

Shalom-Makers?  
Peacemakers  
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Series: The Beatitudes: People in Synch  
Title: Shalom-Makers (Peacemakers)  
Text: Matthew 5:9

“Blessed are the peace makers for they shall be called the children of God.”

As we continue making our way through the collection of sayings we call “The Beatitudes”, we come to the one that is probably the best known of them all. “Blessed are the peacemakers.” Has inspired more music than any of the others. “Blessed are the peace-makers” is found on more greeting cards and wall posters than any of the others. And rightly so! For in His seventh Beatitude Jesus bestows incredible dignity on ordinary, broken human beings. As I trust the exposition today will help us see and feel.

Now, as I have noted throughout this series of studies, whenever we focus on just one Beatitude we need to do so in the relation to them all. We saw how important this is last Sunday when we gave our attention to the sixth Beatitude, “blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” “Purity of heart”, has to be understood in light of poverty of spirit, and meekness, and gentleness, and hungering and thirsting for right-relatedness and mercy.

So will you once again open your Bibles to the Gospel according to Matthew, Chapter 5, verses 1-10. Here is the context. Jesus comes on the scene with what the writer of the New Testament call “The Gospel of God”, God’s good news for the world. The word translated “Gospel”, or good news, is the word evangelion, which comes into English as evangel. Thus we have the related words “evangelize”, meaning to “good-news-ize.” And “evangelical” meaning “people with good news.”

Jesus comes on the scene with God’s evangel. The writers of the four Gospels are making a huge point in using this term. For the Roman Emperors were using it for their edicts, their “throne speeches”. They thought of themselves as lords, as saviours, as redeemers of the world. And their authoritative messages to the Empire were called evangelium. As one scholar says, “The idea was that what comes from the emperor is a saving message, that is not just a piece of news, but a change of the world for the better.” (Pope Benedict: Jesus of Nazareth, 47)

So when the writers of the New Testament use the word “evangelion” relative to Jesus, they are saying to us: “What the emperors who pretend to be gods, illegitimately claim, really occurs here. Here is the real Lord of the world.” (ibid)

Jesus comes on the scene with God’s evangel: “it is time... the Kingdom of God has come near.” And Jesus begins to “evangelize”! Matthew tells us that Jesus begins healing all kinds of diseases, freeing people from all kinds of evil, forgiving sins, welcoming broken people into His family.

And then we read Matthew 5, verses 1-10. “Right-on, in synch with God’s evangels are the peacemakers for they shall be called the children of God.”

Dignity. Incredible dignity. In the seventh Beatitude Jesus is bestowing incredible dignity on ordinary, broken people. “Peacemakers,” says Jesus. Makers. Peace Makers. Jesus is not blessing “peace lovers.” Although He certainly could. Jesus is not here blessing “peace seekers”. Although He certainly could. Jesus is not here blessing “peace keepers”. Although He certainly could and does. Jesus is here congratulating “peace makers”. Plain old, imperfect folks? Makers? Of peace?

For most people the word “peace” “usually refers either to an inner tranquility – peace of mind, or an outward state – the absence of war.” (Dale Bruner, *The Christbook*, 149). The Biblical concept of peace certainly includes those ideas but goes far deeper and wider.

Behind the word used in the seventh Beatitude is the Hebrew word Shalom. It means “soundness, well being, wholeness”. A word that sounds out what it means – shalom. Shalom is life as God originally intended it to be: a well –rounded wholistic existence. Shalom involves harmony with the earth, harmony with other human beings, harmony with the inner self, harmony with the Living God. Shalom is ecological soundness, relational soundness, psychological soundness, spiritual soundness. Shalom encompasses the whole every dimension of life, the economic and political as well as the personal and religious.

For the Bible, silencing the guns does not mean peace has come. For the Bible, feeling good inside does not necessarily mean peace has come. Peace reigns when the causes of strife are healed. As Pope John Paul II said “wars can be prevented not by arms but by getting beyond the ‘symptoms’ of war to the causes of hunger, poverty, inequality”. And I would add by getting beyond human resistance to God and His Anointed One. The Biblical concept of peace involves so much more than inner tranquility and absence of war. Shalom is a psycho-semantic relational, economic, racial and spiritual wholeness.

