

Seeking Peace
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Romans 12:9-21 (CEB)

Love should be shown without pretending. Hate evil, and hold on to what is good. Love each other like the members of your family. Be the best at showing honor to each other. Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic—be on fire in the Spirit as you serve the Lord! Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer. Contribute to the needs of God's people, and welcome strangers into your home. Bless people who harass you—bless and don't curse them. Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good.

If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people. Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath. It is written, Revenge belongs to me; I will pay it back, says the Lord. Instead, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. By doing this, you will pile burning coals of fire upon his head. Don't be defeated by evil, but defeat evil with good.

Greetings from Sun City Arizona, where it is HOT --- even at 7 am it is almost 90 degrees

I am out on the back porch of my parents' home ---

I arrived Thursday morning so that I could accompany them to some doctor appointments and to celebrate their 65th wedding anniversary which was Friday.

While I was driving my parents to an appointment, we drove past a church that had an electronic sign with a simple message: **Pray for Peace**

Pray for peace

Peace?

One word and yet so many different images flood one's mind.

For some **peace** brings pictures of calm and serenity.

As the old Eagle's song says: "I've got a peaceful and easy feeling"

For others **peace** requires the hard work of justice.

Paul tells us: "If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people."

And to that I want to say to Paul --- COME ON, you have got to be kidding me.
Do you expect me to live at peace with the officer who murdered George Floyd?
Or the rioter who destroyed property?

"If possible, to the best of your ability, live at peace with all people."

What then is peace?

And maybe most pressing question is --- what is the peace that Jesus speaks of --- and
Paul desires us to live by?

Last February, when Mary and I preached on the Beatitudes --- Jesus central tenets as found in
Matthew, I spoke about "The Way of Peace"

The basic premise of my sermon was that we are to seek peace ---
reconciliation rather than retribution ---
I suggest that is the message of Jesus and the bible.

I believe that is true --- but the challenge is HOW
How do we live a Christ filled life of peace?

To begin, we need to go back to what Jesus actually said about peace --- and not what we
think Jesus said.

Do you recall what Jesus said?

"Blessed are the peace lovers for they shall be called righteous" is often what we want to think
Jesus said --- because who doesn't love peace?

I especially love it when I can define what kind of peace I am talking about.

Much like the Roman's did with the Pax Romana (the peace of Rome)

Peace for the Romans but not peace for anyone else

In Matthew's Gospel what Jesus is recorded as saying is --- not blessed are the peace lovers or
even the peacekeepers --- but rather:

"Blessed are the peacemakers"

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Jesus is calling for us to be **ACTIVE** peacemakers --- not simply lovers of peace.

And when we pursue peacemaking --- when we live as peacemakers --- Jesus says that we are
children of God

But the problem is --- most of us prefer being a peacekeeper to a peacemaker

So let me try and give you a few distinguishing marks between being a peacekeeper and a
peacemaker.

And I will be honest --- my natural inclination is toward peacekeeping, as I am willing to guess are many of you

A few characteristics of a peacekeeper

- Peacekeepers do not want to be the cause of discomfort. They tend to view any pain that they initiate as harmful so they will often limit their response to injustice because of this desire not to cause discomfort.
- Peacekeepers tend to be rather passive in their approach to conflict. They often keep their issues to themselves in hopes that it will just go away. They tend to let things build up rather than to deal with every little thing that bothers them or offends them.
- Peacekeepers often avoid dealing with people who are different from themselves to limit potential conflict.
- Peacekeepers often express their attitude in very subtle ways, yet it can have major impact in how they deal with the world around them

Peacemakers also tend to exhibit some characteristics

- Peacemakers understand that "peace" must sometimes be disrupted in order to allow for just peace to be created.
- Peacemakers seek non-violent ways to demonstrate against the injustices that they perceive exist
 Martin Luther King certainly exemplifies this method in our modern history
 So too did Colin Kaepernick when he took a knee
 (Often we are uncomfortable with peacemakers attempts to demonstrate against injustices)
- Peacemakers seem to understand that situations often have to become more challenging before they can get better --- and they are willing to persist.
- Peacemakers take the initiative to create spaces for brave conversations. They understand that real engagement is nothing short of messy.
- Peacemakers are active about building an environment for peace to be possible. No task, no conversation, and no person is too small in the mind of a peacemaker. They speak up for themselves and allow safe space for others to join the conversation and to share their story.
- They don't pretend to have all the answers, but are willing to create space for the answers to be found

The problem with being a peacemaker is that it is hard work --- and there is often a price to be paid.

