**March 13, 2022 Matthew 5:9-12**

 ***Peacemaker***

**Scripture:**

*Matthew 5:9-12 NRSV (9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.*

**Nores:**

1. A ***peacemaker*** may be the most ***difficult*** of all the Beatitudes.
	1. What does it mean to be a ***peacemaker***?
	2. ***Peacemaker*** is someone who works for peace.
	3. Peacemaking is an active movement toward ***restoration***.
2. What does it take to be a ***Peacemaker***?
	1. We often mistake peace as something achieved by **force**.
	2. The Beatitudes were written in a culture of ***violence***.
	3. ***Peacemaking***, stands out in stark contrast to the world.
3. ***Peculiarity*** Can Lead to Ridicule and Persecution
	1. Seeking peace may provoke ***anger*** and ***frustration***.
	2. Those who create peace are often ***outsiders***.
4. Peacemaking is an important part of ***righteousness***.
	1. ***Righteousness*** is doing the right things for the right reasons.
	2. Peacemaking is a way ***righteousness*** is lived out.
	3. Living the Beatitudes sets one apart as ***peculiar***.
5. The kingdom of heaven belongs to the ***righteous***.
	1. Those who are ***persecuted***, are often viewed as weak.
	2. The kingdom of heaven is forthe ***overlooked.***
	3. The kingdom of heaven is for those who seek ***peace***.
6. Call for a way that ***walks*** into conflict so relationships may be ***restored***.
	1. We are called to be ***peacemakers***.
	2. Choose the hard path of ***peculiar*** ***righteousness***.

**Script:**

*In what kingdom do I want to live?* That is the question I have been dwelling on this week. Last week we began our Lenten series focusing on the life and death of Jesus and our message focused on the sermon on the mount and the beatitudes.

But as we look at the beatitudes, I came across the word Peacemaker and it makes me to stop and think. What does it mean to be a peacemaker? How can we be a peacemaker in a world so full of greed, hatred and violence? What are the benefits and consequences of being a peacemaker?

My thoughts look to the conflict in Ukraine; what can we do to stop the assault upon the Ukrainian people; how can we foster a resolution to this conflict? Should we enter into the combat and fight against the evil of this world, or should we stand back and call the Russian leadership names? Are our sanctions enough to truly sway the Russian leaders to stop their attacks? Are economic sanctions really going to hurt the people in charge; or do they only have an effect upon the innocent inhabitants of Russia?

How would you go about being a peacemaker? Would you be passive, or perhaps you would use some other methods? Do you even think that this is something that is worth pursuing anymore? Being a peacemaker is a tough task and it is not something that you can decide to do and have the task completed in a couple days. Today we take a closer look at this calling to be a peacemaker. We look at the questions that arise regarding this calling, and we pursue God’s thoughts on this plan.

The call to be a peacemaker may be the most difficult of all the Beatitudes to live out. While some of the Beatitudes are passive, or may seem to be more passive, the term “peacemaker” is a strongly active word. It calls us to make peace in the world around us, an especially difficult task in a world that seems to revel in violence. It would make sense, then, that the call to be a peacemaker is next to a word of blessing for those who are persecuted. These two may be more connected than we think because, in a world that loves violence, being a peacemaker may well lead to persecution. Stand with me as we share in the reading of our Gospel passage for today, from Matthew 5:9-12

 *(9)"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. (10)"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (11)"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. (12)Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:9-12 NRSV*

What does it mean to be a peacemaker? The Greek word for “peacemaker” here is *eirénopoios*. It’s the only time in Scripture that we find this word, it is not used anywhere else. But the related word *eirene* is used ninety-one times in the New Testament. The Greek word *eirene* is used in place of the Hebrew word *shalom* in the Septuagint. The Septuagint being the Greek translation of the Old Testament. This implies that *eirene,* or peace, isn’t about passivity or lack of conflict. It is about wholeness and being mended together. This is something deeper, something much fuller than just not having conflict.

*Eirene* is at the heart of the word *eirénopoios*, and with this in mind,we can infer that those who are peacemakers aren’t merely devoted to the absence of conflict in the world but seek wholeness and restoration. “Peacemaker” is sometimes recast as “peace worker” someone who works for peace. This is an important distinction, because we can mistakenly interpret a peacemaker as one who keeps peace, but working for peace implies more than that. We could also wrongly assume that a peacemaker lives in peace, but working for peace doesn’t inherently mean living at peace; it is a pursuit of peace. Also, because peace means wholeness and mending together, it could also mean walking through conflict in order to come to a place of peace. It is also important to distinguish peacemaking from passivity or pacifism. Peacemaking isn’t merely a passive, nonviolent stance. It is an active movement toward restoration and maybe even reconciliation.

