

Blessed Are The Peacemakers

A Message by James R. Newby

Text: Romans 12:14-18, 20-21

At the heart of the message that Jesus came to deliver, is the gospel of peace. It is not just a footnote in his teaching, nor an editorial comment in the margins. *It is central to his message.* This is something the Early Quakers clearly understood. The words of Jesus about peace were the beginning of our Peace Testimony. Hear again the words shared in a Declaration to Charles II in 1661: *“We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretense whatsoever. And this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any person with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.”*

When Jesus sent out his disciples, they carried no physical protection, not even a purse or a bag for support. And he tells them, to each house you enter, say “Peace be upon this house and if a child of peace lives in that house, your

peace shall rest upon them.” When Jesus heals a woman with a wound that would not stop bleeding, he says to her, “Go in peace.” When a woman comes to him seeking forgiveness for something she had done, he blesses her and says, “Go in peace.” In the Gospel of John, just before he is arrested and will be killed, Jesus speaks to his disciples, summarizing everything that he wants to tell them. There, he speaks of the importance of dwelling in love and then says, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you, not as the world gives...Let not your hearts be troubled, neither be afraid.” And so we know that peace is at the heart of Jesus’ message.

We live in a day of terror and fear...Violence is a part of our everyday lives. The horror of the school shootings that are now occurring every week. The continuous wars in Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq, and the violence, both verbal and physical that has become so prevalent in homes throughout our country, are all creating a sense that violence is the norm. Amidst the violence perpetrated by the Roman Empire, the Apostle Paul wrote: “Live in harmony with one another...Repay no one evil for evil...Beloved, never avenge yourselves...No, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”

This is Paul's message to the Roman Church, and to us as well. Make peace, not hatred. Feed the hungry, quench the thirsts of all people. Remember the words of Jesus: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of God..."

If there is one person who all people revere and hold up as an example of a life lived with God, it is Mother Teresa. Listen to her words as she reflects on *Working Toward Peace...* "The fruit of silence is prayer; the fruit of prayer is faith; the fruit of love is service; the fruit of service is peace. Let us not use bombs and guns to overcome the world. Let us use love and compassion...Let us radiate the peace of God and so light His light and extinguish in the world and in the hearts of all people all hatred and love for power. Today if we have no peace, it is because we have forgotten that we belong to each other...that man, that woman, that child is my brother or sister. If everyone could see the image of God in his or her neighbor, do you think we would still need tanks and generals?"

"Peace and war begin at home. If we truly want peace in the world, let us begin by loving one another in our own families. If we want to spread joy, we need for every family to have joy..." Perhaps Mother Teresa is too simple

and naïve, and yet I am convinced that the path to peace begins with such small and simple steps.

It was my friend, Thomas Cahill, the author of, *How The Irish Saved Civilization*, who stated, “What will be lost and what saved of our civilization probably lies beyond our powers to decide...The future may be germinating today not in a boardroom in London or an office in Washington or a bank in Tokyo, but in some antic outpost—a kindly British orphanage in the grim foothills of Peru, a house for the dying in a back street of Calcutta that was founded by a fiercely single-minded Albanian nun, a mission to Somalia by Irish social workers who remember their own great hunger—in some unheralded corner where a great hearted human being is committed to loving outcasts in an extraordinary way...The 21st Century will be spiritual or it will not be. If our civilization is to be saved, it will be saved by saints.”

As we have come together this morning, some of us may be tempted to tell ourselves that the decisions regarding peace among nations and even peace on the streets of Cincinnati or in a school in Parkland, Florida, are not something that we can affect. And yet, I believe that we can, and the high school students from Parkland, Florida and now around the world, believe we can.

Cincinnati Friends Meeting can continue to become one of those “antic

outposts” that Cahill describes, where we love outcasts in an extraordinary way. Working for justice is something we can all do.

We can also pray and hold others in the Light. William Penn wrote about how George Fox, our Founder, would pray. He writes this about Fox in *The Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers*, “But above all, he excelled in prayer. The inwardness and weight of his spirit, the reverence and solemnity of his address and behavior, and the fewness and fulness of his words, have often struck even strangers with admiration, as they used to reach others with consolation. The most awful, living, reverent frame I ever felt or beheld, I must say, was his in prayer.”

All that Jesus could do on the cross was pray...and so he did. First he acknowledged his own pain: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Then he prayed for his enemies: “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” With Mother Teresa, and with other spiritual giants through the ages, we can recognize prayer as the first step toward peace. Let us be a people who pray and hold our leaders in the Light, that all those with the power to make decisions will follow the way to peace.

The truth is, we already know the way. *We just need the will to get there.* It is through justice for the poor, hungry and thirsty, whether that hunger be

physical, or spiritual, personal or political. It is through common sense gun legislation that will keep firearms out of the hands of persons filled with hate and grievance. It is to focus on peaceful solutions to conflict, rather than quickly resorting to violence. It is through a spiritual transformation, so that we will finally come to recognize, in the radical way that John Donne and the Quaker John Woolman came to recognize, that no person is an island, and that as a part of the human family we belong to each other. And, we can hold one another in the Light. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” says Jesus, “for they will be called children of God.”