Think again of Martin Luther King or Colin Kaepernick

Making peace is not the same as avoiding conflicts.

Making peace requires moving into conflicts,
trying to resolve them,
to uncover their causes,
to restore relationships,
to heal the wounds,
to seek a just peace.

Peacemaking is quite simply conflict resolution.

Peacemaking is not conflict avoidance ---
conflict amongst humans seems inevitable

Are we willing to try to resolve those conflicts when they inevitably happen?

Do we run to our side and throw rocks or even insults at each other?
Or do we seek to find resolution and deal with the hard questions.

Jim Wallis writes:

We all love peace, and when there's a lack of peace we tend to blame other people rather than ourselves. Peacekeeping, on the other hand, sounds good. But keeping the peace under an oppressive status quo and accepting things as they are isn't truly peace. What Jesus is calling us to is an active process of solving conflicts without violence and thereby making peace.

Peacemakers strive to create peace and attempt to reconcile things and people that are at odds with one another and to help overcome injustices.

Peacekeepers, on the other hand, strive to keep peace at all costs.

Proverbs 10:10 (NLT), says:

"People who wink at wrong cause trouble, but a bold reproof promotes peace."

Peacekeepers, by failing to acknowledging injustices or wrongdoings in an effort to maintain peace, are actually causing greater harm.

Pick any contentious issue in the history of our county --- Civil Rights, Slavery, Women and the right to vote and you can see how peacekeepers and peacemakers approached the problem differently.

I don't want to stir up trouble so I will pick the safer one --- Woman's Suffrage --- which celebrated the 100th anniversary of the passage of the 19th amendment just last week.

Peacekeepers tried to keep women from voting because they did not want to stir the pot. They encouraged women to stay home and stay quiet and to trust the men to take care of things.

But women like Susan B Anthony, and Dorothy Day marched, protested and were jailed as they tried to eliminate the injustice of woman being denied the right to vote.

Peacemaking is never simply a political issue --- it is always a moral and ethical issue.

I have offered these tools before --- but I think they are required for peacemaking and are worth being reminded of

LISTEN

Listen to the hurts around you.
Seek to understand why people are acting out
Be proactive in recognizing injustice

LEARN

Create a space within your circle and at Meridian Street for others to share what they really feel without fear of backlash. It's a messy process but ultimately, it allows for real engagement and purpose to happen.
Seek to understand the WHY
Engage people with who are different in race, age, religion, sexual orientation, etc.
We often avoid people who are different from us in order to keep peace that might be disrupted if we engage others who may view the world differently. Whether it is race relations in America or speaking with your Muslim or LGBTQI neighbor, it is important to make peace with each other, not holding onto a false sense of peace that might actually be disguised prejudice, narrow-mindedness, fear or bigotry.

ACT

Find ways that you can participate in making change
And find the perseverance to not give up

Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, the pastor of Riverside Church in New York City for many years told a story that we need to hear:

On the slope of Long's Peak in Colorado lies the ruin of a gigantic tree. Naturalists tell us that it stood for some 400 years. It was a seedling when Columbus landed at San Salvador, and half-grown when the pilgrims settled at Plymouth.

During the course of its long life, it was struck by lightning fourteen times and the innumerable avalanches and storms of four centuries thundered past it. It survived them all. In the end, however, an army of beetles attacked the tree and leveled it to the ground. The insects ate their way through the bark and gradually destroyed the inner strength of the tree by their tiny but incessant attacks. A forest giant which age had not withered, nor lightning blasted, nor storms subdued, fell at last before beetles so small

that a man could crush them between his forefinger and his thumb.

To be a peacemaker we must find the small destructive things that are destroying our society

It takes hard work to stand up against the small things that seem to be destroying us.

And it takes even harder work to look at ourselves and see where we are ignoring the injustices that do not damage our own lives but are slowly eating away at our brothers and sisters.

Christianity is in crisis --- because we have not done the hard work of peacemaking.

It is time we stop just praying for peace

And instead --- start to doing the hard and important work of making God's peace

Loving God, help us to realize that true peacemaking can only become a reality in our world today if it is first a matter in our hearts.

We ask for the gifts of civility and charity so that we can treat others with respect and love.

We ask for the gifts of faith and hope to strengthen our spirits by placing our trust in You rather than ourselves.

We ask for the gifts of courage and compassion that will move us into action to help those in need in the United States as well as throughout the world.

We ask for the gifts of humility and kindness so that we may put the needs and interests of others ahead of our own.

We ask for the gifts of patience and perseverance to endure the long struggle for justice.

We ask for all of this through Christ our Lord. Amen.