What does it take to be a Peacemaker in a culture that loves violence? The culture we live in loves violence. This might seem like a bold statement, but a quick look at some major parts of culture illustrate this reality plainly: the high amount of sales of movies, television shows, and video games that have violent themes; news stories that sensationalize violence, often for the sake of higher viewership (“if it bleeds, it leads”); violent videos spread quickly through social media avenues. While we might be horrified by the consequences of violence, overall our culture relies on violence as a problem solver: capital punishment, war, weapons that we keep in our homes under the pretext that they are there to defend against potential intruders, etc. These can be very controversial things, but the reality stands that in this type of culture, it is hard to be a peacemaker. We often make the mistake of viewing peace as something that can be achieved by force, instead of working on the situations diligently as a means of restoration and healing.

The culture into which the Beatitudes were written is also a culture of violence. The Roman Empire is famous for its use of military might and intimidation. It also embraces cruel forms of capital punishment (which should be obvious to us, especially when we look at how Jesus himself was killed). Some of the remaining ruins of the Roman Empire are examples of the violence the Romans loved, with the Colosseum representing perhaps the largest and most obvious example, as a place where violence was treated as a game, a sport, and a form of entertainment. Peacemaking; true, hard restoration and healing that brings about the peace of Christ in these types of worlds stands out as a stark contrast. Someone who does that type of work looks peculiar to the world.

Peculiarity Can Lead to Ridicule and Persecution. Among those who prefer conflict, someone who seeks a way of peace will provoke anger and frustration. We all know people who prefer conflict those who constantly find themselves in the middle of interpersonal drama, and those who seek out situations where they can manipulate and create conflict.

We have a culture that isn’t just saturated in violence, but loves all forms of conflict. Reality TV has made millions from creating powder-keg situations; and then capitalizing on them when they explode, and we always watch, captivated. Reality TV producers do not tend to hire or cast peacemakers because peacemakers do not increase ratings.

The animated movie *Ferdinand* is a great example of anger and persecution directed toward peacemakers. Ferdinand the bull is devoted to a way of peace, but the other bulls mock him, saying their choices in life are either the bullfighting ring or the chop house. Ferdinand asks, “What if those aren’t the only two choices?” The other bulls continue to mock him for his dedication to peacemaking because he refuses to live how they think bulls are supposed to live. Our world often calls peacemakers “sissies” or various other labels. This indignation is often directed at men in particular. Warrior men are glorified, not peacemaking men. In a culture that glorifies cutthroat and ruthless tactics, those who live toward and create peace are often outsiders.

Peacemaking is an important part of righteousness. As we discussed last week, this scripture does not exist in a vacuum. Peacemaking in verse 9 and righteousness in verse 10 are next to each other for a reason. Righteousness is doing the right things for the right reasons. Peacemaking is one way that righteousness is lived out in the world. The other Beatitudes in previous verses also show ways that righteousness is lived out. Living the Beatitudes sets one apart as peculiar because the priorities for a person living out this type of righteousness are so different from the world.

The Kingdom of Heaven Belongs to the Righteous. Last week we talked about the ways that these verses illustrate a different kingdom as a stark contrast to the kingdoms of this world. This idea is once again emphasized here. Those who are persecuted, beaten down, or bullied are often viewed as weak until they overcome and then they are survivors, conquerors, victors. But the kingdom of heaven is *for* the overlooked, the bullied, the knocked down even before they have survived or overcome or conquered. But it isn’t just anyone who is knocked down; it’s those who are persecuted because of righteousness because they are doing the right things in a world that pursues the wrong things. The kingdom of heaven is for the Ferdinands of this world, those who seek a third way, despite the criticism they receive from those around them. It’s for those who seek peace in a world saturated in the celebration of violence.

We are called to be peacemakers in this world. In a world that revels in conflict, we are to call for another way; not a way that avoids conflict, but one that walks into it in order that relationships may be restored and people might see a new way being forged.

How do you react when facing conflict; when you face persecution? Is your first response to clench your fists and fight back? Is your response to strike first and never let anyone see you in a weakened state? Are you the type who never wants to be seen as a victim, or are you the type to walk away from conflict? Do you turn your back to the conflict, even if it means leaving those who are being victimized to deal with things alone? Do you walk away thinking that this is none of your business? Or do you strive to bring peace to the situation? Do you try to negotiate and resolution to the tension? Do you try to reach a peaceful agreement between the bully and the victim? When faced with these situations what do you do? How do you approach these situations?

We are called to that work; we are called to be peacemakers but it is not a type of work that is often celebrated or applauded. Instead, this righteousness lived out in the form of peacemaking will very likely be ridiculed. It will not gain for us kingdoms in this world, but it will illustrate our citizenship in the kingdom of heaven. So we must ask ourselves, *In what kingdom do I want to live?* Do we want to live in our own kingdom of this world; or, do we want to be a part of the Kingdom of God? May we choose the hard path of peculiar righteousness that leads us to the heart of the kingdom of heaven.