

The Call of Peace

June 10, In the Year of Our LORD, 2007

Gates Presbyterian Church

The Rev. Ralph S. English, Pastor

Matthew 5:1-16

Psalm 122

(Jeremiah 6:13-19)

In the words of our opening hymn, “Make me a channel of (God’s) peace.” As we just sang: “I’ve got peace like a river in my soul.” As invited in the 122nd Psalm of David: “Peace be within you.” As in the reading from the Good News according to Matthew: “Blessed are the peacemakers.” There is our closing hymn that reminds us: “let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” And then there are the words as composed by our younger disciples that grace the bulletin’s cover: “Peace makes the world go around,” “We need peace,” and perhaps a summary in the three words, “Peace is life.”

All of us want peace. First and foremost – and not surprisingly, we want our own lives to be as peaceful as possible. Peace amongst those close to us and in our own communities eventually gives way to the *claim* that we want peace for all peoples of the world. On the face of it, the call of peace is as simple as expressed in that beautiful anthem, “We will sing a simple song of peace. Dona nobis, dona nobis pacem. Grant us peace, grant us peace.” God’s call of peace is an embrace of God’s ways and God’s visions for our lives. ... As led by Debbie White, our younger disciples reminded us in enthusiastic song how we might be a people of peace. It *really should* be that simple.

Humans make anything and everything far from simple! How often we hear that the absence peace in our lives is a problem caused by “others.” Just think of generations of people in Northern Ireland weaned on hatred of the “others.” There was a time when it all it took to enrage a Northern Irish Protestant was to wave the color green as that was the color for the Catholics. Likewise, simply waving orange incited the anger and wrath of Catholics as orange was the color of Protestants! How ironic that people have, thankfully, forgotten that hatred when, for example, any Catholic University plays Syracuse in sporting events. The *original* “Orangemen” were a group of Protestants who in 1795 came together to ensure that all of Ireland would not fall into the hands of those blankety-blank Catholics. No one at Syracuse University associates the “Orange” with that movement, but for some, the words “Green vs. Orange,” is enough to boil the blood!

Hatred, ... the mutual hatred of Sunni and Shi’ite (and this past week different groups among the Sunni!), of the peoples and tribes in the Darfur, ... the vast majority of people in the Gaza Strip born after 1967 who have known nothing but hatred of Israel whom they blame for every ill of their society, even those circumstances that have nothing to do with Israeli action. In their heart of hearts, most Palestinian leaders know that the military leaders of Egypt, Syria and Jordan are the ones who “did them wrong,” who started a war that ended in a major and humiliating loss for the Arab powers, and that Israel had no intention of occupying the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights or the Sinai until pushed to the brink of elimination. In strife between Arab nations and Israel, the Palestinians are the ones who suffered the most.

One ongoing problem is that leaders of nations all over the world, while speaking of peace, are ignoring the real issues that if confronted might mitigate actually the ways of strife and war. Instead of blaming “others” for all of their problems – just as in the TV show, “Lost,” where the problem is most always put on the “others,” perhaps, one day, with impetus and energy from the next generation of Christ’s disciples, leaders will actually embrace God’s wisdom and recognize that there will be no peace until we name, face, and conquer issues like poverty, injustice, hunger, disease, religious and ethnic bigotry – all of which are at the true root of what ails human society.

How can we claim to be a people of peace and justice, when celebrities are treated differently than everyday people of our communities? The overblown brouhaha over Paris Hilton, as much as the circus became in and itself part of the story, if nothing else, tells us that people are treated differently, for better or worse, when they are faces in the news, faces that grace magazine covers. The question is: what message does it send to people of our nation and those around the world? What does it say about what we consider important, of such vital significance that it deserves to be the lead story on the news?

How can we claim to be a people of peace, people who hear God’s call to be peacemakers, when we pollute the land, deplete natural resources, put our trust in more weaponry and “smart weapons” – all of which only goes to show that we as a human race are *anything* but smart?

