

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

I wonder how you feel about conflict?

When people in your family, or your office fall out, how do you feel?

Or what about in church. When members of a congregation fall out, or you sense someone is annoyed about something, what do you do? What if it's you they are annoyed with? How do you feel?

Most of us don't like conflict very much. Our first response is often to try to avoid it, run from it, or ignore it and hope it will go away.

Not long after I started here I went on a Conflict Transformation Course, and one of the most important things I learned on that course was NOT to run away from conflict, but actually to move towards it.

And I think there is something of that in this week's Beatitude: blessed are the peacemakers.

Peacemakers, surely, are people who intentionally try to make peace. People who try to restore relationships. People who see brokenness and division and hate it.

People who long to see an end to conflict, who long for healing and reconciliation so much that they choose to do something to try to make it happen.

Which of course, is exactly what Jesus did. That's why he came from heaven to earth – to reconcile sinful humanity to a holy God. That's why the angel's announced to the shepherds, 'To you this day a Saviour has been born, Christ the Lord.' Simon and I got married in April, but we very nearly had Hark the Herald Angels sing because it's one of our favourite hymns, and the lyrics are fantastic-

Hark! the herald angels sing,  
"Glory to the new-born King!  
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,  
God and sinners reconciled."

The whole point of Jesus coming was to reconcile us to God. To get rid of the barrier of sin that separates us from God. To die for our sins – St Peter writes in 1 Peter 3:18

For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

And whenever someone turns to Christ in repentance and faith, they find peace with God. Their sins are forgiven. And it's all grace. It's not anything we earn or strive to

achieve. We simply accept what Christ did for us, and receive his forgiveness. We are then at peace with God.

And a journey to wholeness begins. Peace in the Bible means more than just absence of conflict. It means a sense of well-being, security, and restored relationships.

And often when people find peace with God, and receive grace and mercy, they become peacemakers. They know how much they have been forgiven, and they begin to long for others to find peace, just as they have. And where once they might have been angry and judgemental, Christ's Spirit in them softens them and gives them a love even for their enemies.

Though this may not come without cost and struggle.

In the Hiding Place Corrie ten Boom writes movingly of an encounter she had with a German guard some years after the war had ended. Corrie and her family had helped Jews escape from Germany through Holland, but they were caught and sent to concentration camps. Corrie's father and sister died in the camps, but Corrie survived and after the war developed a ministry of reconciliation, always speaking of God's grace and forgiveness and his call on us to be peacemakers.

*"He came up to me as the church was emptying, beaming and bowing. 'How grateful I am for your message Fraulein...as you say, He has washed my sins away.' His hand was thrust out to shake mine. And I, who had preached so often to the people of Bloemendaal the need to forgive, kept my hand at my side. Even as the angry, vengeful thoughts boiled through me, I saw the sin of them. Jesus Christ had died for this man; was I going to ask for more? Lord Jesus, I prayed, forgive me and help me to forgive him.*

*I tried to smile, I struggled to raise my hand. I could not. I felt nothing, not the slightest spark of warmth or charity. And so again I breathed a silent prayer. Jesus I cannot forgive him. Give me your forgiveness. As I took his hand the most incredible thing happened. From my shoulder along my arm and through my hand a current seemed to pass from me to him, while into my heart sprang a love for this stranger that almost overwhelmed me.*

*And so I discovered that it is not on our forgiveness any more than on our own goodness that the world's healing hinges, but on His. When He tells us to love our enemies, He gives, along with the command, the love itself."*

Our gospel reading today ended with a command – ‘Be perfect therefore, as your heavenly father is perfect.’

That’s a bit of a challenge isn’t it, a completely impossible one. But that is our calling – to become more like Jesus as his Spirit works in our hearts and changes us more and more into his likeness.

Last Wednesday the PCC approved our vision statement, “Becoming a Christlike Community”. We are trying to be more like Jesus. And the more we allow him to reign and rule in our hearts, the more we will reflect his life in our lives. He was a peacemaker, a reconciler, and we are called to be like him.

In Corinthians 5 Paul writes

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! 18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal

through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.

So some questions to ponder.

Do you know God’s peace – have you received his grace and mercy, do you know you are forgiven. Receive his peace. Trust him. Enjoy that restored relationship with him.

Is there someone in your life with whom you need to make peace? Someone you need to forgive?

Is there a situation in your family, or your workplace, or social life, where reconciliation is required. Might Jesus want to use you to restore a broken relationship? Could you move towards it, rather than away from it?

Or might Jesus want you to be the person who helps someone else find peace with God?

All of those things will need courage. But God will give us what we need when we step out.

And what about us as the church. Where is the brokenness in Caversham? Where is there conflict and strife? What might God be asking of us as his people, his body, here?

Peacemakers will be called children of God- I think in the sense that they reflect a family likeness. We begin to look like our Father as we grow into his likeness, as we do the things he does, as we respond to our world as he did, and still does.

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

Amen.