Sermon preached at Faith Presbyterian Church, Springfield, Virginia, on Sunday, January 9, 1994, by the Rev. W. Graham Smith, D.D.

MATTHEW 5:9

"Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God."

FINDING YOUR MISSING PEACE

When our children were growing up and one of them was especially good and thoughtful of the others, I would think, to myself, "Isn't she just like her father?!" And when one of them would do something that called for correction, their mother would say, "Isn't he just like his father?!"

Jesus says there's one way we can always know if we're like our heavenly Father. "Happy are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." You're like God when you're a peacemaker.

Now notice, it doesn't say, "Happy are the peace-lovers." Everybody loves and wants peace. It doesn't say, "Happy are the peaceable — those who never get disturbed by anything." It says, "Happy are those who make peace — who actively seek to resolve conflict."

There are at least two misconceptions about peacemaking.

1. <u>Peacemaking is not avoiding an issue</u>. It is not running away from the problem or pretending it doesn't exist. Have you ever been in a big argument and afterwards you say, "I don't want to talk about it." That's not peacemaking. That's cowardice. None of us likes conflict, and so we love to stick our head in the sand and avoid it. But it only gets bigger when we do that.

2. <u>Peacemaking is not appeasement</u>, when you always give in and let the other person have his own way and let him run over you. We do well to remember that Jesus was a very controversial person. He stood His ground on a number of issues. Jesus never said you should be a doormat or give up your identity or be a chameleon.

Peacemaking is not avoiding; and it's not appeasement. It is actively seeking to resolve the conflict.

Now, <u>why should I be a peacemaker</u>? It requires a lot of energy. There are at least three reasons.

a. <u>Unresolved conflict blocks my fellowship with God</u>. The Bible assures that we can't have close fellowship with God and be out of fellowship with other people at the same time. 1 John 4:20-21 says, "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God Whom he has not seen." That simply means that if you're out of fellowship horizontally, you're also out of fellowship vertically.

b. <u>Unresolved conflict prevents answered prayer</u>. 1 Peter 3:7 tells us to treat our wives right if we want our prayers to be heard. Matthew 5:23-24 says that reconciliation is a prerequisite to worship. Jesus says that when you come to church and the offering is about to be received, and you remember that someone has something against you, you are to leave your offering and go and set matters right, and then come back. I must tell you that in 50 years of ministry I have never once seen that happen! Giving, witnessing, reading the Bible, praying can never substitute for reconciliation. If you're having trouble getting answers to prayer, maybe you had better check out your relationships.

c. <u>Unresolved conflict hinders my happiness</u>. When you're in conflict with someone, you feel miserable, don't you? You're no fun to be around! Look at Job 18:4 (GN), "You are only hurting yourself with your anger." You see, resentment is utterly foolish because when you become resentful, it monopolizes your attention. That's all you can think about. The people you resent are having a great time, and you're the one who's upset!

Now let's look quickly at <u>five ways to be at peace</u> — how to resolve conflict in your home, at work, at school, with your parents, with your friends. P. E. A. C. E.

1. <u>**PLAN a peace conference**</u>. Let's go to Matthew 5:23-24, "If you... remember that your brother has something against you... go at once and make peace..." You take the initiative. Don't wait for him or her to make the first move. It doesn't matter if you are the offended or the offending party. It's always your move.

In 1979, Anwar Sadat won the Nobel Peace Prize because he took the initiative. He flew to Jerusalem and opened up peace talks between Egypt and Israel which eventually produced some accords. Peacemakers always take the initiative.

Of course, someone says immediately, "But Pastor, why should I go to him? I mean — he hurt me." "Why should I go to her? She hurt me." You do it because Jesus said so. And because you're mature, you go first. You schedule a sit down, face-to-face meeting because conflict is never resolved accidentally. You must intentionally deal with it. When do you deal with it? Jesus says, go at once. You see, when you avoid or delay, it only grows worse.

2. <u>EMPATHIZE with their feelings</u>. Philippians 2:4 (Phillips) says, "None of you should think only of his own affairs but consider other people's interests also." The verb "to consider" in Greek is "skopeo," which means "to gaze upon." When you look through a telescope, you gaze intently at the stars and planets. So, the Apostle is saying that we must look closely at the needs of others.

