are many situations that you will step into in order to help resolve and you will find that you cannot resolve them. That does not mean that you have failed. It will probably feel that way, but even if people refuse to work on resolving an issue, or they pretend to work on it by making unreasonable demands, you still reflect Christ by your willingness to be involved.

But since the children of God are at peace with God, an evidence of this peace with God is the desire to be at peace with one another.

### **B. The gospel brings peace between man and man.**

Let me give you an example. Kevin Rudd was the Prime Minister of Australia from Dec. 2007 to June 2010. He is a committed Christian and took advantage of his position to pursue peace within his country. If you know much about the history of Australia you know that the settlers of this country treated the indigenous people with much abuse. From the 1930's to the 1970's the government forcibly removed the children of the indigenous people from their parents. It was a blight upon the government. Now, it was 40 years later. Kevin stood before the Parliament and said, *"There comes a time in the history of the nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time. That is why the parliament is today assembled: to deal with this unfinished business of the nation, to remove a great*

*stain from the nation's soul and, in a true spirit of reconciliation, to open a new chapter in the history of this grant land, Australia."* He went on to detail the character of the wrong that was done. On behalf of the nation, he asked for forgiveness and pledged to lead the nation to positive steps of reconciliation, acknowledging that if we only use words asking for forgiveness but do not follow through with actions, that it is little more than a clanging gong.

Today Syria is fighting a civil war that is giving people, families, and clans the opportunity for bitterness and hostility for generations to come. How could a nation so devastatingly divided ever be unified? How could the death of 82,000 ever be avenged without further carnage that simply perpetuates the atrocities? There is only one hope. Syria needs the gospel. But, we cannot share a gospel of peace very well, if we are not guarding and pursuing that peace.

### **C. The church is a covenant community that guards and pursues peace.**

Jesus said that peacemakers are blessed. In fact, they will be called sons of God. We take this seriously. It is our personal responsibility as members of this local church to guard the peace and unity of our church family and to pursue it, when something happens that threatens it. In our Church Covenant we make this commitment that *"We will work and pray for the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace...."*

One of the most fundamental ways that we guard and pursue peace is by refusing to gossip, by refusing to listen to those who attempt to, and by lovingly warn those who attempt to. This is our calling. This is a wonderful, merciful way to love people and honor God. If you are not part of the problem, or part of the solution and someone attempts to tell you something that does not concern you, it is loving of you to say, "I cannot let you continue. This is wrong for you to tell me and wrong for me to listen. Would you please go to the person that you need to and attempt to resolve this?" When you do this, the person may thank-you, or they may resent you. But, you have helped make this church a safe place. You have helped to guard the reputation of the gospel. You have put the Peacemaker on display. Instead of passively letting this person sin, you have spoken up, humbly, but clearly and spoken truth.

This is a responsibility that we all share in. In fact, the weighty responsibility of church discipline is peacemaking. There are times when we have to confront people. We have to pursue reconciliation. Problems do not solve themselves.

When King David's son Absalom murdered David's son Abner, because Abner raped Absalom's sister, Absalom fled for his life. Eventually, David permitted Absalom to return to Jerusalem, but David refused to see Absalom. The problem did not go away. David failed to pursue peace. He could have offered terms of reconciliation. He could have given Absalom an opportunity to own his failure and admit his sin, but

since David did not, the problem did not go away. And every day that you wait to address a problem the harder it is. No, it is not easy, initially, but it is rewarding.

Conclusion:

Do you want to know how serious of an issue this is? The Spirit of God directed the apostle Paul to write the book of Philippians because two women in the church were in conflict with each other. So, Paul, after reminding them to “do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves” and “Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others” then later on says, “I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord. Yes, (notice this) I ask you also, true companion, help these women...” Do you see what Paul is doing? He is calling on a person to step in and be a peacemaker. Help these women. Help the church guard the unity. Help the church look like Jesus. Help the church reflect the kingdom of God. Help the church be a better taste of the life that we are going to enjoy with God and with each other. It is our calling.

Is there a situation in your family, or in your circle of friends, where conflict has caused a breakdown in a relationship? Are you willing to step in and attempt to help them admit the wrong, seek forgiveness and help the other offer reconciliation? It is part of our calling. But there is another way that we can pursue peace.

Sharing the gospel is peacemaking. That is what our summer mission’s teams are focused on. BASIC, Manitoulin and Team Jamaica are established for the purpose of telling others the gospel of Christ that people who were formally an enemy of God, might become family.