

PEACEMAKERS

Christ the Rock

June 7, 2015

BIBLE READING – Luke 6:20-37

INTRODUCTION

Greeting

Good morning! It's good to be with you again. Today we are going to invite the Holy Spirit to do a bit of heart surgery, that will be uncomfortable for many of us and downright distasteful for some. If you're wearing sandals or flip-flops, watch out – there's a good chance we might step on a few toes this morning.

Today we're going to explore what it means to be a peacemaker: to bring the message of peace & hope to those who are far from God.

Many of us are well acquainted with this basic premise of the Gospel – that all mankind was far from God, because each of us rejected God's ways for our own ways, choosing to live in rebellion against God, the Creator of the entire universe. But because of His great love for us, God sent His son Jesus to pay the price for our rebellion through His death and resurrection. Even though we were God's enemies, deserving His judgment, Jesus came to earth as the ultimate peacemaker – bridging the divide between God and man – making a way for our transformation from objects of God's wrath into sons & daughters who belong to God's family.

This is the unbelievable grace that has been extended to us. This is the hope we have. And not for ourselves only, but it is a hope we are given to share with others.

But here's the tough part: If we're honest, we easily forget who exactly we were without Jesus. We forget that we were *enemies* of God. We were at war with God. It becomes all too tempting to say, "Yes I was a sinner, but certainly I wasn't all that bad – I wasn't *evil*." Right?

We marginalize the depths of God's grace given to us by idealizing our sinful state. And by doing this, we shrink the power and reach of the Gospel. We say to ourselves: Jesus was able to save me because I wasn't *too far gone*.

The Gospel is bigger than this. Jesus is greater than this. No one is outside of His reach. No one is too wicked to be rescued by His Grace. No one.

Even those who hate us. Even those who harm us. Even our worst enemies. The good news of the Gospel is this: **Jesus came to make peace when you were His enemy, and He is calling you to make peace with your enemies.**

We desperately need God's help to do this. Let's pray and ask for it.

PRAYER

OPENING ILLUSTRATION

My older brother and I were homeschooled when I was in fourth and fifth grade, but at the start of my sixth grade year, my mom decided it was time for us to return to public schools. Like most 6th-grade boys, I was physically and socially awkward. But also having thick glasses, braces and curly red-hair pretty much guaranteed that I would be singled out as the butt of much of the teasing & jokes at my elementary school.

There was one boy in particular, Mark Pfaffenroth, who seemed to take special joy in tormenting me. Mark was also fair-skinned, red-headed and gangly but somehow had acquired a bit more confidence and influence than me. I guess if your last name is Pfaffenroth, you probably develop a thick skin early on in life. In any case, Mark quickly became someone I regarded with an odd mix of admiration, fear and dread. I couldn't help but envy the respect he commanded from other kids, but if and when his attention focused on me, I knew I was sure to be laughed at. Ridiculed. Humiliated. It's not in my personality to really hate people. But I think I probably hated Mark Pfaffenroth. He was my enemy.

One day we were returning to class from lunch, and Mark and I were the first two kids to enter the classroom. I sat down at a desk, and for whatever reason, Mark decided he wanted to sit at the desk I had chosen. He walked right up to me, towered over me and commanded me to move. I was petrified, but tired of being bullied, I refused. Mark insisted again, threatening that I would be sorry if I didn't. I said no. Without another word, Mark reared back and swung, slapping me squarely in the jaw. Red-faced and in quite a bit of pain, I stared back at him, motionless. I said nothing. I did nothing. The bell rang as the teacher and the rest of the students filtered into the classroom. Mark found another desk. I sat quietly as class began, but it took everything in me not to burst into tears.

Many of us have experienced something similar or far worse in life. We have known people who have mistreated us, hurt us, taken advantage of us. Each of us in this room have enemies.

Some of you have even been persecuted for your faith, discriminated against because of your race or your gender, slandered because of your appearance, exploited because of your weaknesses. We all have enemies. Some of these enemies are terrible, wicked, evil people.

And Jesus commands each of us this morning to LOVE THEM.

How can we possibly do this? Let's find out...

Let's look together at Luke 6:20.

BIBLE – LUKE 6:20-26

In Luke 6, Jesus has just called the 12 apostles and is in very first days of his ministry. He is surrounded by a large crowd of people, some of them who He has just miraculously healed, and many of them are new disciples. Jesus looks at His disciples and begins speaking a series of blessings and woes.

BLESSED: Expecting the Favor & Protection of God

WOE: Expression of Pity, Expecting Imminent or Inevitable Calamity

- Jesus describes 2 groups of people, 2 cultures with distinctly different values and characteristics:

BLESSINGS

Poor
Hungry
Weep
Persecuted

VS

WOES

Rich
Full
Laugh
Well-spoken Of

BLESSINGS

Dependence
Longing
Sorrow / Compassion
Suffering

VS

WOES

Independence
Self-sufficiency
Comfort / Indifference
Success / Fame

KINGDOM CULTURE

(same as above)

VS

WESTERN CULTURE

LESSONS FROM JESUS' BLESSINGS & WOES:

The weaker I am, the greater my capacity to be cared for by God and used for His Kingdom.

The more I have, the more I feel compelled to protect what I have.

ILLUSTRATION

The culture of the Kingdom that Jesus describes is the exact opposite of our American culture of individualism. Almost everything the Gospel teaches us to be and do directly contradicts what our society has told us is important: independence, self-reliance, strength, wealth, success, comfort, and the right to protect and defend all of these things.

One of our highest values in the US is the protection of personal freedoms and rights at all costs. Our nation was founded on the concept of personal liberties and our right, or even our duty to defend them. Many men have shed their blood to protect these rights. But valuing these rights at all costs is in fact contrary to the posture Jesus asks his followers to take – He says we are to give up our rights to make peace with those who would take our rights away.