Now, let me ask you, when you're upset, who are you thinking about? When I'm upset, all I'm thinking about is I, myself, and me! My needs, my hurts. "You hurt me! I don't care about you!" God says, "Reverse that ungodly way of thinking and behaving." Hold a peace conference and think about the other person's needs. What can I do to help them with their needs?

Parents have to be peacemakers, don't they? There are tugs of war over toys. We parents all know the meaning of "in-house fighting." And you have to listen to your children and be sensitive and empathize with their needs and try to figure out why they feel hurt. Why are they arguing with each other?!

One of the values of conflict is that when you resolve it, it usually leads to greater intimacy because you understand the person better, because you've been listening, and trying to see where he's coming from.

3. <u>ATTACK the problem, not the person</u>. You can't focus on fixing the problem and fixing the blame at the same time. Read with me Proverbs 15:1 (GN), "A gentle answer quiets anger, but a harsh one stirs it up." Isn't that true? He's saying here, "Engage your mind before you engage your mouth"! Be sincere, not sarcastic. You don't get your point across by being cross. You don't criticize and condemn and compare.

Ephesians 4:29 (GN) says, "Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed." You know the kind of thing — "Oh, you're just like my first wife!"; or "She's just like my mother-in-law." That's like pouring kerosene on a lighted fire! "Be aware; don't compare" is a good motto. Only say things that build people up.

Gary Smalley has written a fine book which I recommend to you. It's called <u>The</u> <u>Language of Love</u>, and it teaches you when you're in conflict, how to say the right thing, not the wrong thing. You attack the problem, not the person.

4. <u>COOPERATE as much as possible</u>. Build bridges, don't demolish them. Go into a peace conference with a spirit of compromise. What can we agree on? Look at Romans 12:18 (GN), "Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody." Paul is saying, "The hallmark of a Christian ought to be his ability to get along with other people." It's not, how much do you pray? It's not, how much do you read the Bible? It's not, how much do you give to the Lord's work? But, do you get along with other people? Jesus said, "By this shall all men know that you are My disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:35)

Now notice in Romans 12:18 the phrase "on your part." "Do everything possible on your part to live at peace with everybody." Do you realize that there are some people whom you may never be able to get along with? They're just not-get-along-able!

Peace always has a price. If you want peace in your home; if you want peace in your marriage; there's always a price. It costs your ego; your pride. You've got to be willing to compromise. As a husband, you will often have to say, "Well, maybe my wife's right!", or, "Maybe my husband does have a point!" You know the old gag, "I'm not always right, but I'm never wrong!" That's the kind of attitude that will always keep the pot boiling over. "Maybe my teenager has a legitimate gripe." "Maybe my parents do know what they're talking about."

Somebody has said that the three most difficult words to utter in the English language are, "I was wrong." And the four most difficult to say are, "Will you forgive me?" So, seek peace by striving for cooperation and legitimate compromise.

Over 20 years ago, Eric Segal wrote a book which was later made into a movie called <u>Love Story</u>. A key sentence in that book was this — "Love means never having to say you're sorry." Folks, Eric Segal was dead wrong. Love means saying you're sorry, because in relationships you get hurt; and in relationships you hurt other people, both intentionally and accidentally.

Look at James 3:18 (LB), "Those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of goodness." James is saying exactly what Paul says in Galatians 6:7, "Whatever you sow is what you're going to reap." If you want people to cooperate with you, what have you got to do? Cooperate with them. If you want people to be nice to you, you've got to be nice to them. He who is friendly has friends. Whatever you dish out is what you're going to get back. If you're experiencing conflict in your family, guess what? Somehow, you're dishing some of it out, because it takes two to tango, and it takes two to engage in conflict. What you plant is what you get.

5. <u>EMPHASIZE reconciliation, not resolution</u>. And there's a big difference. To "reconcile" means to "reestablish a relationship." It does not mean that you resolve all the problems, because a lot of times there are some honest differences between husbands and wives, employees and bosses, parents and children, men and women.

