

West Branch Friends Meeting  
April 23, 2017  
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Where is Peace?

Prior to Palm Sunday and Easter messages, I've been sharing some thoughts on the Beatitudes – a word that means 'blessed' or 'happy' or 'fortunate.' I've shared what it means to be poor in spirit, to be comforted in our mourning, to inherit the earth and all it offers through being meek, what it means to be filled by hungering and thirsting for God's rightness and justice, and how power and mercy are intertwined as we seek to show mercy that we may receive God's mercy.

So today I want to wrap up our discussion of the ways to be blessed – happy – with what may be one of the more challenging ones for a believer today - one that certainly cries out for us in our world filled with so much anxiety...and that is how to be happy by being a peacemaker.

As you know if you were here for the celebration of Helen's life a few weeks ago, I do love jigsaw puzzles! It started way back when I was in elementary school and one of my sisters' and my favorite Christmas vacation activities was setting up a card table in the living room and putting together a jigsaw puzzle. I carried on the tradition when I had children of my own, often leaving the dining room table covered with puzzle pieces....there was a 3-D puzzle of the Eiffel Tower, a mystery puzzle requiring a completed picture to solve the mystery, and a variety of others down through the years. In fact, I just finished a thousand piece puzzle this winter, as is my habit of late, all by myself (except for a piece or two my granddaughter found to put in).

It might be nostalgic to think of the world being put together, one day piece at a time, in one swift week as the writer of Genesis imagined, but I like to consider the evolution of all life as we know it now, each piece being put in place over time, forming the picture that we now see of the earth and its inhabitants. In the Genesis story, man, and then woman, were the last pieces to make the creation puzzle complete. But I rather like to imagine that the puzzle will never be totally complete since we

know the universe is ever expanding and new species are constantly being discovered.

The Quaker peace testimony began with this observation by founder George Fox when he had been thrown in prison for defying the church and when, after some time, he was offered an early release he said:

***“I told them I knew from whence all wars arose, even from the lust, according to James’s doctrine (James 4:1 “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you?”); and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars; and that I was come into the covenant of peace which was before all wars and strife.”***

But when we read the news today, it seems like our world and its inhabitants are more like a jumbled jigsaw than one with a completed picture.

The Quaker pastor, Edward Hicks, is best known for his painting “The Peaceable Kingdom” painted from a vision of the pieces of life on earth all fitting together perfectly; a vision gleaned from this scripture in Isaiah 11: 6-9:

***“The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them. The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the cobra’s den, and the young child will put its hand into the viper’s nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.”***

Unfortunately, I’m not seeing any of that in our world today. I have to ask myself the question, “Why is our world not in harmony?” And it doesn’t take too long to think of a variety of reasons. Sometimes fear motivates us to prejudice or violence; sometimes greed causes us to hoard resources so that others are robbed of the things necessary for a content existence; sometimes our aggressive tendencies push us to get

to the top at someone else's expense (and this happens in individual lives as well as in that of a country).

All of these reasons indicate in order to make our puzzle picture of peace complete, we have a lot of work to do. So let's take a look at what peace should mean for our lives and how we CAN be peacemakers.

I like this definition of peace: "Peace is a spirit and not an intellectual abstraction; it is life, not a theory." Peace is also the absence of conflict- no struggle, no warfare, no bitter words, no animosities, no harsh resentments, no deception, no prejudice, and no mistrust. Peace is the absence of fear that who we are and what we hold dear will be ridiculed, abused, or worse-ignored.

I think back to my teenage years, and there were many times when my parents and I were more often doing battle than making peace. But now I realize it was probably doubt or fear on both our parts...my parents fear I would not be successful in life without getting good grades and making good decisions, and my fear that I would never have any freedom to do what I wanted.

But peace IS: serenity...a fullness...a wholeness...a happiness... a positive well-being...right personal relationships...and a real sense of community.

Taking it one step further, in John 14:27 we read Jesus words, ***"Peace I give you, Peace I leave you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."***

And in Philippians 4:6-7 Paul says,

***"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. <sup>7</sup> And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."***

This kind of peace – the Hebrew word Shalom – is more than the absence of conflict or violence. It also includes all things good and necessary for a healthy, happy, prosperous life. So what has happened in

our world that this gift of peace that makes a beautiful picture is so often absent from our lives and the lives of so many of those living in our world today?

