

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. The word of God that we consider today is from the Gospel according to Matthew: *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.*

We are living in a time of scarcity. There is a shortage of laborers and hence a shortage of certain parts and products. But perhaps most of all, we are living in an age where peacemakers are in short supply. We've got plenty of braggarts both inside and outside the church. They have no problem being blunt; telling it like it is. The problem is they tell it without compassion. "This is the way it is. If you don't like it, too bad!" The war in Ukraine makes us all the more aware of the need for robust, courageous peacemakers.

I wonder if this is true in your house – in our house, we have that yellow City of Dubuque recycle bin and right now it's full of politicians – they're all in there together having a little party: Grassley, Franken, Hinson, Mathis, and all the rest. I think every single ad attacks the opponent more than it promotes the candidate. And most of the issues at stake are those that get called "culture war" issues. It seems like we're all ready to go to war over something...but where are the peacemakers?

When Jesus speaks about peacemakers, what does *he* have in mind? The theme of "peace" saturates the Scriptures. And almost always the Bible operates with a very big concept of peace. The Hebrew word is Shalom. And it isn't just the absence of war and conflict. It means wholeness; completeness; abundance; rest; fulfillment. It's all of these things that call to mind the idyllic vision of paradise. It is that which was lost in Eden and which God promises to restore again in greater measure at the coming of Christ.

All Saints Day is a day for us to dwell on that vision of heavenly peace and rest; shalom. It contrasts nicely with Reformation Day, which we celebrated last weekend. Reformation Day highlights what we call the church militant. All Saints Day highlights the Church triumphant. Reformation Day, by its nature is a sectarian holiday. It is pretty much only celebrated by Lutherans and it draws our attention to the historic break between Catholicism and Protestantism and also the need for the church on earth to always defend the Truth from those inside and outside who seek to suppress it. All Saints Day, on the other hand, is a universal celebration among all Christians who follow a church-year calendar. It draws our attention to the continuity between saints still living and saints already in heaven. It also focuses us on the future promise of the church at rest, enjoying that promised shalom.

So if we want to understand what Jesus meant when he said, "Blessed are the peacemakers," first we have to take the Bible's all-encompassing view of peace as shalom, God's work of restoring creation to its original state of sinless beauty. When we see peace that way, we begin to realize this is not something we can bring about. Then we look to Jesus, who is the ultimate peacemaker. He is the one who came from heaven to

bring that vision of shalom – and it doesn't begin with peace in families or between nations. It begins with peace between God and man. At his birth the angels sang as we do in the liturgy, *"Glory to God in the highest and on earth **peace**, goodwill toward men."* Where sin makes us enemies of God, Jesus gave his life to reconcile sinners to his Father. Paul writes in Colossians 1, *"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making **peace** by the blood of his cross."* And so through Christ's cross, the greatest act of violence ever committed, God made peace with us.

And now God uses us Christians, his beloved saints, as ambassadors for Christ, ambassadors of God's peace. So, first God made peace with mankind through Jesus Christ. Now through his Church, that peace is being shared with others. We see this play out in the church service every week – we recognize that peace originates from God with the words, **"Peace, goodwill toward men,"** and right before we receive the Lord's Supper, **"The peace of the Lord** be with you always" and then as we depart, **"The Lord** make his face shine upon you and give you **peace."** But we also have this moment of joyous informality in the service where that peace is shared with our neighbors as we greet one another, **"Peace** be with you" – a practice that goes all the way back to the New Testament's "kiss of peace."

As we go back out into the world, then, we are ambassadors of the peace of Jesus. And later in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus teaches his disciples to bring peace into the homes they visit: *"As you enter the house, greet it. And if the house is worthy, **let your peace come upon it.**"* What does that mean? Dr. Jeff Gibbs suggests that Jesus gives us the very words that bring peace just a few verses earlier – *"Proclaim as you go, saying, 'The reign of heaven has come near.'" That's the message that brings peace. "The reign of heaven has come near."* In other words, when Jesus came to earth *is* God bringing his gracious rule into our midst.

This reminds me of a passage from C.S. Lewis' "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe." If you've never read the book or seen the film, Aslan is the lion who is the Christ-figure of the story. Here's the passage:

"They say Aslan is on the move- perhaps has already landed." And now a very curious thing happened. None of the children knew who Aslan was any more than you do; but the moment the Beaver had spoken these words everyone felt quite different. Perhaps it has sometimes happened to you in a dream that someone says something which you don't understand but in the dream it feels as if it has some enormous meaning- either a terrifying one which turns the whole dream into a nightmare or else a lovely meaning too lovely to put into words, which makes the dream so beautiful that you remember it all your life and are always wishing you could get into that dream again. It was like that now. At the name of Aslan each one of the

children felt something jump in its inside. Edmund felt a sensation of mysterious horror. Peter felt suddenly brave and adventurous. Susan felt as if some delicious smell or some delightful strain of music had just floated by her. And Lucy got the feeling you have when you wake up in the morning and realize that it is the beginning of the holidays or the beginning of summer.”

“Aslan is on the move” – for the creatures living in Narnia under a witch’s spell, that was a message of hope. So “The reign of heaven has come near” is a message of hope for all the residents of earth. It means God knows about the wars and the fighting and everything that robs us of shalom but he has already begun to turn that around; he is at work even now ushering his peace into this decaying creation.

But just as the name of Aslan stirred a sense of dread in Edmund, so the message of the reign of heaven coming near can also cause conflict because there are those who fear it or reject it. Jesus tells us this too: *“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”* So here we are mindful again that in this present age we are the church militant. And yet Jesus calls us peacemakers – to keep our eyes on the church triumphant...we don’t need to go looking for conflict. It will come to us in spite of our best efforts to be kind and winsome. Remember that even the Reformers weren’t looking to pick a fight or start another church! They wanted reform the church of Rome from within! But the storm came, nevertheless.

To close, I want to invite us to see this verse and all the beatitudes as Gospel rather than law; promises rather than commands. Jesus is not demanding that we *act* like peacemakers. He is saying his disciples are *already* blessed, *already* peacemakers. Not working to become saints but *already* saints by association with Jesus. Through our relationship with Christ, we bring his peace with us wherever we go. We do this as in various ways we share that message that the reign of God has come near. And we are peacemakers as we embody Christ’s love and as we work toward shalom, however imperfectly, in the places God has placed us.

We do this “till with the vision glorious, [our] longing eyes are blest and the great church victorious shall be the church at rest.” When Christ returns to usher in the end of the age, then the promises will all be fulfilled. The peacemakers will experience God’s shalom perfected – the mourners will be comforted, the meek will inherit the earth, those hungering and thirsting for righteousness will be satisfied, we will receive mercy, we will see God, and we will be called “sons of God” - as the Epistle reading tells us, we already are children of God but in that day we will finally become what God already calls us in his Son. AMEN.

May the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.