

**“Is Peace Really Possible?”**  
**Luke 2:8-14; Mark 9:38-41; Matthew 5:9**  
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This morning we lit the candle of peace on the Advent wreath. We do so at a time our world is torn by violence and bloodshed. War is not a stranger to us as we had hoped it would be after the fall of Communism and the end of the Cold War. If anything, violence has escalated and the world is even a more dangerous place. Our jails and cemeteries are overcrowded.

I believe this breaks God’s heart. I am confident that He wants “peace on earth goodwill toward men” as the angels declared the night Jesus was born.

**Is peace really possible? If so, how will it be achieved?** What will it take for people to live in harmony and quit hurting and killing one another? This question has been debated since Cain killed his brother, Abel. This morning, I do not presume to have finally found the answer, but I would like to add some ideas to the discussion.

**I do not believe that peace will occur by asking God to destroy our enemies or praying that He will help us kill them.** If this were true, it would have already happened. We have killed a lot of enemies and prayed a lot of prayers and we still live in a dangerous world.

John Dominic Crossan, New Testament scholar, author, lecturer and co-chair of the Jesus Seminar, makes an interesting point about the contrast between John the Baptist and Jesus. He believes that John the Baptist expected an avenging God to appear on the scene that would destroy his enemies and bring peace through violence. Instead, John the Baptist’s enemies killed him.

According to Crossan, Jesus observed what happened to John the Baptist and learned from him how God works. Instead of preaching about what man wanted God to do with his enemies, he talked about turning enemies into friends through the pursuit of justice and love.

Repeatedly Jesus told his followers not to tell people who he was. Why? He knew they would impose their expectations upon him and demand that he lead a violent revolt against the oppressive authorities. For generations, the Jews had been looking for a military figure to be raised up by God to purge the world of evil. Jesus knew his generation was no different. He also knew that fulfilling their expectations would fail and end any hope of establishing peace on earth.  
**So what did he do?**

Everywhere he went, Jesus invited people to follow him and help him do his work. **What was that work?** His mission was building community by building bridges to people that would bring them together. His work connected resources with needs so that all people would have food to eat, a roof over their head, a job to support their family, a safe place for their kids to play and someone to care for them when they got sick. He boldly reminded leaders that their task was to create a world where all people are equal, encouraged to achieve their potential and given ample opportunities to do so. He truly believed that the pursuit of justice mingled with generous compassion would turn enemies into friends and accomplish what violence never could. It would also honor God and make it possible for people to have meaningful relationships with Him.

“What does the Lord require of you?” Micah asked. “To act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God” Micah 6:8. Jesus modeled what the prophet proclaimed because he believed it with all his heart. He believed it all the way to his death when he uttered those immortal words, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.”

No, I do not believe that peace will occur by killing our enemies or asking God to destroy them. **Peace will come when God’s people become the presence of Christ in a broken world, not only sharing their faith but also pursuing justice for all people, making a place at the table for everyone.**

When we want for **all** children what we want for our own, peace will prevail. Peace will flourish where people work to provide for everyone pure drinking water, clean air, nutritious food, warm beds, adequate clothing, quality education, medical attention, good paying jobs and even fair ways of settling disputes. It is the absence of these basic elements needed to sustain life that leads to jealousy and violence.

Only when we become “God in the flesh” as Jesus did and tackle these crucial challenges will peace be realized in our war-torn world. Make no mistake. This is hard work and will require a strong resolve, tenacity, passion, patience and sacrifice. It will demand good listening skills, inviting others’ perspectives. It will require revisiting our priorities and methodologies to identify mistakes and make necessary changes. It will require elevating the conversation from slanderous slogans, worn-out clichés and 30 second sound bites to honest, meaningful, thought-provoking dialogue.

**I’ll tell you what else it will require. It will demand that we cooperate with others that have the same lofty goals.** This challenge cannot be accomplished on our own or working only with people that like us or are like us. It will require that we partner with all people that share this dream, regardless of their background or beliefs.

Last weekend, Rick Warren and the Saddleback Church in southern California hosted a two day summit on the global AIDS crisis in an effort to “serve the hurting like Jesus did.” Over sixty speakers were invited from a variety of countries, political and theological viewpoints. Days before the conference, some leaders in the evangelical movement voiced their opposition and announced they would not attend. They refused to be on the platform with those with whom they disagreed on moral issues, referring to some of the speakers as “the enemy.” Warren responded with this statement.

“Our goal has been to put people together who normally won’t even speak to each other. We do not expect all participants in the summit discussion to agree with each other. However, the HIV/AIDS pandemic cannot be fought by evangelicals or any group alone.”

Isn’t this what Jesus tried to teach his disciples? In one of our texts today, Mark shares a time when Jesus’ disciples came to him and told him they rebuked a man who was healing people because he was not one of them, not following them. You might have expected Jesus to commend them for their intolerance and to have said, “If anyone doesn’t affirm our creed or follow our methods, then you should berate them and tell them to stop.” Jesus did not do this, however. Instead, he said that anyone that was inspired and motivated by him to help others was helping him. Don’t discourage him. Recognize his Christ-like spirit and encourage him!

According to Mark, Jesus’ followers were to welcome honest cooperation even in unexpected places by irregular means. They had to be willing to relinquish their lust for control and overcome their inability to see what is truly important, helping people. Mark reminded his readers that God fulfills Himself and achieves His will in many ways and no disciple should ever be so blind or arrogant as to think that God’s actions were limited to the forms with which they were familiar. To do so would be an attempt to hold God hostage.

I like the way Phillip Yancey describes God’s movement among us. He sees God’s work like a flowing stream, from trickle to creek to river, more inclusive as it travels rather than restrictive. Far be it from us to keep it from expanding.

I have a good friend that often says, “I am for anyone that is trying to build a better world.” This generous man will partner with anyone that is using his or her time, talents, resources, influence and opportunities to make the world better. He has partnered with many people, some quite different from him, and has made a difference in the lives of so many.

I have studied Matthew 5:9 on many occasions and find no adjectives connected to the noun, peacemakers. Jesus did not say, “Blessed are the Jewish or Gentile peacemakers, black or white peacemakers, Republican or Democratic peacemakers, even Christian peacemakers.” There is no qualifier. “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will become the children of God.” Surely we see how much God values peace and how inclusive this invitation is.

This fall, I was listening to a radio call-in show. The host and guest were criticizing another religion for promoting violence and ridiculing those that believed it. They blatantly supported their assumptions by quoting select passages from a holy book.

A person that was a proponent of this religion called in and said he did not share their interpretation of the texts and said that his religion, like Christianity, called for justice, mercy and peace. I was so in hopes that the host would say, "I am glad to hear you say this. How can we help you get your message out to others? How can you help us get our message out to your friends? Let's find ways to work together."

Instead, they cut his microphone off and picked up where they left off. They began quoting texts from his bible that called for violence, criticizing the caller for being naive and ignorant.

How sad I thought. No wonder our world is torn apart by violence and bloodshed. How we need to learn the lesson Jesus taught the disciples about partnering with anyone that is trying to make the world better.

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the children of God." Who were the peacemakers in this radio conversation?

**Are you a peacemaker? Will you make the decision today to be one?** Our world is crying out for peacemakers. It desperately needs people that will honest, fair, trustworthy, compassionate and sensitive to the needs of all people. It needs people that will join hearts and hands with all that share this dream. Will you be one?