It's always easier to blame someone else for our problems....we would have peace if North Korea would get rid of it's nuclear weapons...or...if the two sides fighting the civil war in Syria would just get along, they wouldn't be bombing each other and killing innocent people.....or if there were no leaders who were so power hungry that they will do anything to get what they want there wouldn't be any starving people in Venezuela, and we would have a better chance at peace.

Obviously none of us can solve any of these problems. So should we just throw up our hands and give up any hope of being a peacemaker? I'd like to propose that a major reason peace is so hard, is due to the inability of us as individuals to be peacemakers in our own lives.

Jesus didn't say "Happy are the peace LOVERS; rather, happy are the peace MAKERS. And peacemaking is work. It is being an arbiter, an encourager, a restorer, a guide, a listener, and a caregiver. It is working to create conditions of peace where peace would not otherwise exist. We have to risk stepping out and trying to reconnect a few pieces of the puzzle that seem not to fit where we think they should.

I get daily email devotions from Father Richard Rohr and – believe it or not - Friday's message was actually about this very beatitude and he sums it up by saying ***"when we become peacemakers, we are no longer wielding the sword of the binary operator that divides the world into good guys and bad guys, insiders and outsiders, winning team and losing team."***

A woman by the name of Muriel Lester expressed it well when she said, ***"The job of a peacemaker is to stop war, to purify the world, to get us saved from poverty and riches, to heal the sick, to comfort the sad, to take up those who have not found God in their lives, to create joy and beauty wherever you go, to find God in everything and everyone."***

Wow – filling those sorts of roles is a challenge. In other words, peacemakers help put the peace puzzle back together. But we also have to find out where **we** fit in the puzzle – exactly what our role as a peacemaker should be.

Let me site two real life examples of people who found special ways to put a little piece of the peace puzzle together.

John Beal was a Vietnam Vet living in Seattle who suffered with post-traumatic stress syndrome, and then he suffered a series of cardiac arrests at the age of 29. Having been told he would likely only have a few months to live, Mr. Beal decided he would spend his last days trying to do something good, so he started carrying off washing machines and all other sorts of debris from the creek near his home. He was determined to find ways to make the stream support life – and he did! The Metropolitan Seattle Federation was so impressed by his success that they hired him to work part time as a waste-reduction advisor in the Duwamish River where now, thanks to his efforts, there is bountiful wildlife including spawning salmon in the river. This man's peacemaking efforts genuinely recreated life in what was a barren waste area; oh – and he lived another 27 years!

A second example is of an 85 year old retired school teacher by the name of Margaret Pickford who brought her piece of the peace puzzle to over 1800 patients by simply holding their hands...those who were anxious about getting a local anesthetic, patients who were unconscious, and those who were anxious going into surgery.

John and Margaret didn't do anything remarkably daring or extraordinarily exciting. What they did was something transforming that provided a lasting contribution. In their own special ways they were peacemakers; their own contributions to the peace puzzle.

So what are some ways WE can discover how to use our lives to contribute to peace? It might be participating in peace marches like some of you have done; it could be letter writing or making speeches; running for political office, or campaigning for a peace candidate; it might be being a member of or supporting our own Peace and Social Concerns committee like some of you do. And above all, making sure we

know our candidates for offices and how they will vote on important issues of peace, and letting others know these views.

On the other hand, it might be hand holding, writing an encouraging note to one in need, not reacting in anger when we feel we've been wronged but seeking to understand the 'why' of any difficult situation. Peacemaking is often hardest in our families, often requiring letting go of our own egos and putting the needs of others before our own.

Our reward? Being a child of God. And I like to think we ALL are children of God, we just don't always act like it! But I'm guessing our parents had times when they didn't want to claim us, either – but they loved us just the same, as does God who is with us at all times.

Be a peacemaker....we can start by learning to be at peace with our own lives and then expanding our peacemaking efforts to our families, our communities, and beyond.

And finally, as we think about the work of being peacemakers, I'd like us to reflect on this well-known prayer of St. Francis that helps us understand more clearly what it means to be a peacemaker.

***Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.***

***Where there is hatred, let me sow love.***

***Where there is injury, pardon;***

***Where there is doubt, faith;***

***Where despair, hope;***

***Where there is darkness, light.***

***And where there is sadness, joy.***

***Oh divine master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console;***

***To be understood as to understand;***

***to be loved, as to love.***

***For it is in giving that we receive;***

***It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;***

***And it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.***

May it be so.