

Making Peace

✝ With God (5:20-21)

✝ With each other (6:1-2)

In the name of Jesus, who gives us peace with God, dear loved ones in the Lord:

Do you believe this is true? ***“Blessed are the peacemakers.”*** Why, of course. Jesus said those words in His *Sermon on the Mount*. But why do we tend to get suspicious when we see ***“Blessed are the peacemakers...”*** on a bumper sticker or yard sign? Is it because our Lord is so often quoted out of context as if we should ignore the rest of the Bible? Wars of self defense, capital punishment – for example? What about protecting the rights of the innocent unborn, the weak and frail, the elderly and those with disabilities? And have you ever seen the whole quote all together? ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*** (Matthew 5:9 NIV) Sounds politically incorrect.

“Peace” has been a problem for God’s people since ancient times. Through prophets like Jeremiah the LORD warned about false prophets: ***“They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. ‘Peace, peace,’ they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them,”*** says the LORD.” (6:14f NIV)

We need true **Peace**. Today God the Holy Spirit teaches us about **Making Peace...**

✝ With God (5:20-21)

The God of the Bible does not sugarcoat anything, not our problem and not His love. His Apostle Paul has been defending his Gospel ministry to the Corinthians in this Second Epistle, telling them awesome truths about God’s New Covenant of pure, one-sided grace in Christ. ***“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”*** (2 Corinthians 5:18f NIV) That’s when God’s pleading love kicks into high gear with our text: ***“We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God.”*** (5:20 NIV)

Making Peace – With God? How do you know you have a problem? Most people think they’re fine the way they are. And this cross all cultures. One of our Missionaries describes the difficulties trying to reach his Chinese friends. Sounds like many Americans to me. He starts with this: “What’s the middle letter in *sin*?” Anyone with a little English knowledge can easily answer. *Sin* means *self-centered*, something Chinese look down on. His friend objects, “Sinners are murderers, rapists, embezzlers. I am not. I don’t have that problem.” The missionary then asks, “What’s the middle letter in *pride*?” Raised eyebrows answer. *Pride* is comparing yourself to others and coming out on top. Adam and Eve fell into *sin* because their *pride* wanted their “I” rather than God. *Pride* brought sin and death into the world. Finally, he asks: “What is the middle letter in *guilt*?” “I” shows in God’s eyes I am a *guilty sinner* filled with *pride*.

The ancient Chinese character for “I” shows inharmonious nature in two radicals used for “I” – a *hand* on the left; a *weapon* on the right.



Isn’t that clear from Moses’ story when he decided, “I will deliver the Israelites from slavery in Egypt”? With a weapon or bare hands he killed an Egyptian and had to flee to the desert. Forty years later at the burning bush Moses asked who was sending him to command Pharaoh to release his Hebrew slaves? ***“What is his name?”*** was answered with אֲדֹנָי אֲשֶׁר אֲדֹנָי – **“I AM WHO I AM.”** The LORD Jehovah or Adonai or Yahweh – יהוה – is the God who exists and freely gives His people **Peace**.

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” God’s solution uses this double character for “I” – *hand + weapon*, and adds one more. Above the two characters the ancients drew the character for a *lamb*. *A lamb covers me*. This character all together means *“righteous.”* God makes us right with Him by putting His Lamb over us.



Since I have an “I-Problem” with *sin, pride* and *guilt* I cannot give what God demands: zero sin + all holiness = life. Jesus says, ***“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”*** (Matthew 5:48 NIV). “But nobody’s perfect!” some will object. That’s true. What God sees is my sin – holiness and He says, ***“The wages of sin is death...”*** (Romans 6:23 NIV). Trying to climb a ladder to be right with God or do more good than bad or compare myself to others will never give me **Peace – With God** because He is holy. ***“All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags.”*** (Isaiah 64:6 NIV) It’s all or nothing with God. We don’t want a single drop of sewage in our water.

What God did can be called God’s Great Exchange. All our sin God put on His Son who volunteered to rescue us as our Prince of Peace. All His righteousness God put on us. He put *the Lamb over me* to make me and you and every sinner righteous in God’s sight. ***“My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”*** (Matthew 27:46) Jesus asked as He was paying for our sins on the cross. ***“It is finished!”*** (John 19:30) He shouted when our sins were paid in full. ***“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!”*** (Luke 23:46) He cried when full payment was accepted by our Father in heaven. ***“The punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”*** (Isaiah 53:5 NIV)

✝ **With each other (6:1-2)**

So God’s pleading continues. ***“As God’s fellow workers we urge you not to receive God’s grace in vain.”*** Look at the Israelites in our Second Lesson forfeiting God’s grace by their rebellion under Moses in the desert. ***“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it.”*** (1 Corinthians 10:11-13 NIV)

That surely includes temptations to not get along with each other. How does my “I-Problem” get in the way of my relationships? Jesus’ questions in today’s Gospel reveal how. When disasters happen around us, Jesus asks: ***“Do you think...[they] were worse sinners...?...Do you think they were more guilty...?”*** (Luke 13:1-9) This is my concern when we hear how the immoral ELCA Convention was smashed by a targeted tornado that tore down the church steeple, leveled the tents and uproot trees. It’s hard not to see the hand of God. But if we don’t listen to God’s Son in true fear of the Lord, how can we claim to deserve better. A single sin like pride with “I” inside makes me guilty before God. Only by grace alone in Christ alone by faith alone as taught in Scripture alone can I stand. And trusting God’s mercy on all sinners, we can enjoy God **Making Peace** not only **With God**, but also **With each other**.

Shall I wait until tomorrow to repent to God and forgive those who sin against me? God says, ***“In the time of my favor I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you.” I tell you, now is the time of God’s favor, now is the day of salvation.*** Trusting in what Christ did for me to free me from my slavery to sin, death and hell, I don’t want to wait. Tomorrow may never come. In gratitude to God I want to see those signs as great reminders of how God’s **Peace** in Jesus is meant not only for me and my friends, but for my enemies too. Self-defense is allowed, but hatred and revenge belong to God. So as He ***“causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous”*** (Matthew 5:45 NIV), I will remember the whole statement of my Savior: ***“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”*** (Matthew 5:9 NIV) God **Making Peace** with me, makes me want to get busy **Making Peace** with others. **Peace** received is **Peace** to give in Jesus Christ my Lord. Amen.