

FPCU**October 25, 2026
Peacemakers****Rev. Dr. Tina Blair**

Text: Matthew 5:9

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

Many of you know that my father worked for the U.S. government and, as a result, we lived in New Delhi, India, for 3 years. I was there from age 9 to 12. Every October 2 is a national holiday for Mahatma Gandhi’s birthday – Gandhi, the great liberator of India through non-violence. On a side note, that is my sister’s birthday also – and being very young, she thought that the holiday was for her! No school that day!

Gandhi has become the model, the symbol, of non-violence and peacemaking. Since my days in India, I have been fascinated by him and have done some studying of his life. He was not a perfect man and we would not agree with some of his ideas and actions, but I have learned a lot from him. He was a lawyer, studying and then living in England and South Africa before returning to India and leading the movement to free India from British colonial rule, which had impoverished India while enriching the British Empire. When living in India, I learned that his favorite hymn was “Abide with Me,” which is played every year on the steps of the red sandstone Parliament building to bring a close to a week of celebrating Indian independence. Although not a Christian, his favorite verses from our Bible were the Beatitudes in Matthew’s Gospel.

At the heart of Gandhi’s work was his belief in sacrificing everything – job, home, family and even one’s life – for the work of truth and peace. Having experienced the oppressive racial discrimination laws of So. Africa and the harsh colonial restrictions of British India, he worked for change, but refused to fight with violence or to hate the other person. He respected his adversaries as fully human and worked for acceptable compromises and peaceful resolutions. For him, peace was not a passive thing, it was action to bring about just resolutions.

This was an important insight for me. In English, peace sounds passive, don’t you think? I remember that in the 1970s, Newsweek (or Time) magazine stated that for the CIA and other government agencies the definition of peace was “a lack of military action.” And I thought, “NO! that is not all it is!” Gandhi’s understanding of peace as active, self-sacrificial, respectful justice, was helpful to me. And – it ties in with what the Bible says.

At the heart of the Old Testament's description of our God is that of God's peace, God's *shalom*. *Shalom* means so much more than a simple understanding of peace as a lack of something. *Shalom* implies God's Word at work, God's song spreading and acting – a song of safety, of plenty, of good work, of just treatment, a song of God's love. The Psalms sing of God's peace and express the people's longing for this true peace. You heard some of these verses in today's Call to Worship – each line came from a different Psalm.

*“ Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet; righteousness and **peace** will kiss each other.” (Psalm 85:10-11)*

*“Only God gives inward **peace**, and I depend on him.” (Psalm 62:5)*

*“May the Lord bless his people with **peace** and happiness and let them celebrate.” (Psalm 64:10)*

The prophets describe the disasters of the day, but also faithfully predict future days filled with God's *shalom*, God's peace:

*“Then justice will dwell in the wilderness and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. ¹⁷ The effect of righteousness will be **peace**, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever.” (Isaiah 32:16-17)*

*“The Lord said to his people, ‘Stand at the crossroads and look. Ask for the ancient paths and where the best road is. Walk in it, and you will live in **peace**.’ But they said, “No, we will not!” (Jeremiah 6:16)*

The prophets help us to understand in what ways peacemaking is active rather than passive. Peacemaking involves righteousness, justice, forgiveness and love. This peace depends on trusting our Lord God.

Jesus walked in the footsteps of the prophets. We often say that Jesus is priest, prophet and king – but do we forget the prophet role, I wonder? He based his ministry firmly in the Hebrew Scriptures and God's law. In fact, he makes this clear shortly after proclaiming the Beatitudes. He says:

¹⁷ Don't suppose I came to do away with the Law and the Prophets. I did not come to do away with them, but to give them their full meaning. ¹⁸ Heaven and earth may disappear. But I promise you not even a period or comma will ever disappear from the Law. Everything written in it must happen.” (Mt. 5:16-17; Common English Version)

Jesus lived and spoke as a prophet, calling out present-day abuses of the law, teaching truth, calling for repentance and faith in the one Holy and Loving God, travelling all over, including to Gentile lands, to spread God's Word to the people.

From him, and then from his apostle, Paul, we learn to think about peacemaking in 2 basic ways: outer action of righteousness, justice and mercy; inner action of trust, stillness and faithfulness. Peace requires both. For us to join Jesus as peacemakers, we must work on both aspects, outer and inner.

Jesus' teachings and his actions give us clues to the work of the outer aspect: bringing peace to our communities and the world. Our Jewish sisters and brothers call this "tikkam olam," the healing of the world. I find this phrase so helpful – that's what Jesus was doing, that's what Jesus calls us to do: the work of healing our world.

