

## **CIC 8/24/25: Blessed are the Peacemakers**

### **Matthew 5:9**

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

I want us to concentrate on the word peacemaker; it indicates that peace is something that is actively made. Even in the Greek, same as the English, the word used here, for peace makers ***eirēnopoios***, is a combination of a noun for peace, ***eirēnē*** and a verb for making or doing, ***poieō***.

If peace is something that is actively made or done, that means that it is not inherent, it is not necessarily the status quo. That means conflict is actually more normal than peace.

In his letter to the Galatian church, Paul wrote:

### **Galatians 5:19-21**

**19** The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; **20** idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions **21** and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Our inclination isn't towards peace. Our sinful inclination is towards pleasing ourselves, it's towards being impulsive, and oftentimes being impulsive means the feelings and actions Paul identifies. Hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, envy. All of these feelings and actions are antithetical to peace.

I want us all to think, when's the last time I hated someone.

Thinking of discord, when's the last time something I said made a situation worse for my friends, my family, my workplace, my classroom.

When's the last time I was jealous of someone else, when I envied what they have.

Is there a time recently when I felt rage, unreasonable anger about something or someone.

Thinking about selfish ambition, have you made a choice that benefits yourself but disadvantages others,

and for dissensions and factions, when's the last time you excluded others or made someone feel alone or isolated. Or when you choose to exclude or isolate yourself.

Odds are all of us can think of at least one, if not multiple times when we've done one of the above recently.

All of this points to the reality that

**Peace is not inherent; it must be actively made.**

With that conclusion in mind, a logical question to ask is how do we actually make peace?

One big issue we come across is often-times we as people tend to interpret peacemaking as conflict avoidance. That is a mistake.

Peace-making and conflict avoidance might seem similar, but the two are different

**We are meant to be peacemakers, not conflict-avoiders.**

Peace making is making peace where it is absent, where there is conflict and tension. It requires willingness to engage with conflict, which is the opposite of conflict avoidance.

If we are conflict avoiders and not peacemakers, there are some really destructive dynamics that are likely to emerge.

When you think about it, Conflict avoidance is selfish at heart. It is concerned with self-preservation, specifically with the sense of our short-term personal well-being. It is driven by fear, fear of feeling uncomfortable and insecure, fear of the unknown consequences of addressing conflict. Fear that someone will react poorly to you bringing up a topic. Fear that your reputation in others' eyes could be diminished.

I understand the issue of fear, I've felt that fear many times, and unfortunately, I've let it affect my actions on many occasions.

We need to be concerned with how much fear and what kind of fear determines our actions. Ultimately God is the one we should be most afraid of, not circumstances or people. He is the most powerful being in the universe, not us.

This wisdom goes back a long way.

### **Proverbs 29:25**

**Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD is kept safe.**

And then Jesus shares similar wisdom in the New Testament when he sends out the 12 disciples to minister to others.

### **Matthew 10:28**

**<sup>28</sup> Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.**

From personal experience I've never been glad to remember how I chose to act out of fear of others versus fear of God.

Usually, my fear is the fear of someone deciding they don't want to be friends anymore or not follow God anymore depending on what I choose to say to them. But the reality is, all of the people that I didn't have a difficult conversation with years ago aren't close friends or following God now anyway. So, the worst that likely would have happened actually did happen.

When we avoid conflicts we aren't doing anything to resolve them. Once again, making peace where there is conflict requires action. And so, if our peace making is inactive, then we're not doing anything to resolve conflicts. Therefore, we aren't doing anything to stop conflicts from growing. We aren't doing anything to stop conflicts from negatively affecting others. Thus, not only are we not making peace, we're helping conflict grow and allowing others to suffer as a consequence.

**Deferring consequences and suffering from yourself onto others is the opposite of the heart of Christ.**

### **Matthew 16:21-25**

<sup>21</sup> From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.<sup>22</sup> Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"<sup>23</sup> Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it.

Jesus is telling his disciples about what is going to happen to him. And Peter does not like hearing that Jesus is going to die, he rebukes that idea. And it is here that Jesus says get behind me Satan. When Peter tempts Jesus with the idea of preserving himself instead of sacrificing himself. And Jesus goes on to say that self-preservation is not a Godly concern, but a

human one, and in fact a requirement of following Jesus is self-denial. Whoever wants to follow him must deny themselves.

So, going back to peace making and conflict aversion, we have to realize that self-preservation, and deferring suffering from ourselves to others are not Godly decisions to make.

How do we actually make peace in the midst of tension, in the midst of conflict, in the midst of our brokenness?

Jesus actually talked about how to do this.

In the same sermon on the mount as the beatitudes, Jesus said.

### **Matthew 5:38-41**

**38** “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ **39** But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. **40** And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. **41** If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles.

Oftentimes, these verses get interpreted as reason to let wrongdoing slide. That’s not the case. Jesus’ responses in each of these hypothetical scenarios don’t ignore, affirm, or excuse the wrongdoing done. There is a response recommended by Jesus. But that response is not a response in kind, it doesn’t repay wrong with wrong, it doesn’t seek to get revenge.

### **Don’t respond to conflict with escalation, but with de-escalation.**

This is not conflict avoidance, this is conflict engagement and de-escalation. The wrongdoing is directly confronted in a way that is loving but also grabs the attention of the wrongdoer. Each response would meet the wrong with undeserved love, and would essentially hold up a mirror to the wrongdoer to make sure they see they are the one who is wronging someone else.

In Matthew 18, Jesus also said

### **Matthew 18:15-17**

<sup>15</sup> “If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. <sup>16</sup> But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’<sup>17</sup> If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector.

When we witness our fellow Christians sin or commit wrongdoing, Jesus directs us to address it, not leave it unaddressed. This is not a violent response, Jesus has an order to follow, and the order emphasizes addressing sin first one-on-one and then in a small group context. The approach of Jesus, while direct, offers the brother or sister in the wrong, dignity and privacy when a correction is directed towards them, and only recommends making the wrong-doing public when they repeatedly refuse to receive that correction. The point is to address, not to insult or shame. Once again,

**Wrong is not to be ignored or repaid with wrong, but addressed with love.**

There’s a scripture I want to end on

### **Galatians 5:22-26**

<sup>22</sup> But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup> Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. <sup>25</sup> Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. <sup>26</sup> Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Some of you might recognize this is the continuation and flip side of the verses we first began with.

But just as our flesh is so often inclined towards hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions <sup>21</sup> and envy,

It is possible for us to keep in step with the spirit instead, and to choose love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness and self-control

God has not left us helpless in dealing with the flesh, our selfishness, and the conflict, tension they breed. If we follow Jesus, we have access to the Holy Spirit. And the Holy Spirit empowers us, if we so choose, to love, to practice joy and peace, to be forbearing, to be kind, to be good, to be faithful, gentle, self-controlled. We are not fated to be slaves to our sinful nature, we don't have to be conflict and chaos bound, we can choose to keep in step with the Spirit.

**With the help of the Holy Spirit, the choice to be peacemakers is within our grasp.**

We can choose actions based on love, not based on hate.

We can seek joy, instead of resigning ourselves to cynicism.

We can practice peace instead of contributing to chaos.

We can be forbearing instead of impatient

We can choose to be kind instead of mean spirited,

We can choose what is good and noble over what is evil,

We can be faithful instead of deceitful or fickle

We can choose to be gentle instead of spiteful

We can choose self-control over our impulses

We can choose! We can be peacemakers, The Spirit gives us that power.

Pray over the congregation

