

#### Micah 4:1-5

In the last days the mountain of the LORD's temple will be established as the highest of the mountains; it will be exalted above the hills, and peoples will stream to it.

<sup>2</sup>Many nations will come and say,

"Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the temple of the God of Jacob. He will teach us his ways, so that we may walk in his paths." The law will go out from Zion, the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

<sup>3</sup>He will judge between many peoples and will settle disputes for strong nations far and wide. They will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.

<sup>4</sup>Everyone will sit under their own vine and under their own fig tree, and no one will make them afraid for the LORD Almighty has spoken.

<sup>5</sup>All the nations may walk in the name of their gods, but we will walk in the name of the LORD our God for ever and ever.

#### Ephesians 2:11-22 New International Version (NIV)

<sup>11</sup>Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands)—<sup>12</sup>remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup>But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

<sup>14</sup>For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, <sup>15</sup>by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, <sup>16</sup>and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. <sup>17</sup>He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup>For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

<sup>19</sup>Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, <sup>20</sup>built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord.

<sup>22</sup>And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Matthew 5:9

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

PRAY

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

That is a tall order. We are called to be peacemakers:

Not peace lovers. Not peace seekers. Not peacekeepers.

*Peacemakers.*

By way of introduction and review, it is well for us to remember that these beatitudes collectively describe Jesus’ disciples and they/we characterize the Kingdom of God, the beloved community to which we as Jesus’ disciples belong. Each beatitude builds upon the next.

As those who are poor in spirit, we know that we are utterly impoverished without God taking the initiative to reach out to us.

As those who mourn for our sorry sinful condition, we experience the comfort and assurance of God’s undeserved grace and forgiveness.

As those who are meek, we humbly and gently speak truth to power.

As those who crave right relationships, we shall experience the upside down set right side up in God’s Kingdom.

As those who are pure in heart, we shall see God.

As those who make peace, we shall, as God’s offspring, bear a clear family resemblance.

But what is this peace that we are to make?

And if we are crafting peace, what are its components?

The passage from the prophet Micah puts forth a portrait of radical transformation: When peace comes, “swords will be beaten into plowshares and spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not take up sword against nation, nor will they train for war anymore.”

Considering recent incidents of brutality involving police and resulting in the deaths of numerous black men, there have been calls on the part of some, for “defunding police”. That sounds as radical as swords being beaten into farm implements. I don’t know what the answer is.

What I do know is this: The issues of racial inequity and injustice are complex and longstanding. And if hungering and thirsting for righteousness or “right relationships”, is what Jesus is advocating, we have a long way to go, both as a nation and a church. Our denomination’s General Assembly met this last week. Among the work they did was adopting overwhelmingly, a resolution called—Responding to the Sin of Racism and a Call to Action. I am still in the process of reading and processing it myself, but this is *more* than a call to study and educate ourselves, it is a call *to action*.

An undated cartoon (“Cornered” by Mike Baldwin) pictures a man sitting on his couch watching the evening news on television. In the thought cloud above his head are the words “WAR BAD”. The caption below the cartoon says: “Peace Inactivist”!

In this beatitude, Jesus is calling believers—you and me--to be “Peace Activists” - peacemakers today.

What is this peace that we are called to “make”?

Peace means more than inner serenity, more than tranquility or lack of conflict or warfare. It is those things, but it is far more!

**Shalom** - “peace” - prosperity (not necessarily in monetary terms but rather in terms of thriving) - welfare or wholeness. ***Shalom is “the dynamic, vibrating health of a society that pulses with divinely directed purpose and surges with life-transforming love.”*** (E. Peterson, p. 152, They Run with Horses)

This is the peace that characterizes the Kingdom of God—it is life as God intends for it to be! It is wholistic, encompassing harmony with the earth, with other human beings, harmony within, and with the Living God. Shalom encompasses [and strives for right relationships/righteousness in] every dimension of life, including personal and social, economic and political. \*(p.115, D Johnson, The Beatitudes)

Jesus is portrayed as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6, Zechariah 9:9-10). Jesus is the only One who could broker any kind of peace agreement with God on our behalf...and he did so, on the cross.

*<sup>19</sup>For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him [Christ], <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. Colossians 1:19-20*

Peacemaking is costly and it is not without risk. When inviting us to follow him, Jesus himself calls us to deny ourselves, and to “take up [our]cross daily and follow” Him (Luke 9:23). Dietrich Bonhoeffer concludes that disciples of Jesus make peace “by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others.”