Isaiah 11 “the wolf will dwell with the lamb and the leopard will lie down with the kid.. the lion will eat straw like an ox” (vs 6,7) That is Shalom.

Isaiah 35 “the wilderness and the desert will be glad .. it will blossom profusely ... the eye of the blind will be opened, and the ears of the deaf will be unstopped... the lame

will leap like a deer, the tongue of the dumb will shout for joy (vs 1, 5, 6) That is Shalom.

Isaiah 2 “And they will hammer their swords into plow shares, and their spears into pruning hooks.” (vs 4) That is Shalom.

Ephesians 2 “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens but you are fellow citizens with the saints and are God’s household.” (vs 19) That is Shalom. “having been built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the Cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together is growing into a Holy temple in the Lord.” (vs 20-21) That is Shalom

Revelation 21 “ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain.” (vs 4) That is Shalom. That is peace.

You see then? Why I say, in the seventh Beatitude Jesus bestows on us incredible dignity/ We wounded human beings? Makers of Shalom? Lovers of Shalom, of course! Seekers of Shalom, of course! Keepers of Shalom, maybe! But makers? Human beings? Makers of Shalom? Only the Living God can make Shalom! Shalom is a Divine reality. A wholistic soundness which only the wholeistic God can make. And yet Jesus calls those whom He calls to Himself “Shalom –makers”. On this Beatitude Karl Barth rightly renders “blessed” as “you lucky bums”.

When Jesus and His evangel gets hold of an individual, a community, a city, a nation something happens. Ordinary, broken people become partners in a Divine work. Shalom makers. Oh such dignity.

Now, remember the observation we made at the beginning of the series. In the Beatitudes Jesus is not describing eight different kinds of Kingdom people: one who is poor in spirit, another who mourns, another who is meek, another who is pure in heart. Rather, Jesus is describing eight different qualities of the same kingdom person. Which means every person captured by Jesus and His Gospel become poor in spirit: every good-news-ized” person begins to hunger and thirst for right-relatedness; every “evangelized” person becomes merciful and every “evangelical” is called to the Shalom-making vocation. Every Kingdom-ized, every born again, every Spirit –filled, use whatever term you want. Every disciple of Jesus is to be a Shalom-maker. Not just lover or seeker or keeper but maker!

Why is this a mark of those who have turned around and embraced Jesus and His good news of the Kingdom? For two basic reasons.

First, Jesus the Evangelizer is the Man of Peace. He is Shalom Himself. Isaiah 9, the great Christmas Eve text “Unto us a child is born, unto us a child is given... and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting father, Prince of Peace” (vs 6)

Zechariah 9, the great Palm Sunday text – “Behold, your king is coming to you; He is just and endowed with salvation, Humble; and mounted on a donkey.. I will cut off the chariots from Ephraim, and the noise from Jerusalem; And the bow of wars will be cut off. And He will speak peace to the nations.” (vs 9-10)

The One Who announces the Gospel is Prince of Peace who speaks Shalom into being. Those who enter into relationship with Him cannot but become at very least, Shalom lovers and Shalom seekers. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it: When the disciples met Jesus of Nazareth “they found peace, for He is their peace”. (Cost of Discipleship, pg 126)

Second, peace-making is a mark of those upon whom the Kingdom has come because the Kingdom is a Kingdom of Peace. The “new world order” has come near and it is an order of Shalom. In Jesus we see the soundness, the wholeness, the fill-orbed well being for which we were originally created. In Jesus’ actions we see Shalom-in- the –making; restoration of harmony with the Living god, restoration of harmony with others, restoration of harmony with self, restoration of harmony with the earth. When His new world order begins to break into our lives we cannot help becoming at the very least Shalom lovers and seekers. Jesus says we will become more, we become Shalom makers. Makers.

Well then, what does this peace-making look like? What does it look like in this city? Jesus unfolds the answer in the Sermon that follows the Beatitudes in His Sermon on the Mount. And He unfolds the answer as He lives and dies in our world. I do not know everything that the dignified vocation to which Jesus calls us. But I do know these five things.

