

Making Peace

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Peace, peace be with you. Peace be with this house. Peace be with this city. Peace be with this world. Peace to all in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

In the good news that we heard this morning, Jesus sends out seventy disciples on a mission of peace. He asks them to be peacemakers, remember elsewhere He says, blessed are the peacemakers. Peacemaking is as much a task or even more of a task needed in our own day as it was in Jesus' own. But what is it to make peace? By default we often think of peace of merely the absence of conflict and especially perhaps, in the warm and lazy days of summer, we may think of peace as lying in a hammock in the shade sipping a cool drink, or floating on a raft in the pool, splashing cool water across overheated skin. But to Jesus, peacemaking is not lazing in a hammock or lolling on a raft in a pool, or even merely the absence of conflict, wonderful as all three of these things may be. For Jesus, peace is an activity, an action, it is peace making. It is expressed in that wonderful full word in Hebrew, shalom, a word redolent with multiple meanings. It means healing and health, it means wholeness and the completion of everything in goodness. It means all the goodness that comes from God and that makes a world of justice and generosity. Where everyone has enough and where the forces that destroy goodness are transformed so that goodness can thrive and flourish. In short, peace and peacemaking is central to the kingdom that Jesus was sent into the world to inaugurate. It is Jesus who is the primary peacemaker, and he shapes and sends us out, just as he sent out those seventy so many years ago, to be peacemakers, kingdom builders, in our own places, in our own ways, little by little bringing the kingdom of peace.

But if peace is an action, an activity, what sort of activity? We can learn a lot about this by looking, again, at today's gospel and looking at what Jesus sent the seventy out to do. Note that on their mission, He asks them to do several things. He asks them to bid peace to those with whom they stay. He asks them to cure the sick. He asks them, "don't worry about failure, you won't lose the peace that you carry with you and send out, even if they don't accept it. Tell them, tell them that the kingdom has come near and don't be vengeful or nasty if they don't accept you or your peace. Just move on. And don't get caught up in rejoicing when evil falls before you, instead rejoice at the whole point of peace. That God has given us enough peace as gift, that our names are written in the Book of Life, that we've discovered what the secret, the true secret of joy in life is. That peace comes from God, that God offers it to every human being who is willing to be in a relationship with God. And that it's inexhaustible, this peace that God pours out will never run dry. It's an ever flowing stream, ever renewed and it's protected, because peace belongs to God and God gives it to you and to me and everyone who is willing to receive it. God's pursuit of peace is relentless and nothing will deter God, nothing ever has, from pursuing peace. Not then, not now, not ever.

So what may peace look like? What may peace and peacemaking look like in our own time and place, here in the early years of the 21st century? Two strands of peacemaking in today's gospel. The first, to be a peacemaker is to be vulnerable. We are sent out to be like lambs among wolves. Not exactly a happy image, but there may be a different way to think about this. Do you remember that image from Isaiah? The peaceable kingdom image, where God predicts that one day there will be peace in the world that lions and lambs will lie down together. I don't know how you hear Jesus, but today I hear Him saying, "Look the worst part of the task is over. You don't have to face lions; all you have to face are wolves." I wonder if He is saying God's already done the harder part of the work. God has faced down the lions now you only have to face the wolves. It's still a risky venture, but maybe, maybe, we can risk it. If you say, "It's a really nice image, but how, how could I possibly risk this? What hope is there that there will be any success at all?" After all, as the press constantly reminds us, we live in a world populated with, what they call "terrorists". How can there be peace? If you are feeling hopeless and feeling like the task of being a lamb-like peacemaker in the face of wolves is just too much, a source of hope from just a little over ten years ago. Do you remember South Africa? Just a little over ten years ago the apartheid regime ended there. What did you expect at the end of that regime? What did the press predict? What did everyone think would happen? A bloodbath, a bloodbath. But it didn't happen, did it? Instead what happened was the risky venture of a truth and reconciliation commission. Where both sides had to admit that they had committed against the other. Both sides had to be lamb-like in front of the ones they had thought of as wolves and had to admit that they had been wolves devouring lambs on the other side. Hope for peacemaking.

The other strand I hear in the gospel is, "don't lose heart. Be joyful and confident." God has already placed the peace in your heart that you will give to others. You don't have to pull it up out of yourself, God has given you peace. No, your peacemaking and mine will not be successful at every turn. There will be people who will not receive your peace or mine. It's always been that way but we do not need to despair. "We are not called," and I am now quoting a dear friend, "to be successful, we are called to be faithful." Faithful in peacemaking, the success lies with God and with those to whom we offer the peace. If someone doesn't receive your peace, gently shake off the dust and find someone else. Someone will receive it and something good will grow.

