

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, November 9, 2008  
Rev. John Tapscott

"BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS"

Matthew 5:9

Today we read Jesus' teachings from the Sermon on the Mount known as the Beatitudes. There are eight beatitudes, but today I've chosen to speak on just one and it's this Matthew 5:9 - "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Now when we look at the Beatitudes we need to think about Jesus' key word, "Blessed." Some Bibles translate the word as "Happy." This is possible but puts too much emphasis on subjective feeling.

In a Peanuts cartoon Lucy asks Charlie Brown if he has ever known anybody who was really happy. Just then Snoopy comes dancing along on tiptoe, his nose high in the air. He dances and bounces his way across two frames of the cartoon strip. Finally, in the last frame, Lucy changes her question, "Have you ever known anybody who was really happy and was still in their right mind?"

But "happy" doesn't quite capture the deep meaning of this word "blessed." Now living in God's way may well increase your joy and contentment. But not always. The state of blessedness doesn't have to do with your moods. You can be blessed in God's sight, even if you are not happy as the world defines it. The word "blessed" has the sense of "Congratulations," or "How fortunate you are." It is not the world's verdict, but God's verdict. In fact, the world may call "wretched" those whom God calls "fortunate". The world may say "Fool" those to whom God says, "Congratulations." Last week I said that the candidate who lost the presidential election might be the fortunate one. It's hard to imagine saying to John McCain: "Congratulations; how fortunate you are" but given the state of the world it may be true. The people whom God calls "blessed" are not always those whom the world calls "blessed". But it's far better for you to have God's approval than the world's approval. And in today's Beatitude, Jesus gives divine approval to the peace-makers. He says "Congratulations to the peace-makers" or "Fortunate are the peace-makers." "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God."

Now in studying this beatitude I begin not with us, but with God. We should

always begin with God. Here's the first point I want to make. **God is the great peace maker.**

God's great purpose is to bring peace between himself and humans, and harmonious relationships between human beings. Shalom.

Some years ago a large African river had cut a deep ravine through a plateau. A village grew up on either side of the ravine. Since the river was impossible to cross for miles in either direction, the villagers were strangers to one another, and hurled insults and shot arrows at one another across the river.

Eventually the government ran a highway through the area. A bridge was built across the river between the two villages. People from each village began interacting with one another and found that there was no reason for them to be enemies. A deep bond of friendship soon developed between them and the bridge that brought them together became known as "The Bridge of Reconciliation."

This story gives us a hint into what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. In the beginning humans had a close, intimate relationship with God. But human sin carved a deep ravine between God and us. From our perspective God now seemed distant. God was no longer considered a friend, but an enemy, someone out to get us. Hostility and fear entered the relationship from our side. We wanted to hide from God, rather than embrace Him in love. Our relationship with God was not peaceful. We were at war with Him.

But God did not stop loving the human race. Instead, he built a cross-shaped bridge of reconciliation from heaven to earth. God sent his Son into this world to live with us and teach us God's ways. Eventually Jesus himself experienced hostility and rejection and death. But in his death on the Cross and his resurrection from the dead, Christ bore our sins and overcame all that causes us to be divided from God. We don't have to build a bridge from us to God, because God has built a bridge of reconciliation from himself to us. God has done all he can from his side, so that we can live in peace with God in this world and for eternity. We don't need to be afraid. A peaceful relationship with God is now offered to all humanity. We only have to accept it by faith.

Some years ago, Japanese soldiers from World War 2 were discovered hiding out on some south Pacific islands, still planning to fight the enemy. They'd never heard that the war had ended decades ago. Authorities suspected that thousands of soldiers lived and perished in the jungles, never realizing that the

war was over and that they could come home. So it is that many people still live far from God, treating God as an enemy. But in Jesus Christ God says to the world, "The war is over. The door is open, propped open with a cross. Put your trust in me and in Jesus my Son. Come home and live at peace with me." Listen to how the apostle Paul puts it in his Colossian letter. "For God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, by making peace by the blood of his Cross...once you were alienated from God and were enemies...but now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and accusation - if you continue in the faith..."

God is not your enemy; He is Your Heavenly Father. He wants you to love Him and to trust in His goodness. And if you have crowned Jesus as your Saviour and Lord, then you have crossed the bridge of reconciliation. You are home with God; at peace with Him. You know that your sins are forgiven, and that you will be with Him for eternity.

God is the great peacemaker. Peacemaking begins with God. And so does ours. When we are in that reconciled and peaceful relationship with God then we ourselves become peacemakers. We start to become like the One who is the Prince of Peace.

"Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God." Now here's the second thing I want to say - **Peace-making is not easy.**

We long for peace but the sin nature within us seems to prefer turmoil instead of peace. Look, peace-making cost God the suffering death of his Son. And that was costly beyond our imagining. And even now many reject God's offer of reconciliation. They prefer hostility and fear. They choose hell over heaven.

Peace-making is hard and costly. If you desire to be a peace-maker, you need thick skin. A friend reminded me the other day of Jimmy Carter, a good man and the most publically Christian President the United States has ever had. Carter desired to be a peace-maker and to build bridges between old enemies and yet in certain countries they held up signs at protests which read "Death to Carter." He certainly didn't deserve the hatred he received. A peace-maker may experience rejection and derision.

It can happen in another way. This may have happened to you. It's happened to me. You open the door one to someone from whom you are estranged, but they reject you and rebuff your offer of reconciliation. It takes two willing souls to make peace. But at least you've tried.

On Remembrance Sunday we remember that making peace is not easy and

often requires great sacrifice. We honour and give thanks for all who gave themselves, even their very lives, to make peace.

It's always a debate in Canada - are we a nation of peace-makers or peace-keepers? We have done both in our history. Personally, I believe that you have to sometimes have to make peace first, in order that there be a peace to keep. And sometimes, tragically, we do have to go to war to make peace. Now we always need wisdom and restraint. And we have to be vigilant in watching that when our nation goes to war, it really is to make peace and security for ourselves and others, not for selfish nationalistic purposes. But this is a fallen world. The world is not full of nice people waiting to love one another. This is why I cannot embrace a strict pacifist position. Now I think that pacifism is honourable and we need always to be reminded of the horror of war and the need to go the second mile in seeking diplomatic solutions. But in this broken world diplomacy sometimes falls short and war becomes necessary as a last resort. The reality of evil in the world and even within ourselves is pervasive and subtle and real. So we have to be on guard. We have to know where to draw the line. Winston Churchill knew where to draw the line, and how far would Hitler have gone if he hadn't? Not only would Hitler have dominated a good portion of the world; he might have essentially wiped out the Jewish people.

Peace-making is not easy. In fact, making peace always requires the help of the Christ who walks with us, and the Holy Spirit who dwells within us. So peace making is not easy, but here's the last thing I want to say.

**Being a peace-maker makes you God-like.** "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God."

A child of God is one who is God-like, one who does what God does. For a moment set aside all the theological aspects of the term "Son of God." What really made Jesus the "Son of God" was that in all he did and said he was like God. He obeyed the Father's will and clearly reflected who God is and what God is like.

Now we are not Jesus; his role as the Son of God was unique. But when we act as peace-makers we reflect God's character. And no matter what the world thinks of us, this is the pay off. When we are peace-makers God gives his approval to us. His blessing rests upon us. God says to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant." When you are a peace-maker God calls you his child. And to be a child of God child is the highest honour a human can have, higher than advanced degrees, secular titles, or the Order of Canada, higher than anything. "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called children of God."