First, I know the posture for peace; that is I know the proper stance for receiving and experiencing peace. I know that Shalom is a gift. A gift of God. A gift which can finally only be enjoyed in relationship with God. The peace of God is finally realized when God is allowed to be God.

On page after page, the Bible puts its finger on the most cause of the unrest, anxiety, strife that makes our world. It is that humanity has turned its back our Maker. “God is dead” sadly leads, inexorably so, to violence and decay. Humanity refuses to live as creature before the creator. Human beings (even religious human beings) have usurped the peace and role of God, and are, therefore, in a state of rebellion against God. Need I illustrate? The Theologian Declaration of Barer, written during the rise of Nazism, declares “ As Jesus Christ is God’s assurance of the forgiveness of all our sins, as in the same way and with the same seriousness He is also God’s mighty claim upon our whole lives.” Resistance to “God’s mighty claim” is at the root of all peace-less-ness. Until that resistance ends Shalom cannot be fully realized.

Is that not what the angels were getting at on Christmas Eve when they sang: “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.” (Luke 2:14) Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace. “Glory to God in the highest” is the infra-structure for “peace on earth”. No glory to God, no peace. The shalom which Jesus brings into the world is experienced

when we bow the knee before the God who reigns, when we step off the throne of life and accept our place as creatures, as children as followers. In a special he gave at Stratford University, Vaclav Havel, the President of the Czech republic, described the current world situation and ended by saying “humanity probably will have to go through many more Rwandas and Chernobyls before it understand how unbelievably short sighted a human being can be who has forgotten he is not God.”

“Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace.”

This means that Shalom-making invades evangelism; bringing the Good News to people so they may turn and receive Jesus as Saviour and Lord and Friend. After declaring the god news that “God was in Christ” reconciling the world to Himself, the apostle Paul went on to say, “therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were entreating through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.” (2 Cor. 5:20) We beg you, lay down your resistance to the Living god and come home. Only the love of God in Jesus can melt resistant hearts. Peace-making, therefore, involves telling our contemporaries in every way we can, of that love: telling the city that it is safe to come out of hiding; the Father against whom we have rebelled is waiting with out-stretched arms (Luke 15) Shalom is a gift of God given to those who let God be God. That is the posture; the stance form which we make peace.

Second, I know that qualifications of a Shalom-maker. They are the first six the Prince of Peace is describing the people who have what it takes to be engaged in this Divine enterprise. And what a surprise!

1. Peace – makers are “poor in spirit”. They recognize and admit their spiritual bankruptcy. They recognize and admit the lack of peace in their hearts. They recognize and admit the violence in their own hearts.
2. Peace-makers are “those who mourn”. They grieve over the sinful condition of the world and their own heart. They weep the fear of God Himself Who grieves over a humanity which turns its back.
3. Peace-makers are also “meek”. Not weak but meek, gentle. They can resist temptation to take vengeance into their own hands. For they have thrown themselves on the king of Kings and for Him to vindicate them.
4. Peace-makers also “hunger and thirst for righteousness”. Their appetite has changed. They long to see God’s right-related-ness be realized. They recognize that we live in one world and seek the good of the whole world, not just the good of their own Empires. They treat other human beings with respect and not just as pawns in a grand chess game.
5. Peace-makers are “merciful”. They do not need to give to others what others might rightly deserve; they give to others what they do not deserve; they give pardon and kindness. They are willing to put themselves in another person’s, another culture’s, another nation’s shoes.
6. And Peace-makers are “pure-in-heart”. They abhor decent, hypocrisy, manipulation. They can spot it in their own hearts and want it out. They want to see all of life in light of God’s Truth and Grace. They recognize their own lust for

power, their desire to control and can distinguish it from the will of God. They simply seek the Face of Jesus.

According to the Prince of peace it is “Beatitude People” who are agents of Shalom. They are the ones who make peace in the city.