If you are wondering a little more concretely, so what might my peacemaking look like in our time and our place? Three possible images come to mind. When we celebrate Eucharist together, which we are not doing today, but we do at this service on the first Sunday of the month, we pass the peace with one another. An easy phrase, we turn to one another and say, "The peace of Christ be with you." Someone offers us peace back and we try to exchange our names with each other. It's a little risky thought, isn't it? To exchange peace with someone in your pew who might be a household member of yours and with whom you had an argument last night? Your spouse, your beloved or with your child who didn't snap it up and get dressed fast enough this morning. A little risky to exchange peace, or even more risky, what if the person next to you is a stranger and you don't know whether they will give you peace back. It's a good place to start isn't it? This

peacemaking here. Christ is here offering us each peace and asking us to exchange it with each other.

A second image for another place to exchange peace. Most of us have someplace that we spend most of our working week, a workplace with others, or home sometimes alone or with others. What about the person who drives you crazy in that workplace or at home? You know peacemaking isn't about warm feelings. Peacemaking is not the same as romantic love. Peacemaking is about the exchange of goodness. What might it be like to take a risk and seek good in that person at work that you don't get along with? How could you do it? A kind word at the water cooler; a bit more risky, an invitation to lunch; or a word of encouragement or greeting instead of simply avoiding the person?

And a third way, a third way of making peace is brought to mind by our TEEP program that I mentioned in the announcements just now, the Trinity Education for Excellence Program. Perhaps that program has something to teach us about peacemaking. You know what TEEP is, it's a five week program every summer where students from Boston City Public Schools come here for an academic and cultural enrichment program and then sent back out into their community and schools with a renewed sense of love for learning and a desire to make a difference in their communities. The way that TEEP works is through something that they call the 5 R's. They are: Respect, Responsibility, Restraint, Reciprocity and Redemption. Respect, Responsibility, Restraint, Reciprocity and Redemption, wonderful words. Though TEEP is not just for Christian students, I think each of these words has special meaning for those of us who seek to follow Christ as peacemakers.

First Respect. Could we do better on the civic stage of life in the city and life in the nation and the world than to seek to make peace through respecting other people? Perhaps especially those with whom we differ? Wouldn't it make a difference in the church? I'm now thinking about Anglican arguments, if those of us who name ourselves progressive Anglicans and those who name themselves traditional or conservative Anglicans treated each other with respect even though we disagree. Doesn't our baptismal covenant say that we'll respect the dignity of every human being? What about Responsibility? What about peacemaking through responsibility? How do you already take responsibility in this city or the nation or the world? Do you recycle? Bravo! Peacemaking. Do you vote? Bravo! Peacemaking through being responsible. Do you support this parish through a pledge? Because you know its our pledges that make the TEEP program possible. Bravo! Peacemaking through pledging. And it doesn't support just TEEP, it supports our missions in Honduras and our mission trip last weekend with the youth who went to Washington, DC. If each of us takes responsibility perhaps dreams of justice and peace will become concrete realities and not just dreams.

The third R is restraint. Last week in her sermon, the Vicar asked us to imagine a United States. A nation and what it would be like here if we were all moved in our international relationships by restraint? What if we as individuals exercised restraint in our personal dealings? Do you remember that rule of thumb we are taught as a child? Count to ten before? It's a good rule for adults too, you know. What if we counted to ten every time

before we spoke or even thought a judgment about another person? What if we counted to ten before we assumed that we knew what was motivating someone else? What if we became known as people of restraint? Wouldn't that begin to make peace?

Reciprocity. Reciprocity in Christian terms is wonderfully summed up in the words of scripture, "freely you have received, freely give." The TEEP students understand that they are receiving a lot and have received a lot before they ever became a part of TEEP. And they are taught to try and give back. What about us? What would it be like if we tried reciprocity for everything we took from the earth and give just a tithe of it back? How green the earth would be with just that kind of step of reciprocity.

And the final great R is redemption. Now in TEEP that doesn't mean Christ's redemption of the world because, of course, that's not a Christian program just for Christian students. But for us, think about the redemption wrought by Christ. TEEP defines redemption as second chances. Have you ever thought about Christ's redemption as the offer of second chance at every turn? What if we gave every single person that we came in contact with a second chance? What about the person who cut you off on your way to church here this morning? Instead of a harsh word or harsh gesture, what about a second chance? What about that friend of yours who hasn't returned your phone call? What if you exercised peacemaking and second chance by calling that person again? What if we gave a second chance to the illegal immigrant in our midst? What if we became known as a church where there was always a second chance?

The kingdom of God is here, Jesus says, its right at your fingertips. Every time someone makes peace its right there. It's right here. Can you reach out and take it? Of course you can that's why you're here. Can you reach out and give it? Of course you can with Christ's help. The great peacemaker to whom be praise and glory, now and evermore. Amen.