

## **The Things That Make for Peace**

Psalm 122; Luke 19:36-42; Ephesians 2:11-22

*World Communion Sunday/7<sup>th</sup> October 2007*

One of the many things I love about Jesus is that he's not afraid to tell the truth. He's consistently realistic. Some might construe his realism as pessimistic or negative; others might say he's too idealistic, too optimistic – especially on the subject of peace. We all know Jesus said, “Blessed [Happy] are the peacemakers. For they shall be called children of God.” We know this is our work as Christians – makers of peace, creators of peace, that *this* yields happiness. But how often do we hear this text and others like it, and view it more as a lofty ideal or goal that would be nice to achieve, but deep down inside know it's simply not possible, it's *unrealistic*. Maybe Jesus is talking about what *heaven* will be like, but not here on earth, not here where there are always wars and the rumors of war, where violence, division, and alienation are rife in the world, our communities and cities, our households, families and relationships, right down to the depths of our soul. We have to live in the real world, we're told, and in the real world peace is always illusive, perhaps a luxury we can't afford. Was Jesus simply naïve? Unrealistic? It depends how you look at it.

When Jesus called the crowds to be peacemakers, don't think for a second he was being naïve. This is neither pie-in-the-sky idealism, nor merely wishful thinking. *Jesus was thoroughly realistic about the world around him.* I have to think that when Jesus called his followers to be agents of peace, there were probably Roman soldiers listening in, generally nervous about crowds as they were. He's not naïve. He knew what was at stake. He knew the suffering of God's people. The *Pax Romana* of the Empire was not peaceful; it was secured by violence and torture. He knew the mounting weight of oppression they were under because of the Roman occupation. The subjugation was particularly severe in the Galilee. Palestine was actually a political powder keg for most of Jesus' life. His listeners knew about contemporary Jewish zealots who picked up the sword against the Romans, accomplishing nothing. On the night of his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus explicitly told Peter to put away his sword (John 18:11). That's not my way, he said.

The people were searching for a different way. When Jesus approached Jerusalem, the crowds praised him and said, “Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest.” But then the religious leaders rebuked him and told Jesus to admonish his disciples. To which he replied – I love this verse – “I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out.” He cannot

be silenced. *Which seems to imply that all of creation, even lifeless stones, indeed the will of the universe is bent in the direction of the life that Jesus brings, which includes peace in heaven, and as the angels said at his birth, “peace on earth among men and women with whom he is pleased (Luke 2:14).” As for humanity, we prefer silence, resistance.*

Jesus came to bring peace, but they would have none of it. When Jesus approached the city and saw it, looking up at the glory of the Temple, as historian Josephus (37-c.100) tells us, covered in gold, glimmering in the sun, Jesus wept.<sup>1</sup> *He wept. “Would that even today you knew the things that make for peace! But they are hid from your eyes.”* Jesus came bringing peace, they would have none of it, they could not see and being blind they paid a horrendous price (we always do).

In 66 A. D., the keg finally exploded in the Jewish Revolt against the Romans, leading to the complete devastation of Jerusalem, the total destruction of the Temple in 70, and thousands crucified or taken away into slavery. What’s left of the Temple Mount today is known as the Wailing Wall, sacred to Jews. On the site of the Temple (or very near it) is the Dome of the Rock, sacred to Muslims. Not far from the Temple Mount is the stone quarry, Golgotha, sacred to Christians. When you look back upon the history of these three religions whose members all claim to be “children of God,” and remember this blood-splattered history still bleeding – particularly in Jerusalem – a history shaping our world, shaping the way we live here in America, one has to wonder if peace will ever come. Christians might talk about peace, but if you look at the history of the church and of nations claiming to be Christian, sadly, peaceful is not the first word that comes to mind. Was Jesus being naïve? How can he be so totally wrong here? Or maybe we are ones who are naïve, naïve about the nature of God. I believe Jesus continues to weep for us.

Jesus brings peace – *his peace* – but we will have none of it. The human response to Jesus’ life, then and now, was rejection, violence, and the cross and countless other crosses since then. While this might be our response to God, thankfully it’s not God’s response to us. God’s ways are not our ways. God justifies the one who was refused, rejected, and killed, and raises him up to show *that nothing can undo the hard truth that time and time again God comes bringing peace, his peace.* This is what Paul discovered in the resurrection of Jesus. Christ’s peace *is* reconciliation, the bringing together of enemies (not their annihilation) in order for them to sit at the same table. In Jesus’ time, you would never sit at the same table with your enemies. This way doesn’t come naturally or easily, but it’s possible. Humanity will continue to reject what God offers until the end of time, but this doesn’t change who God is toward us. Our alienation

---

<sup>1</sup> Josephus vividly describes the Temple in *The Jewish Wars*.

from God, as enemies of God's will, cannot deter God's desire to unite us to him through Christ. There was a time when we were alienated from God, but God has the power to bring alienated parties together, to bring people together at one table. "For [Christ] is our peace, who has made us both one, and has broken down the wall of hostility," reconciling us to God and to one another. "And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near," and called all people into a new community, no longer strangers and aliens, but fellow citizens of the household of God.

This household of God, this new community, this new way of living *is* Christ's beloved church – we exist to witness to the world a different way, an alternative vision of human community. This community – like churches around the world – is called to witness to this truth in our life together, called to witness Christ's peace, the peace we have with God which informs how we treat one another and every person who comes through our doors to this Table. It's our job to help people have the eyes to see the things that make for peace in the world. Why? Because we've seen it. We offer an alternate way; the church is the real world and beyond it is a false surrogate. We want people to see within us something different, something unbelievable, *unrealistic*, something you don't see every day.

When I was on vacation in Vancouver this summer, I had the occasion to be part of something you don't see every day. There's an organization called "Outstanding in the Field," that arranges dinners throughout the United States and Canada which take place outdoors. These educational events explore the connection between the earth and the food on our plates. It's part of the "Eat Locally" movement. The meal is prepared by a leading chef of the region. Everything on the table was raised or grown locally, within about 100 miles of the dinner. The farmers, fishermen, and cattle ranchers were all there. More than 120 people showed up on a farm at the University of British Columbia on a spectacularly beautiful summer evening. But what struck me sitting there with perfect strangers was the way in time, through the sharing of a meal, served family style, where we served one another and made sure there was enough for everyone around us, friendships were formed, connections made, mini-communities talking and sharing together *all along the length of that common table*, one long *common* table seating 120. It was a sight to behold. I said to myself, "I've never sat at such a table before." Then I heard others echoing the same question, "Have you ever sat at such a table before?" Then it hit me. Yes, I have. I have sat at a table like that before – and so have all of us. That was a foretaste of the Kingdom of God for me. That's what the church is supposed to be.

It's how I like to imagine the Lord's Table – especially on World Communion Sunday – one big common table. That table in the field and this table are glimpses of the future God intends for all people. Where people from north and south and east and west, men, women, and children, people from every segment of society sit together at one table, no longer strangers, but friends who share a meal and serve one another, making sure there's enough for everyone, friends who remember the One who sits here – *here* – with us here and loves us and offers us his presence and his peace which the world can never give and will never understand. Naïve? Unrealistic? It depends how you look at it. Through God's grace, may we have the eyes to see.

*Rev. Dr. Kenneth E. Kovacs*

*Catonsville Presbyterian Church  
Catonsville, Maryland*