

**TEXT: “His disciples came to Him, and He opened His mouth
and taught them, saying,
BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS,
FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD”**

Her name was Abigail, and she was in a desperate race with time.

Anxiously she stuffed the donkeys’ saddlebags with loaves of bread,
raisins, skins of wine, and sweet fig cakes,
then hurried down the dusty path.

There was trouble brewing, and she was racing to head it off.
Her hot-headed husband Nabal had insulted a roving band of men
that had pleaded for help.

Now the strangers were angry, and bent on revenge. She hoped this
generous gift of food would head them off, calm them down.

Her heart was pounding. She knew that if this PEACEMAKING MISSION failed,
her husband would be dead before the sun went down.

PEACEMAKING is a crucial art in a violent world.

And the human heart is just as stubborn, just as violent, now
as it was in Abigail’s time 3000 years ago.

Tribal violence in Rwanda a few years ago led to the bloody slaughter of
more than 500,000 people. That’s where our own Eric Brinkert is just now,
part of a large peace-making effort.

In the Middle East, Israelis and Palestinians have just finished another round
of fighting in their long war. No end is in sight.

In Mexico, the drug warfare has escalated. Six thousand people have been killed in
the past year, and soldiers have been deployed to restore order.

It isn’t just other countries in trouble.

Peacemaking is desperately needed right here in the USA, right under our noses.

You say you aren't sure? Want to know what it involves?

Let me give you a brief JOB DESCRIPTION...

To put it simply, PEACE-MAKING involves getting in between two warring parties, bringing calm, listening attentively, and working toward a resolution.

It is Abigail putting herself and her donkeys between her hothead husband and that angry band of men.

It is the Secretary of State sitting down between the Israelis and Palestinians.

It is a mother stepping between two struggling, shouting children, or a child stepping between his fighting parents.

MAKING PEACE is much more than TALKING PEACE.

The peace MAKER must put himself or herself into the breach. Otherwise, it's all talk, and talk is cheap.

German writer Juergen Moltmann put it this way:

It is irresponsible for Christians to hope for God's peace unless they go where men are at war, and hoist the flag of peace between the lines of those who are about to kill each other.

It is, I must admit to you, a very RISKY thing to do.

A few years ago, Terry Waite, an Anglican churchman from England went to Lebanon in 1987 to seek a path for peace. He was kidnapped and held there for four years by a Muslim faction.

And have you ever heard of a man named Telemachus? He was a slave in Rome who became a Christian.

One day he and his master were at the arena watching the gladiators. One of the men fell, and the victor made preparations to kill his fallen opponent. Horrified, Telemachus rushed into the arena, placed himself between them, and shouted, "In the name of Christ, stop!"

Angered at the intrusion, the victorious gladiator turned on Telemachus and ran him through.

It is DANGEROUS, indeed, to be a peacemaker!

So dangerous that some PEACEMAKERS turn violent themselves.
They take up arms. They become vigilantes.

In the Old West, there was a gun that got a special nickname because it was used in this way.

The Army-issue Colt 45 pistol was called "THE PEACEMAKER"

For one of our sinful human tendencies is to make peace with FORCE.
To eliminate our enemy. Shut him up. Ship him to Siberia. Put a bullet in him.

"Now there'll be some PEACE around here!"

There's a second human tendency we meet more often...
That's the "F and A" approach to conflict resolution.

"F and A" stands for "Forget and Avoid"

For peace-MAKING we substitute peace-FAKING.
We say "Oh, just FORGET IT"
and then AVOID the unpleasant person or situation.

What results is a FALSE PEACE. A counterfeit peace that is achieved by ABSENCE.
We absent ourselves from the enemy and the struggle.
All grows quiet, and it feels like peace...

The unhappy partner leaves the marriage.
The unhappy parishioner leaves the church.
The unhappy employee avoids his quarreling co-workers.

The prophet Jeremiah nailed it when he said we humans cry
"Peace, peace, when there IS no peace!"

God's brand of peace is not a counterfeit peace, not a phony peace.
It is a GENUINE PEACE.

But it can only be achieved God's way.

