The blessing of this beatitude is that peacemakers are called “children of God,” people who reflect the likeness of God. We say, “Like father, like son,” or “the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree” when we see the similarity of character, habit, or behavior of a parent reproduced in a child. Similarly, when we are born of God, some likeness to our heavenly parent will be reflected in our life. This resemblance is seen clearly when we make peace.

There are four reasons why peacemakers are called the children. First, **we are children of God when we have peace in ourselves as God has peace in God’s Self**. God is the “God of peace” (Rom. 15:33; 1 Thess. 5:23; Heb. 13:20). Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isa. 9:6). The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Peace. At no time has there ever been the slightest hint of tensions or conflict within God. The Triune God – Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit – is one in purpose and one in love.

Second, **we are** **children of God when we surrender our rights** **to God’s greater purpose**. We live in a world obsessed with rights, and there are times when it is appropriate to insist on them. But before you insist on your rights in a conflict situation, remember that if God insisted on His rights, we would be lost and abandoned souls. Instead, God chose give up His rights. Jesus, did not hold on to what was his by right: he left heaven, stepped down, and came into the world to make peace. You don’t make peace by standing on your rights.

Third, **we are** **children of God when we move toward trouble**. Conflict managers tells us “to move toward the barking dog.” To my mind, a barking dog is a sign of danger, and my instinct is to back off. But when the world was barking at God, God did not back off. God moved toward us, even though it would lead to the cross. Peacemaking does not mean avoiding conflict, and it is not for the faint of heart. Peacemaking can be the most dangerous job in the world. For Jesus it meant laying down his life.

Fourth, **we are children of God when we love others before we are loved in return**. Paul put it this way: “God shows God’s love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). Showing love for another, without a thought of any return on the investment, is godly peacemaking.

Putting all of this together may make any resemblance between us and God seem slight indeed. Our pursuit of the Beatitudes, our progress in purity, our mercy toward others, our hunger for righteousness, our submission to God’s will, our mourning over sin, and our awareness of our own needs all fall a long way short of what we would want them to be, and much farther short of what God calls us to be. And although we may make some progress, we will always be dependent on the grace and mercy of God.

So, let me say again that the progress through the Beatitudes is a journey, the completion of which is not realized in this lifetime. The aim of the Christian life is to become more holy, more Christ-like, in our words and actions. But there are limits to what we can do as human beings: limits to our peacemaking, limits to our purity, mercy, righteousness, meekness, mourning, and humility. Which is why Paul said, “If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18). There will be situations where we cannot make peace, but we should never stop trying to make peace.

So, for all you would-be peacemakers, let me offer some tactics to deploy in the pursuit of peace. **Recognize that there is a problem**. In every age, there were people who make a good living telling others what they want to hear: don’t worry, all will be well. But this isn’t peacemaking: its conflict avoidance. Peacemaking is not “anything for a quiet life.” Peacemakers recognize when there is a problem and choose to confront it.

**Deal with conflict early**. I used mud and rocks to dam up a stream on my family farm to make swimming holes. We had to be vigilant, though, because the smallest trickle of water working through the dam would bring the whole structure down. The beginning of conflict is like that trickle of water: it starts out small, but soon becomes a roaring flood. Peacemakers deal with that first harsh word, that first wound, or that first moment of distrust when it occurs before they are washed away in a flood of resentment.

**Practice restraint**, especially with words. Self-expression is one of the leading idols in our culture. We feel compelled to say what we think and feel; but we really don’t need to say everything we think and feel. Recognizing a problem and having the courage to face it does not mean letting rip with our accumulated frustrations, disappointments, and complaints. If God unloaded every way in which we have wronged God, we would be destroyed. But God shows restraint and makes peace, because God is filled with grace as well as truth. Peacemakers practice restraint in their words and deeds.

**Prepare for a long journey**. Peter wrote: “Seek peace and pursue it” (1 Peter 3:11). Peacemaking is a progress, not an event. Like a game of Hide-and-Seek, peace is not easy to find, but even if peace is far in the distance, we must stay the course. When God made peace with us, God sought and pursued those who were “far off” (Eph. 2:13), relentlessly pursuing peace with us. Peacemakers reflect God’s persistence.

