

For Whose Sake is War Waged

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Matthew 5:3-9

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‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

‘Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

‘Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

‘Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

‘Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

‘Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

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

My sisters and brothers, I am honored to share The Gospel today. Thank you so much for all of you, co-workers of Peace of your dedicated works. Exclusively grateful of Church and Society and Korea Peace Committee leadership for this timely Forum.

I am prepared to deliver a hard message. It is a convicting message that acknowledges that we now reap the seeds we have sown, and that we are experiencing the consequences for the things we have done, and the things we have left undone. We are the people the prophet Jeremiah described, crying, “Peace, peace, where there is no peace!”

But why is this? Why, after all we have learned, and after all we have lived through, is there still so little true and lasting peace in the world? How can it possibly be that we live in a global community in the 21st century – a community that has experienced throughout history war, and violence, and division, and bloodshed, and fear of annihilation – and still not see the possibility of peace, and

harmony, and justice, and mercy as our shared core values? How can we live in a world where most major world religions espouse peace as an essential core value, but is torn by religious strife and intolerance, resulting in violence?

We hear the words of Jesus, “Blessed are the peace makers,” and we nod our heads with a sweet smile on our faces, in full and total agreement with this generous and lovely sentiment. But contained in Jesus’ teaching from the Sermon on the Mount is both the problem and the solution. The problem is our either/or thinking that has become so divisive in our time. We look for good guys and bad guys, heroes and villains. Those who are meek and those who are mighty. Those who weep and mourn and those who celebrate and rejoice. Those who wage war and those who wage peace. Either/or, good/bad, right/wrong. We split and divide and pass judgement. This cannot lead us to peace.

But the solution contained is elegant. What does it mean to be “blessed?” The Hebrew word, *brk*, (pronounced bruk) meant “to bend the knee in deference; to honor, to show humility and respect.” And the Hebrew faith held as a core value that those who are blessed of God should be a blessing to others. Mercy, justice, meekness, humility – these are not idealistic hopes, but they are blessings – they frame who we are and who we aspire to be.

In the real world in which we live, we are faced daily by wars, rumors of war, and an increasing occurrence of senseless violence. For the privileged and fortunate, these are rare and occasional events. But for a significant part of the world, this is a daily reality. In the Korean peninsula, war has been the reality for over sixty years. Beginning in 1950, an armistice was signed in 1953, but no official ending to the war has yet to occur. North and South Korea are split and

divided by a senseless war without end. War was declared by the powerful and the mighty, for control and command, and for values and ideals long since forgotten.

The powerful and the privileged declare war, **but for whose sake is the war really fought?**

So often, freedom, justice, patriotism, homeland, and righteousness are raised to explain and justify war. But when we look at the costs and impacts of war, noble ideals are rarely revealed. War is much more a result of greed, selfishness, will to power, egotism, and prestige than justice, mercy, grace, kindness or love. Those things blessed by God have nothing to do with war; indeed, they are exactly opposite! We do not fight wars for the sake of the poor in spirit, the meek, the lowly, the merciful or the just. War defies the peace-makers, and hurts the weakest and most vulnerable among us. War is not waged for the lost, the last, and the least. If peace and justice will ever prevail, war is not the way.

Peace is named by Paul as one of the nine fruit of the Spirit. Along with love, joy, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, peace offers a vision for authentic and powerful Christian living. But we must remember that the fruit of the Spirit is the outward, visible, and tangible result of a total orientation of thought, word and deed. The fruit are not lovely concepts, nice thoughts, or passive ideals. The fruit of the Spirit are actual conditions of life, created by the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, and made manifest through the faith of men and women called Christian. There is nothing passive about these fruit; they are active.

It is not enough for us to be peace-keepers, we must be peace-makers. It is not enough to be peace-makers, but together we must become peace-

builders. And I would even say that in the critical needs and crisis reality of our current day, we must become peace-crusaders.

Some might be put-off or offended by the contradictory image of “peace-crusader.” The Crusades were a period of extreme violence and cruelty, where religious warfare and intolerance reigned. But it is the very paradox and challenge that I believe we need to confront. Anything less than a crusade will likely fall short of what is needed in our world today.

What is happening in Korea is a good illustration. Many efforts at reconciliation and healing have been proposed, and even launched, and time after time other things come up that divert energy and distract attention. Peace is “put on the back burner;” it becomes secondary to what some would have us believe are “more pressing and important matters.” The leadership changes in both the North and the South, but the excuses and diversions remain the same. Until peace and reunification becomes the most important thing, very little is likely to change.