Many of us grew up believing that America was a Christian nation. Some of us still long for our country to return to its Christian roots. But I'm not sure we really want a *Christian* nation? Not just a country whose laws merely adhere to biblical morality, but one whose economy, foreign policy and social fabric align with the values Jesus espouses for his disciples. (?s)

Thankfully, God did not choose a man-made government or nation to represent Jesus to the world. The Church is God's chosen vehicle for transformation and hope in the earth. The people of God are the ones called to lay down our rights, give up our freedoms, give away our belongings and make peace with those who are far from God.

Jesus calls *us* to a culture antithetical to our own. One where we give up our control, our rights, our belongings, our security, in order to position ourselves in a place of complete dependence on Him.

Only from this lowly position can we possibly do what He asks from us next...

BIBLE – LUKE 27-37

Jesus instructs us to love our enemies.

He says:

Do good to them

Bless them

Pray for them

Let them take advantage of you

Give up your rights for them

Give away your belongings to them

I spent some time this week studying the Greek meanings of the words in this passage, and unfortunately, there were no big surprises. Jesus is saying exactly what He means for us to do. This isn't in the middle of a parable or some prophetic metaphor where we can strain out another meaning.

As followers of Jesus we are called to love our enemies.

Jesus is saying to help those who hurt you. Bless those who hate you. Let them take advantage of you. Let them exploit you. Give your belongings to those who have already stolen from you. Honor those who revile you.

This sounds crazy. *Except for Jesus.* Except for Jesus it was unjust that you found peace with God. And except for Jesus it is unjust for those who hate you to experience love from you. **Except for Jesus.**

But why? – we then ask. Why must we do this? *There are two reasons.*

TWO REASONS:

1. For You: **Surrendering your rights to your enemies means surrendering yourself to God.**

When we love our enemies, we identify ourselves as belonging to Jesus. Sonship means looking like our Father (v36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.)

In so doing, we also grow our understanding of God's grace. We can actually begin to grasp the truth of v35 – "He is kind to the ungrateful and evil." (How many of us read that and say "yeah, BUT..."?)

2. For Them: **When we make peace with others, we demonstrate that the peace Jesus offered us is available to them.**

We make much of God's grace in such a way that they are likely to take notice. We become the vehicle of God's salvation even to those farthest from him.

In 2 Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul says it like this,

"All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

ILLUSTRATION

Let's stop for a moment and consider a common enemy that many of us would identify simply because we're American citizens: ISIS – the Islamic State of Iraq & Syria. Every few weeks there are new reports of ISIS perpetrating horrible acts of evil in the Middle East – beheading hostages on video, slaughtering scores of Christians for their faith, terrorizing entire people groups as they take control of more and more of the region.

Now going back to the premise of America as a Christian nation (I would strongly contend that it's not, but for the sake of argument) if the US was to realign its foreign policy with Luke 6, how should we as a country treat ISIS? How should we respond to those who terrorize and martyr hundreds if not thousands of our brothers and sisters in the Middle East?

In the days of the early church, there was a similar group of terrorists much like ISIS who were traveling to Syria to persecute and kill those who claimed to follow Jesus. These terrorists were led by a man named Saul. Most of you are familiar of the what happened after Jesus appeared to Saul on the road to Damascus – How His grace transformed an evil man into the most influential apostle in Church history.

Paul was evil. Paul was ISIS. But God's grace was big enough to reach him. And later, a Christ-follower by the name of Ananias risked his life to obey God and visit him, to pray for him, to love him.

A few days ago a Gina Fadely, the director of Frontier Missions (a division of the Youth with a Mission organization), was speaking on the Voice of the Martyrs radio network and shared a story from the Middle East:

"One of our YWAM workers in the Middle East was contacted by a friend earlier this year and they met up and he was introduced to an ISIS fighter who had killed many Christians already. I mean that's a horrible situation, and admittedly, he was probably on guard,"

Fadely, who appeared on the radio program along with Kevin Sutter, another YWAM leader, went on to share that this Islamic State jihadi confessed not only to killing Christians but "that he had actually enjoyed doing so."

"He told this YWAM leader that he had begun having dreams of this man in white who came to him and said, 'You are killing my people.' And he started to feel really sick and uneasy about what he was doing," Fadely continued. "The fighter said just before he killed one Christian, the man said, 'I know you will kill me, but I give to you my Bible.' The Christian was killed and this ISIS fighter actually took the Bible and began to read it. In another dream, Jesus asked him to follow him and he was now asking to become a follower of Christ and to be disciplined."

APPLICATION

With something this difficult, where do we even begin? How do we apply this? Let's start with a simple question:

WHO ARE YOUR ENEMIES?

Go ahead, take a minute and think. Maybe it's someone at your work, maybe a relative, maybe a neighbor. Maybe it's a people group – those who belong to a specific race, culture, political party, or religion. Who is that you feel threatened by? Who have you distanced yourself from? Who has hurt you? Who has taken advantage of you? Who hates you?

Take another minute. For many of us, if we're honest, there is more than one name we should write down.

Now the hard part:

How can you love them?

Next to their name, right one or two clear, specific and tangible ways you can demonstrate grace-filled, self-sacrificing, Gospel-driven love.

- What would bless or help them?
- What belongings do you have that you can give to them?
- What rights can you give up that would cause them to benefit?
- How can you pray for them? (Specifics...not just prayer)
- How do you wish they treated you? How can you do that for them?

CONCLUSION

Jesus is asking you to love those who wound you. Those who take advantage of you. Those who hate you.

This seems impossible, but it's not. Jesus has made peace between you and the Father. And He has transformed you into a minister of this same peace.

He has made you a Peacemaker. In your weakness, He is strong.

COMMUNION