What did he teach? The Beatitudes are the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount from which we learn so many fundamentals about what it means to follow him. He asks us especially to be agents of reconciliation – we are not even to go worship God until we have reconciled with our brother or sister (Mt. 5:21ff). We are to forgive in order to be forgiven. (6:9ff). He teaches in his parables that we are to help others be reconciled to each, forgiving each other. We are to turn the other cheek and even love our enemy! (Mt. 5:38-47). And most of all we are to pray as he teaches in Matthew 6 (in which his prayer, the Lord's Prayer, is included).

What does he show us through his actions? He reconciles the outcasts to society by helping them, healing them, eating with them, rich and poor, male and female, Jew or Roman Gentile – he reaches out to all. He praises the poor widow and criticizes the powerful leaders who are all show but no substance. He overturns the tables of the moneychangers in the Temple, angered by their greed and injustice, sully the house of worship of his Father. He lives the life of the ordinary person, walking the dusty road in sandals, validating the ordinary life of ordinary people.

Don't you think that we must do the same, if we are to be faithful to his call to us? Maybe the first thing we learn as we ponder these lessons is that to be a peacemaker takes work. It takes conscious decision-making to act like Jesus, step-by-step throughout our lives. It takes all of our lives to improve, to imbed peacemaking in our souls. Do we remember to be reconciled with someone we don't get along with? Not easy. What about putting ourselves in the uncomfortable position of listening to and caring for those who are not loved by society? Even harder! Do we remember to pray for and love our enemies? Harder still!

Ah – but Jesus is with us as Holy Spirit. Jesus empowers us, gives patience, listening ears, the energy to help and to give. He unites us with each other so that we work together – every talent supporting other talents. You have experienced this! So where is Jesus calling us as a congregation to be peacemakers in the future? Our

communities and our nation are in turmoil, citizen against citizen. The fear of the future is widespread, and the current realities seem to get worse each day. The Harvard Poll of young voters, aged 18-29, Republicans, Democrats and Independents, came out this week (find it online). Thousands were polled. Only 9% of young voters think that this nation is headed in the right direction, and only ¼ have hope in our future. 2/3 are worried about corruption and the power of large corporations and the concentration of wealth. And 2/3 fear for their jobs due to AI. That is a lot of fear and a huge loss of hope for our young adults!

Meanwhile we all know that costs of living, especially food and gas and housing, have skyrocketed, and more people live on the edge of poverty. As a church, we already have some ministries that work to help: feeding people, nurturing youth. I know that as we move into the new year, we will explore other ways that we could bring concrete help and compassion, love in action, reconciliation and peace into our world. Jesus does not ask for big gestures of power – he invites us to plant seeds, to bring a little yeast, to look for one pearl. He supports us as we sit at table with others and empowers us when we speak truth to power.

In order to be in touch with Jesus and to know that his Spirit is with us, we need to cultivate inner peace as well. As you know, this means spending time with our Triune God. That's what prayer is – time of mind and heart with our Creator, our Savior, our Comforter. Prayer that shapes us into peacemakers requires time – time to be honest and share ourselves openly with our God; time to evaluate our actions in God's light; time to listen in silence; time to speak and sing in praise. We have decades in our lives where we don't have enough time, it seems – but whatever we give, God returns a hundredfold as support and empowerment and peace. One of the advantages of age and retirement is that we now have more time – let's take advantage of that! Find ways to build in habits that give you time with God in whatever ways work for you. For example, memorize some favorite verses from the Psalms or a favorite phrase. Use them to center you and start your prayer time: "Bless the Lord, O my soul!" "The Lord you are my shepherd," and so forth.

When I do this, I remember that Jesus, the Light of the World, is with me. I talk to him; I picture his light with me. I ask help to forgive others – and myself. I remember that he has a healing touch, a forgiving hand, and a joy about his creation. If I take this time, I am given the gift of his peace which passes all understanding.

Inner peace empowers the actions of outer peace; outer peace fuels the contact with God by meeting Jesus in the stranger and in our work, deepening thereby our inner peace. As I pray quietly at home, or as I head out to ministry work, I often remind

myself of Christ's presence by saying this Celtic prayer, picturing it in my mind and heart:

The light of Christ above me;
The light of Christ below me;
The light of Christ behind me;
The light of Christ before me;
The light of Christ beside me;
The light of Christ within me;
The light of Christ to give me peace.

Another version can be (I play with this prayer):
The light of Christ behind me, having protected me.
The light of Christ before me, to guide me.
The light of Christ beside me, to hold my hand.
The light of Christ within me, to share with others.

Close your eyes, and pray the first, simple prayer with me; picture Jesus with you: I will say a line and you then repeat it.
Amen.