**Take a step toward peace**. Every journey begins with a single step. Paul wrote: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink” (Rom. 12:20). When peace seems a long way off, think about making one small step in the right direction, then another, and then another. Peacemakers take one step at a time.

**Aim at humility, not humiliation**. In his book about the Cuban missile crisis, Robert Kennedy quotes his brother, President John F. Kennedy: “If anybody is around to write after this, they’re going to understand that we made every effort to find peace and…give our adversary room to move. I’m not going to push the Russians an inch beyond what’s necessary.”[[1]](#footnote-1) The President’s goal was peace, not vindication and not vengeance. God makes peace, not through a triumph of power, but through a triumph of love. Peacemaking aims at humility, not humiliation.

**Entrust the injustice to God**. In life we will get slighted, treated unfairly, passed over, or taken for granted. It’s a painful thing to have evil returned for good, or to give of yourself and receive insult in return. Jesus knows what that feels like, too. Peter wrote: “When they hurled insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to [God] who judges justly” (1 Peter 2:23). The only way to break the escalating cycle of retaliation is for peacemakers to absorb the pain rather than pass it along. Peacemakers entrust themselves to God, letting God deal with the injustice rather than trying to vindicate themselves.

Peacemaking is a noble pursuit: it is hard, thankless work. But it is the most important work we can do. Of all the wonderful blessings offered in the Beatitudes, the blessing for peacemakers is special: to be called a child of God. Let’s pray for peace today!

Prayer: Gracious God, We pray for peace in our communities this day. We commit to you all who work for peace and an end to tensions, and those who work to uphold law and justice. We pray for an end to fear, for comfort and support to those who suffer. For calm in our streets and cities, so that people may go about their lives in safety and peace. In your mercy, hear our prayers, now and always. Amen

**Give Up Your Rights**

Sunday, November 12, 2017 Matthew 5:8

Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

If I asked you to choose one word to describe the modern world, I doubt that “peaceful” would be the word. Most days our world seems anything but peaceful. A gunman kills 26 people during a worship service. Crazed despots test nuclear missiles. Politicians cannot agree on anything. Protests turn violent. Families struggle to make ends meet. Drugs and wars, beliefs and hatreds consume people and nations. Peace is elusive.

Making peace is the last Beatitude, which tells us that it is of great importance and we should not be surprised that it is difficult to achieve. We’ve noted the order and progress in the Beatitudes, and as we’ve moved from ring to ring, we’ve found that the challenge becomes greater. Now, having arrived at this ring, it’s time for the ultimate stretch, the highest and hardest of them all: to become a peacemaker in a world of conflict.

Since the blessings of the Beatitudes form a continuum in which each of the blessings builds on what went before, we can say that the blessing of peace arises directly from the pursuit of purity. James alludes to this connection when he describes the wisdom from above as “first pure, then peaceable” (James 3:17). Peace of heart flows from purity of life.

Purity of heart means to will one thing, and the person who has this singleness of purpose will be at peace. By contrast, a person who has a heart that is fundamentally divided, seeking contradictory things, can have no peace so long as that unresolved conflict rages. The more you give way to impurity the more conflicted and restless you will become; but the more you pursue purity, the more you will enjoy peace.

Peacemaking is not optional for Christians: it is our calling (1 Cor. 7:15). We are called to promote peace in our families, our churches, our places of work, our schools, and our communities. Since peace is our calling, we must be intentional about pursuing it. “Those who plan peace have joy,” says Proverbs (12:20). Where there is no peace, our task is to consider the best ways to make peace. Recognizing that peace is our calling, and deciding how best to pursue it, we are to “strive for peace with everyone” (Heb. 12:14).

1. Robert Kennedy, *Thirteen Days: A Memoir of the Cuban Missile Crisis*, New York: Norton, 1999), 98. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)