Third, I know what can happen to Shalom-makers. They recognize the approval and blessing of God. And sometimes the approval and blessing of people. And sometimes the scorn and opposition of people. If the first six Beatitudes describe the qualifications of peace making, the eighth Beatitude describes the consequence. “Blessed are those who are persecuted.” Sorry but it happens. Be about the business of Shalom-making and we might encounter trouble: Jesus warns anyone who follows Him on the path of peacemaking, that first as rebellious human hearts resisted Him they will resist them (see John 15 :18-24). As E Stanley James said “people hate to be disturbed – even for the better.”

The status quo cannot handle the poor in spirit, pure-in-heart, especially when the poor in spirit and pure in heart seek to let God be God and welcome His Kingdom in. the status quo systems will pressure the disciples of Jesus into compromise or into silent acquaintances. If that does not work the systems will seek to eliminate His disciples. As Bishop Dom. Helda Camara of Brazil once said “when I feed the poor they call me a saint, when I ask why the poor are poor they call me a communist”. Shalom-makers meet opposition and sometimes get hurt. More on that next Sunday.

Fourth, I know that Shalom –making involves sacrifice. That is, Shalom-making involves a cross. How can it be otherwise? How did God make peace with us?

Colossians 1:19-20 “For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Christ, and through Christ to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”

Isaiah 53:5 “The chastening for our Shalom fell upon Him, by Him scourging we are healed.”

The Living God makes Shalom through sacrificial love. So too we.

Thus Jesus says to us later in the Sermon on the Mount “I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil: but whoever slaps you in the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (5:39) That is peace-making the way of the cross. Jesus says, “Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you.” ( 5:44) That is peace-making the way of the cross.

Paul exhorts the Christians in Rome: “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if your enemy is thirsty, give him something to drink. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” (12:17, 20-21) That is peace-making the way of the cross. Again Dietrich Bonhoeffer says it well, the disciples of Jesus make peace “by choosing to endure the suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others.” (pg 136)

Somewhere along the way , we have come to terms with the fact that the cross is not only the source of our new life in Christ it is also the pattern of our new life in Christ. The prince of Peace who is our peace says to us “if you want to come after Me, you must deny yourself and daily take up your cross.” Shalom is made and experienced through the cross. Through the cross flows the blood which heals the wounds.

I know one more thing about our vocation. It happens one step at a time. It happens by you and I making Shalom in little ways/ in our little corners of the city. “Let us be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” As the song says. Paul exhorts believers in Romans 12:18. “If possible so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all people,” (12:18)

Here are some little steps of peace-making we can take today.

1. We can begin by affirming our identity and vocation in Jesus. We can say “I am a peace-maker”. By grace, we are children of God sons and daughters of the Author of Shalom, sisters and brothers of the Prince of Peace.. By grace, we have been granted the dignity of causality. “I am a partner in a Divine work.”
2. We can then acknowledge any resistance to God in our hearts. We can ask God to melt it , to melt the resistance so we will let God be God.
3. We can further acknowledge any anger in our hearts. Anger against others, anger against self, anger against God. We can ask God to heal the anger in our souls.
4. We can further acknowledge any fear in our hearts. Fear holds us back from our great vocation. Acknowledging any fear. And ask Jesus to overcome it.
5. And then we can affirm the Gospel again. We can say a fresh “amen” to God’s evangelion. We can say with Jesus “it is time. It is time for the Kingdom of God to come near.” Re-affirming the Gospel revives perspective and courage and hope.

The Kingdom has come. The Kingdom is coming. Is coming. Coming.coming Like a seed forcing its way up through the soul and rocks. Like a fire. Kindles over all the earth. Who can stop it? (Mortimer Arias, “Announcing the Reign of God”, 42) No one and nothing. No-one and nothing can finally stand in the way of God’s Kingdom. Shalom is coming. Easter morning guarantees that. Jesus’ resurrection says loud and clear that Shalom will come. For the Prince of Peace has defeated the greatest enemy of Peace; Jesus has defeated death. Shalom is coming. Blessed , right-on – in synch are the Shalom –makers. Makers? For they shall be called the children of God. What an incredible dignity!