

“Making Peace”

Meditation on Matthew 5:1-12

Jan. 29, 2017

Merritt Island Presbyterian Church

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up the mountain; and after he sat down, his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak, and taught them, saying: ‘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. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I start my message today by expressing my gratitude to my husband, Jim, who preached last Sunday for me, with permission from our session. This was so I could have a few days of vacation during the week and go with my mom on a 5-day cruise. I hadn’t been on a cruise before, and I was nervous. I am someone who gets motion sickness very easily. But Mom wanted me to go. She gave the cruise to me as a Christmas gift after asking me for years to go with her. I always had a reason why I couldn’t go. This year was the first time I saw it as her need to get away and rest from being a caregiver for my dad.

I haven't always gotten along with my mom. As a teenager, we argued. I felt she wasn't there for me when I needed her. In my 20s, when I got married, had children and struggled to juggle career, school, family and self-care, I realized she was just doing the best she could—trying to provide for her family. But she was there for me during and after my divorce, calling me and encouraging me every day. As the years slipped by, my mom started to have some serious health problems. More and more, I began to see her not just as a mother but a friend.

The trip was for me an act of faith. I worried not only about getting sick, but that being together so much would put a strain on our relationship. I asked God to help me be a peacemaker so that our past hurts would continue to heal. God, I believe, granted my request.

Scripture tells us that peace isn't something just to enjoy for ourselves; it is something to be freely given (as Christ gave it to us), to be made and to be pursued; it isn't just an absence of conflict but a loving way of life. Peace— εἰρήνη in Greek --is from the Hebrew *shalom* -- meaning "*wholeness, harmony, completeness, health and well-being.*" Peace is a decision. "**Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts,**" we say just before we share the peace during worship, "since as members of one body you were called to peace." (Col. 3:15) The writer of Hebrews urges in 12:14, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy." Likewise, Paul in Romans 12:18 writes, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

Today, in our reading in Matthew 5, we hear the command to *make peace*, with a 2-fold promise. “**Blessed or happy** are the peacemakers,” Christ says in Matthew 5:9, “for they **will be called *children of God!***” This familiar passage marks the beginning of the Beatitudes or the “Sermon on the Mount,” although “into the hills” may better fit the topography of the area and the Greek expression translated, “up the mountain.” Jesus sat down and taught his disciples, along with a crowd that had followed him from “Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.” The word “beatitude” comes from the old Latin version of the Bible, the *Vulgate*. *Beatitudo* means “happiness” and it has come to mean a statement that begins “Blessed or happy is/are” followed by a description of a quality of life or thinking that is to be commended.

Some translators now favor “happy” for the Greek adjective *makarios* over the traditional “blessed.” The Greek word for “blessed” is *eulogetos*, not *makarios*. But this may alter the meaning for some of us who are used to “blessed.” And maybe it confuses us, too, to use the word “happy.” How can we be “happy” while we are mourning, poor in spirit, and persecuted? And God doesn’t desire us to be insincere about our feelings or hide our suffering from our brothers and sisters in Christ. Scholar R. T. France defends the use of “happy”: “No English word fully captures the sense of *makarios* in this traditional form of beatitude,” he says. He uses it “despite its inappropriate psychological connotations as the **least inadequate option** in current English.” He goes on to explain that *markios* doesn’t mean someone *feels* happy, but that they are in a “happy situation.” I think it helps to see the beatitudes

as a window into the future--when the Kingdom of God has fully come. We live with this vision, looking through this window that is Scripture, not fully understanding, but always trusting the Lord and doing God's will. We children of God seek not just to experience God's peace but to *make peace* with others, as Christ calls us to do.

Today we ordain and/or install 3 ruling elders and 1 deacon. They will be charged with loving the Lord and God's children through servant leadership in our congregation. They are mature, compassionate Christians with diverse backgrounds and many gifts and talents. We are happy **and** blessed that they are willing to serve! All 4 witness to their faith by being *peacemakers*, understanding that this is God's will for us and Christ's gift to the Church.

