

Instruments of Peace

Stanton Reformed Church

November 3, 2019

Focus: Peacemakers inherit the kingdom of God.

Function: To make peace, not just keep peace, is to make the kingdom of God.

Do/Think: Make peace, don't just keep peace.

When my brother and I were younger and we would fight, typical sibling stuff, my mother would say to us, "who wants to be the peacemaker?"

And we knew that being the peacemaker was what was right and what was expected. And typically we would be eager to be the peacemaker - which meant we would say sorry. We would hug and we would go about playing again.

Now there were plenty of times where we were not eager - I wouldn't want to say sorry. I definitely did not want to hug him.

I wanted him to say sorry. But then I still didn't want him to hug me.

Peacemaking is hard business.

I remember several times where one of us would begrudgingly say sorry and then half hug the other just to appease my mother.

In that case, my mother kept the peace but we did not make peace.

Now any parent knows, keeping the peace isn't easy either. And sometimes we will settle for keeping the peace.

I dare say that the entire Law and Order franchise on television is proof that not only will we settle for keeping the peace, sometimes getting something seemingly settled makes us feel comforted.

We all know that despite how great it feels at the end of a 60 minute Law and Order episode, we know that peace is not made in 60 minutes.

Real life peacemaking is hard business.

But what is the difference between peacekeeping and peacemaking?

When we speak of peace, we understand it in two ways. There is negative peace and there is positive peace.

Negative peace means the absence of violence.

Going back to my brother and me. Mom tells Rob to stop taking my toys. Mom is imposing a negative peace in the household.

My conflict with Rob is not resolved, but merely suppressed. It happens in the home. I happen internationally.

The cessation of violence and hostility is often imposed by what? U. N. Peacekeepers.

Law enforcement also create negative peace.

The bad guys are taken off the street; crimes is reduced.

At best, the civil justice system renders a fair and impartial decision. But a decision is not a resolution or a transformation of conflict.

Now Positive peace implies some kind of transformation, like reconciliation or a restored relationship.

In positive peace, Mom sits me and Rob down, invites us to exchange stories about what led to our fight.

Mom and I learn for the first time that Rob feels angry at the way I ignore him.

We then work out a plan that allows Rob to speak out about his feelings.

I promise to listen more carefully to Rob.

Rob promises to talk to me and no tare my toys.

The fighting has stopped, but more importantly the relationship has been reconciled and restored.

Now, we know some conflicts are not worked out without some form of separation.

Sometimes peacemaking requires a radical change in relationship, a complete rewriting of the rules of engagement.

Bottom line, peacemaking is concerned with something deeper than a ceasefire.

Peacemaking sees conflicts, disagreements, misunderstanding as places of possible transformation.

It's interesting, the Reformed Church of America, our denomination, has a particular relationship with peacemaking in South Africa after anti apartheid.

Bishop Desmond Tutu led the Truth and Reconciliation commission.

It was peacemaking commission that made way for amnesty for some of the perpetrators and it offered real healing for some who were traumatized.

But get this - almost 10 years before the start of that Truth and Reconciliation commission, the Dutch Reformed church, our mother church, began looking at the unrest and pain, and the violation of human rights through a theological lens.

That reflection produced the Belhar confession.

Now there are dozens of church creeds and confessions.

The one we seem to know best here at Stanton is the Apostle's Creed. That is the oldest and the most universal Christian creed.

The truth is our Reformed Church of America is guided by four creeds: The Heidelberg Catechism, The Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort and the Belhar confession. Each of them speak to specific issues of their day. They provide a theological framework, a way to understand God in the world.

The Belhar speaks to peacemaking, in and after horrible conflict.

The Belhar is concerned with the unity of the church, reconciliation and God's desire for justice.

It says things like:

We believe that we are called to follow God, bringing justice to the oppressed and giving bread to the hungry;

We believe that God frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;

that God supports the downtrodden, protects the stranger.

This wasn't the easiest confession to adopt. There was a lot of discussion - here and earlier when the South African church adopted it.

Adopting a confession like this would make us accountable. We would have to live by it.

This confession was calling us to peacemaking and not just peacekeeping.

Peacemaking is hard business.

It's sort of why i chose the story of Jacob and Esau... When we read the story a few weeks ago in the Wednesday evening Bible study, we mentioned how it seems a little too easy.

I mean, Jacob and Esau were twins. You can't get much closer typically.

And a horrible breach happened in the relationship. Jacob and his mother manipulated Esau earlier in their lives, stole his birthright and his blessing.

Jacob realized what he had done and he ran away.

Jacob was gone for years - long enough to marry two wives, build an entire career as a shepherd, have twelve sons and a daughter.

And then one day, or maybe it was several days, or maybe every November he couldn't

stop thinking about this brother... maybe he lived with an ache for years, several years of his life, a pain in his heart to be reconciled to his brother.

When he could take it no longer, He packed up the family and began the trek to be reunited with his brother Esau.

We know almost nothing of what Esau did during that time. How often did he think of his brother? Did he also spend each November with a constant heartache?

We don't know the backstory but then again, yes we do. We know the story. We know the story from our own lives.

We know what it is like to fight, to hurt one another, to be hurt by another.

I'd like my mother used to ask, who wants to be the peacemaker?

Who wants to pack up the baggage of however many years and head toward the one we hurt?

Who wants to lay down his or her pride? Who wants to put relationship before being right or wrong?

Jesus said, Blessed are the peacemakers for theirs is the kingdom of God.

Well of course it is. Of course the peacemakers get the kingdom of God. They are the ones who created it in the first place.

When there is peace when there is reconciliation, when there is restoration of relationship, their inhabits the kingdom of God.

Where in our lives is there any for peace? Is it at home? Is it here at church? Is it in our neighborhood? Is it at work? Or school?

Who wants to be the peacemaker?

Blessed are the peacemakers for they will inherit the kingdom of God.