The original meaning of the word “crusade” was “to mark with a cross.” Once again – a contradiction – a symbol of death and destruction, punishment and humiliation has become for us the symbol of our faith – fidelity and sacrifice, kenosis and humility. The cross has the power to challenge and defeat the powers and principalities of this world, paving the way for peace and justice for a world to come. Kingdom becomes kin-dom and dividing walls of hostility are destroyed.

Crusaders are single-minded in their commitment to their cause. The vital need for peace crusaders is evident. Peace-building cannot be a secondary occupation. Peace-making cannot be an add-on. For our world to have a future, we need to commit to peace as our top priority. North and South Korea cannot wait – the time for peace is now. Afghanistan, Syria and Iraq cannot wait – the need for peace is today. Young black men in America cannot wait – their lives are

in danger now. The victims of gun violence on our streets and streets around the globe cannot wait – the next tragedy is about to happen. We cannot continue to cry “peace, peace,” but turn a blind eye to the violence, posturing, and political manipulation and inaction.

John F. Kennedy once said, “Peace is a daily, a weekly, a monthly process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures.” Do we have time to let such a slow, cautious process unfold? I am afraid not. The natural evolution of peace is not adequate to meet the challenges of our modern world. We cannot wait for peace; we must build peace.

Hafsat Abiola, Nigerian human rights activist, says, “Peace comes from being able to contribute the best that we have, and all that we are, toward creating a world that supports everyone. But it I also securing the space for others to contribute the best they have and all that they are.” She is a peace crusader – “contribute the best that we have an all that we are.” Nothing less is sufficient. There is nothing more pressing or more important for our global community than peace. We cannot turn our attention to other things.

As we prepare to enter the Advent season, we are reminded that one of the titles and descriptors of our Messiah is “Prince of Peace.” We are all subjects to the Prince of Peace. As subjects, we are stewards. We must serve as ambassadors and advocates for our prince. Peace must be the message, the meaning, and the mandate that we carry with us wherever we go. Peace is our Christian witness. There can be no passive response to war. We should never view war as “normal” or “natural.”

Paul Chappell, Peace Leadership Director of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation, offers helpful insight into what peace crusaders must look like and

how they must act. “To replace the old paradigm of war with a new paradigm of waging peace, we must be pioneers who can push the boundaries of human understanding. We must be doctors who can cure the virus of violence. We must be soldiers of peace who can do more than preach to the choir. And we must be artists who will make the world our masterpiece.” Peace building is art, science, vocation, occupation, call, commitment, and life’s work all rolled into one. It must be our everything if we are to have a future worth living.

As human beings in an imperfect world, we must prepare for war, but as Christians, we must act for peace. We must reject the divisive and caustic rhetoric designed to tear down, defame, discredit and destroy. We must strenuously object to the language of violence, vengeance, vigilantism, and vulgarity that aims to fuel intolerance, outrage, aggression and hatred.

In the United States, we must redefine patriotism. Exceptionalism, entitlement, economic disparity, party politics and individual rights should not define us. We should not strive to be the best *in* the world, but to be the best *for* the world. Patriotism should be about the common good – a country founded on the highest moral and ethical values to create safety, security, comfort, and care for the greatest number of global citizens possible. No walls, no divisions, no distinctions about who is deserving – just a relentless commitment to peace that guarantees justice for all people.

We live under a cloud of war and the threat of war each and every day. Author Han Kang describes in her essay, “No War in Korea,” what it is like for Koreans to cope day to day under the threat of war. This is a chilling and compelling insight into the life innocent civilians live when there is a looming threat of war. She notes that **“in all wars and massacres there is a critical point**

at which human beings perceive certain other human beings as “subhuman” – because they have a different nationality, ethnicity, religion, or ideology.” As Christians, we must not only see the humanity in all people, but the divinity as well.

I will close my comments with a reflection on words from Martin Luther King, Jr. who said, “Nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral questions of our time; the need for mankind to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to oppression and violence. Mankind must evolve for all human conflict a method which rejects revenge, aggression, and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love.”

A commitment to peace is a challenge to our belief that “God is love.” Love is the only power on earth great enough to bring peace from war, hatred, and violence. You cannot enforce peace with violence. You cannot beat peace into people. Our only hope is to appeal to people’s better nature – to continue to hold forth a vision for a kinder, more just, more caring world. And beyond that, to commit to do everything in our power to build peace, to create peace, to restore and protect and defend peace, wherever and whenever we can. May The United Methodist Church lead the way in a global crusade for peace, starting right now.

Thanks be to God. Amen.