Heidi Dutter -- was born in Denver, Colorado, and lived there until 1978 when she moved to Merritt Island, Florida. Her mother and father were Presbyterians, and after moving to Florida they joined Riverside Presbyterian Church where Heidi was baptized in 1981 by Reverend Pedlow. At Riverside she served as a greeter and usher, and helped with Vacation Bible School. Heidi and her mother were founding members of the Riverside Presbyterian Church bell choir and watched the program thrive. Heidi was married to Keith Dutter on October 13, 2001. They have two children, Tyler and Alecia. Keith and Heidi transferred their membership to Merritt Island Presbyterian Church in December 2004 because they felt it had the programs and caring members that their

family needed. Their daughter, Alecia, was baptized in 2005 and their son, Tyler, was confirmed April 1, 2007. Heidi has served on a PNC and as a Deacon. She has taught Sunday school and Children's Church, played bells with the Ringers of Tomorrow, and helped with Kids' Klub and Vacation Bible School. Heidi says, "My favorite part of the day is taking Bandit for a walk with Alecia. I love listening to the events of her day as we walk."

Robert (Bob) Willett was born and raised in Chicago. He entered the service in June 1944 at 17 and went to France for a year after the war. "I was to be in the invasion of Japanese Kyushu on Nov 1, 1945," he says. "The War ended August 6, 1945. I was happily discharged in Nov. 1946." Then in Nov. 1950 he was called to serve in Korea before being discharged in Nov. 1951. He has been married nearly 60 years to Donna whom he met in Michigan. The Willetts moved to Merritt Island in 1977 and have been members of MIPC since 1982. He is a retired banker, historian and author of several books. He is currently on assignment to *Air and Space Smithsonian*. He has been a Presbyterian since the early 1960s, and served as an elder in the First Presbyterian Churches of Grand Haven, Alpena and Howell, all in Michigan. Donna is a pianist who has played at MIPC services and most recently at our ice cream social. They have 3 adult children and 7 grandchildren; his daughter, Leslie Mitchell, is our church secretary and director of the Praise Band. Bob and Donna live in Rockledge; they enjoy traveling and have been on at least 100 cruises!

June Hutchinson has been an active member of MIPC since she joined us in 2001. She was born at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, and moved

around the world as a child of a career Air Force man. She attended Merritt Island High School, Brevard Community College, and University of Florida. At MIPC, she has served twice as a Deacon, and played hand bells in the Ringers of Tomorrow. She has volunteered as a Kids Klub helper, office angel, and usher. She played roles in two MIPC productions-- *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* and *Footloose*. She lives on Merritt Island and enjoys hanging out with her cat Wallie. June says MIPC **is** her family. She also says, "Go, Gators!"

Patricia (Pat) Smith and her husband, Sterling, were born in Easton, PA, and attended the same high school, but did not start dating until just before she left for college at Penn State. He was attending Lafayette College. They got married 3 years later after Pat graduated with a degree in Kindergarten and Elementary Education. They have been married 53 years in July and have 3 grown children--Pam Poland, Scott Smith, and Sara Root--and 5 grandchildren. Pat worked as a teacher until they moved to Merritt Island in January 1997 from Annapolis, MD, when Sterling was transferred to Kennedy Space Center from NASA Headquarters in Washington, D.C. They joined MIPC in April 1998. She was ordained an elder in January 2002 and a deacon in 2011, serving 2 terms. She has been a Sunday school teacher, VBS leader, MIPC tutor, Kids Klub Craft Leader, Chair of the Christian Education Committee, chair of deacons, and on the planning team for women's retreats. Pat says, "I have always been involved in the church. I grew up in the Reformed Church, which became United Church of Christ, where my dad was extremely active in all areas of the church and my mom was a Sunday School teacher. As a child and teenager I had 10 years of perfect

attendance at my church! As a reward, I got to church summer camp several times for free.” She loves reading, working in her yard and doing her art, especially working with watercolors. Sterling and Pat enjoy spending time with family, traveling, and birding. One of her favorite sayings is, “ The love in your heart wasn’t put there to stay; love isn’t love, ‘til it’s given away.” Thank you, Bob, Heidi, June and Pat, for answering Christ’s call to serve! God bless you with joy and peace!

Let us pray.

Holy One, we thank you for your gift of peace and call to us to be peacemakers. Thank you that by your grace you call us your “children”! Please teach us and strengthen us to make peace in a community and country so divided and a world so in need of your love and grace. Where do we begin, Lord, when the world is such a broken place? Help us to find our common ground in the foundation of our faith--our savior, Jesus Christ, who is our peace. Heal us and make us whole. And Lord, thank you for Bob, Heidi, June and Pat. Help us to support them, always, and build them up so that they may discern your will for and help us to obey. Stir us all to be more faithful to give and serve you and your people all of our days. In Christ we pray. Amen.