Do you realize that there are major differences between men and women? We think differently. Do you know that according to a recent report, the average man speaks 15,000 words a day? The average woman speaks 27,000 words a day! Now, ladies, when you say, "My husband just won't listen to me!", try to realize that he doesn't have a brain with the capacity to hold as much as yours does! It's not his fault that God gave man that kind of a brain! But our little brains can only handle about 15,000 words a day, and so you've got a 12,000-word excess that's just going to fly over his head! So, don't beat up on him; that's just the way God made him. Women are generally speaking more verbal than men; it's just a fact of life.

In the best of relationships there are going to be honest differences, and many times you're not going to resolve them; but reconciliation means that you bury the hatchet; it does not mean that you bury the issue. You can keep talking about the issue, but you keep talking about it in harmony. The fact is, you can disagree agreeably. You can walk arm-in-arm without seeing eye-to-eye. That's the point. You can have reconciliation without the resolution of every problem. Reconciliation focusses on the relationship; resolution focusses on the issue, the problem.

Now when you focus on reconciliation, the resolution often takes care of itself. For example, if you're having marital problems, and you focus on reconciliation, you say, "Hey, we're married. Why are we fighting each other? We're supposed to be on the same team." If a major disagreement arises over anything — how to raise the children, or how to spend the money — that's the issue. First, focus on reconciling the relationship, and often when you do that, you are in a far better position for solving the problem, because you know that you have two people who are now working as a team to resolve the issue.

2 Corinthians 5:18 says, "God... has reconciled us to Himself through Christ and has given us the ministry of reconciliation." That is to say, God models what He wants you and me to do. You see, a synonym for a "peacemaker" is a "reconciler" — one who brings people together. God sent His Son to bring us to Him, so we could have peace with God. God is the original peacemaker. What He has modelled, He now wants us to do with other people. Paul is saying that when you help restore relationships, you're doing what God would do. When you help to bring people together who have been estranged, that's the most Christ-like thing you can do — to engage in a ministry of reconciliation. When God looks down on you and sees you taking the initiative to restore harmony in that marriage, or in that office, or with that parent or child, or that estranged relative, God says, "You are indeed My child!"

I heard a story once about an old man who carried a small can of oil with him wherever he went, and if he passed through a door that squeaked, he would put a drop or two of oil on the hinges. If he heard a baby carriage squealing its way along the street, he would smilingly ask the mother if he might put a few drops of oil on the axles! Thus, he passed through life, lubricating friction points and removing many of the harsh and unpleasant sounds. People called him eccentric, but the old man went steadily on refilling his can of oil when it became empty!

God grant that we may be people like that, in the spirit of Christ helping to remove the harshness from life, helping to bring people together, so that they may understand each other better. Paul says to us in Colossians 3:15, "Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts..."

What do you want to be remembered for? For being a peacemaker or a troublemaker? What have you a reputation for at work? — A peacemaker or a troublemaker?

St. Francis of Assisi used to pray, "Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace." That's a great prayer to pray. Bringing people together is the most Christ-like thing anybody can do. Every time you tell somebody about the Lord, you're being a peacemaker. Every time you tell someone, "Jesus loves you, and He wants to make a difference in your life; and He has a purpose for you, and He wants to forgive every sin you've ever committed and make you a new person..." and you introduce that person to Christ — you're being a peacemaker.

But we must always remember that peace is a two-dimensional thing. First of all, it is peace between you and God, through the blood of the Cross. I hope you have knelt at the Cross and received the peace of God by receiving His pardon for sin — your sin. That is the truest kind of peace, and no other peace can really come until you have made your peace with God. But once you've done that, you can't stop there. You've got to oil the machinery. You've got to be Christ's hands and feet and lips in order to make peace as well as love peace.

You know, of course, that a sermon should motivate people to do something in response to the preaching of the Word of God.

Tell me — is there anyone from whom you have been estranged? Perhaps you need to go home and arrange a peace conference. Maybe you need to write a letter, releasing any resentment you may have, and seeking for reconciliation.

Do remember that if the person does not want reconciliation, there's nothing you can do about that; but at least you have the satisfaction of knowing that you did your part, you tried your best; and you are not now responsible for his or her reaction to your peace overture.

But God expects you to make the first move; the ball is in your court; and the Holy Spirit promises to give you the wisdom and the grace to be Christ-like. When we are truly like Christ, we can be assured that God will carry out His gracious purposes through us.

<u>AMEN</u>.