How can we claim to be a people of peace when music like “gangsta rap” promotes violent behavior? (I woke this morning to find a three page special report at the end of the first section of the Democrat and Chronicle entitled “Raunchy Rap Still Pollutes Music!”) How can we claim to be a people who hear God’s call of peace when hand-held video games romanticize battles, war and bloodletting? Just yesterday, the Church of England filed a protest because a “new and popular PlayStation 3 game, ‘Resistance: Fall of Man,’ shows a virtual shootout between rival gunmen with hundreds of people killed inside the cathedral” in Manchester, England. “Church officials described Sony’s alleged use of the building as ‘sick’ and sacrilegious.” Sony’s response was that the game does not include a photograph of the cathedral, that it is only a video game and that it is, after all, just *entertainment!* I wonder how many video-game nurtured youth have joined the military thinking they will be equipped with the sophisticated weaponry they have used during their games and “entertainment” only to discover that a lost limb or a killed buddy is lost forever, that there is no “restart” button in the “game” of war!

How can we claim to be a people of peace when we are only interested in meeting our own selfish needs – often at the expense of others? There is nothing wrong with trying to “get ahead” in life, in making a better life for oneself and ones loved ones, but when “getting ahead” means putting someone else aside or “behind,” then that stands in opposition to the ways of peace and grace.

The peace of God calls us – from across all that divides us. The peace of God calls us – and demands personal responsibility in all of those instances we act in ways that are anything but peaceable, when we refrain from *peacemaking*, which means purposeful, tactile, active ways of seeking, making, instilling peace. Peace does not come about by inaction. Peacemaking does not come from sitting on ones hands and doing nothing. Peace requires hard work, confronting the powers and principalities that stand in the way of peace, and working to find ways of accord instead of discord, mutual agreement by consensus instead of polarized stances, calm instead of

turmoil, and a way that makes sure that when we seek peace, it isn't just peace for ourselves, but is, indeed, something we invite and embrace as deserving by all on this globe. As Elder Kim Bodhorn put it in her meditation in the worship bulletin – “spread joy and peace will appear. Give hope for the children near and far.” Are we not excited today by the energy, vim and vigor of our younger disciples who have led us in worship, today? Are we not encouraged by the faith of this generation? They are spreading God's joy – and in doing so, invite peace into our midst. However, is the unfortunate corollary not “squelch joy and hope and peace will remain elusive?”

In Jeremiah's 6th Chapter, verses 13 through 19, there are words of challenge and condemnation. They were spoken to the people of Jerusalem long ago, when it fell to the prophet Jeremiah to tell his own people that God was going to use the armies of Babylon to punish them for their sins. However, listen to how timely the warnings might be for people on this globe who are so arrogant as to think they can shun the visions and dreams of God – and in particular the call of peace!

"From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them," says the LORD. This is what the LORD says: "Stand at the crossroads and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it, and you will find rest for your souls. But you said, 'We will not walk in it.' I appointed watchmen over you and said, 'Listen to the sound of the trumpet!' But you said, 'We will not listen.' Therefore hear, O nations; observe, O witnesses, what will happen to them. Hear, O earth: I am bringing disaster on this people, the fruit of their schemes, because they have not listened to my words and have rejected my law."

As Christians, those redeemed by and through Christ, we embrace God's ways and God's calls to and of wisdom and peace. The call of peace is real. It is active, visceral and touches every part of the human psyche and soul. As in our reading from the Gospel of Matthew that questions the value of salt that has lost its taste, do we not hear the challenge to make sure we are the “salt,” that brings the flavor and taste of joy and peace to all of God's people? Again, from that 5th Chapter of Matthew, do we not hear the call to be a “light to the world,” a beacon from people who don't just hear the call to peace – but pursue it?

Peace is one of the calls of our God. It requires a response. It demands that the call of and for peace be more than just words to placate, pronouncements that put all of the blame for strife on others. The call of peace requires that all of us, from the youngest to the oldest, embrace the theme of peace and work for peace with our hearts and souls and minds and strength. Then, to quote Kim Bodhorn again, “Joy will spread” and “Peace will appear.”

May it someday be so!

Amen.