\*(p.125 D. Johnson, The Beatitudes)

What does this mean, practically speaking?

It means being prayerful and discerning. This means listening with compassion. It means learning, educating ourselves.

It means change, first, inner change - within you, and within me. “Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me.” It begins with a changed mind and heart and attitude. These changes are the beginning of the radical transformation of which Micah speaks.

It means being bridge-builders and reconcilers.

It means that we live into the reality that if “there is no justice, there is no peace.” This phrase has been heard a lot recently as protestors have chanted it repeatedly. Peacemaking and Justice-making go hand in hand.

Does this get political?

Yes. If and where systems - religious, social, economic, judicial, political or whatever - have been inequitable, have favored any group over against another, or where atrocities have been inflicted, then change is warranted.

For instance, in South Africa and Rwanda, peacemaking has involved “Truth and Reconciliation Commissions” that were formed to listen to all sides, and to ‘seek the truth’, with the primary goal of “providing proof of crimes against humanity and other human rights abuses.”

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth\\_and\\_reconciliation\\_commission](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Truth_and_reconciliation_commission))

These two situations were quite different, but interestingly the leadership of these commissions, involved prominent Christian leaders who were instrumental in this work of peacemaking and reconciliation.

More recently, and closer to home, in August 2014, after the shooting death of unarmed black teen Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, unrest and violence - including civilian looting and violent repression by local police - turned the town into a "war zone." Protesters and police found an unlikely peacemaking leader in police Capt. Ronald Johnson - himself a black man - who was eventually assigned to handle security.

Captain Johnson became a peacemaker at the center of the firestorm. Informed and inspired by his faith in Christ, Johnson persevered in his belief that the only way to effectively bridge the divide between black and blue was to – literally - walk across it.

According to an article in *The New York Times*, Capt. Johnson and a woman from the community talked about the story of when Jesus and Peter, walked on water. Johnson said, "[This frightened woman from the community] said, 'When Peter got scared, Jesus picked him up and said, have faith'". Johnson added, "And I'm telling you today, we need to be just like Peter [and have faith] because I know we're scared." Jesus, the great Peacemaker, can use ordinary people like you and me, to bring hope and peace even in the most challenging circumstances. (August 2014, [preachingtoday.com](http://preachingtoday.com))

As Christians we must be engaged in leadership here and now, joining with others to understand and work for solutions that implement meaningful, substantive change. Unlike the man portrayed in the cartoon, we cannot be “peace inactivists”!

It is noteworthy that when Jesus first spoke these words, he did so in the Roman Empire, which was experiencing the “Pax Romana”. Rome’s military superiority allowed them to end numerous small wars between states or provinces, so there was an absence of war except on the remote frontiers of the empire. But peace in the biblical sense of shalom, could not and cannot be established by military might, because this shalom/peace begins in the human heart.

You and I are called upon to take action as peacemakers in our own sphere of influence: within our families, our neighborhoods, our church, our schools and places of business. We are called to engage politically - at the very least by educating ourselves about issues and being informed voters; at the very most by engaging actively with groups who are working to end systemic racism and inequality within our society, on a variety of fronts.

If we are living into this beatitude of peacemaking, others will recognize us as Jesus' siblings. We will be called "children of God". Each year at Christmas time in the exchange of greetings, we often receive photocards. Some of these depict several generations within a family, including recent additions by birth or adoption or marriage.

What is interesting to me, is to look for the family resemblance. Some offspring are the "spitting image" of the parents. Their appearance betrays their relationship - they bear a very strong family resemblance - be it eye and hair color, a strong chin, or other facial features. But deeper than physical traits, the resemblance may be equally obvious in characteristics that are *not* pictured: in voice inflection, in mannerisms, and perhaps most importantly, in character.

In this regard, I cannot think of a higher compliment than to be called a "child of God"! It is my hope that when others see you and me, they see Jesus!

Ann Voscamp, says:

"All there is to see, is Jesus; Jesus in the face of everyone - and everyone seeing Jesus in the face of us!"

It is my dearest hope that as we lean into living these beatitudes, that not only will we be drawn closer to Jesus, but that we indeed, will become more and more like him, to the end that when others see us, they will notice our family resemblance!

PRAY