It must address the CAUSE of the conflict. And it must bring God's radical CURE.

The root cause of our conflicts is SIN.

The root CURE of those conflicts is Jesus Christ.

Whether that sin is greed or pride or hatred, it must be faced, admitted, and repented, or the “solution” will be both superficial and temporary.

Historian Victor Cherbulliez made a study of peace treaties around the world.

In his investigation, he found that there were no less than 8000 treaties signed between the years 1500 and 1860.

They lasted, on average, only TWO YEARS!

Such is the kind of “peace” we get if we don’t address the problem of SIN.

If we want GENUINE, lasting peace,
it must be, first of all, a PEACE WITH GOD.

That was the peace Jesus came to bring.

When he was born, do you remember what the angels sang?

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth, PEACE...”

How did He bring it?

St. Paul wrote that Jesus “**Made peace by the blood of His cross.**”

That blood was the payment for our SIN DEBT that stood between us and God.

Now, when we stand before God, He does not see our sins,
but only the blood of His Son.

If you would be a PEACEMAKER,
you must yourself be AT PEACE WITH GOD.

So Jesus speaks of dealing with “**the log in your own eye**” first.

Before we approach the quarreling fellow church members, or our alienated friends or family members,

have we come to our Lord, confessed our own conflicts, asked his pardon,
and trusted His promise of forgiveness?

If we KNOW CHRIST, then we KNOW PEACE, and we may truly
help others know it too.

And how may we HELP others find that peace?

By bringing them into the presence of Christ.

We bring them into the presence of Christ by PRAYING for them.

Have you been praying for people in conflict? Regularly? Trustingly?

We bring them, further, by SPEAKING HIS WORD of life to them, and by treating them as He would treat them.

When early Christians came to the sacrament of Holy Communion, they spoke the PEACE and administered a kiss of peace.

And so we do it here, as the pastor says,

“The PEACE OF THE LORD be with you,” and you respond...

(and also with you!)

For in the end, it is not really WE, but HE, who is the great PEACEMAKER.

We are simply the bearers of His presence, His Word.

BLESSED ARE SUCH PEACEMAKERS, Jesus said.

Why? Well, because they make a difference in this unhappy world.

Abigail’s mission, I should tell you, succeeded.

Her husband was spared. Tragedy was avoided.

Telemachus did not know it, but even in his dying, he became a peacemaker.

The crowd at the arena did not cheer his death, but went home in silence.

It was the beginning of the end of the gladiator spectacle.

And you, who speak a calming, healing word

to an angry child, or a frustrated wife, or a grumpy fellow member at church, bring to bear the healing power of Jesus Christ.

In Christ, that labor is not in vain.

There’s another reason.

A peacemaker discovers, in that very task, a oneness with Christ

as he or she becomes the arms, the face, the voice of Jesus to the neighbor.

Blessed are the peacemakers, Jesus says,

“FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.”

In his wonderful book, *CRY THE BELOVED COUNTRY*, Alan Paton tells the story of a black priest in South Africa named Stephen Kumalo who is beset by frightful troubles.

His sister and son have both gone to Johannesburg.

The sister has become a prostitute, and his son has become a thief and also gotten a young girl pregnant.

The priest goes in search of them. While he is there, the son is arrested for the murder of a white man who is the son of his neighbor back home – a man who despises black people.

Amidst all his griefs, the priest faithfully bears with his erring family members – rebuking their sin, but offering Christ’s pardon.

In court, he must face his neighbor, the father of the boy his son murdered. By his humility and Christ-likeness, that man’s anger is disarmed.

It is the story of a peacemaker at work,
and a reminder of the good that a peacemaker can accomplish,
even in the midst of tragedy.

At the end of the book, one of his fellow priests looks at him with wonder and says,

“There is one of the few people I have known
who is truly a MAN OF GOD.”

That’s what Jesus promised:

“BLESSED ARE THEY....FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.”

It is on that promise, and in that hope, that we stand together today,
with Christ’s own call to be peacemakers in His name.

Our reward will be to have a share in His work, and to be known as
His children.

What could be better?

Will you say it again with me, once more?

**BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS
FOR THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF GOD.**