

October 8, 2023
Promoting Peace
Matthew 5:9

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Please pray with me: God be in our heads and in our understanding. God be in our eyes and in our looking. God be in our mouths and in our speaking. God be in our hearts and in our thinking. Amen.

Yesterday, like the rest of the world, I woke up to the face of Prime Minister Netanyahu announcing, "We are at war." It is this morning's headline in the LA Times. And here we are today, hearing Jesus say, "Blessed are the peacemakers..."

Jesus was no stranger to the brutality of a nation threatened. Rome once wiped out an entire city just a few miles from the village of Nazareth where he was raised. That was how Rome kept the peace, with violence and threats of violence. They called it the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome and they hailed Caesar Augustus as the "Prince of Peace," for finally bringing an end to Roman civil war.

Jesus was well-aware of that kind of so-called peace. Such peace is not God's peace.

So, to a crowd of peasants, he paints a different picture of peace, a peace not wrought by violence but by love; a lasting peace that works from the inside out. And to a group of people powerless to broker peace treaties, he announces that peace begins right here, and right now, in their thoughts and actions toward one another and those they encounter. In this collection of teachings we know as the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus teaches the art of peacemaking.

Jesus speaks of being meek and merciful and the danger of harboring anger in our hearts. "Be angry but do not sin," was Paul's take on Jesus' teaching. "Don't let the sun set on your anger and give no opportunity for the devil." (Ephesian 4:26-27) Anger can consume us and fuel our propensity for violence and hatred. To be a peacemaker is to learn the disciplines of compassion, humility, and forgiveness, and to want wholeness more than victory.

Jesus knew the Old Testament teaching, an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," but peacemaking requires us to break the vicious cycles of violence by refusing to retaliate. "Turn the other cheek," he teaches. Peacemaking requires us to love our enemies and to pray for our enemies, because our enemies are not beyond the reach and love of God, despite the evil they may do. Jesus also taught that with humility we are to care for those in need, giving up the need to have your own horn tooted.

Pray, Jesus teaches in the Lord's Prayer, for a forgiving heart and forgive as God forgives. Pray for God's realm of peace to come on earth as it is in heaven. Pray for wholeness and reconciliation and make this your life's work.

Jesus addresses our relationship to money teaching that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. Greed can tear apart families and destroy nations. And he also addresses anxiety, which can also fuel our capacity to harm others. Trust in God. Rest in God. Walk with God. Seek God’s peace, in your heart.

This is the art of peacemaking.

Jesus asks, “Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye and not notice the log in your own eye.” (Matt 7:3) Peacemaking is more than holding a sign and wishful thinking. It requires a transformed heart that can only come through introspection and spiritual practice.

It takes more than anger, ideology, and willpower to make peace. “We need to change our hearts as well as our minds,” says Richard Rohr. He goes on to say, “People who haven’t changed their hearts can become as much a part of the problem as they oppose. Their will and egos are still totally in control with their need to be right, to win, and to have success, which almost always lead to violence of some kind.” Martin Luther King Jr. said it this way, “Violence cannot drive out darkness only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate, only love can do that.” Perhaps that is why Jesus told this crowd, “You are the light of the world, let your light shine...” Peacemaking begins within, and lasting peace comes when enemies are reconciled, and relationships are restored. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” says Jesus.

Peacemaking also calls us to creatively and constructively confront the injustices that undermine peace. We confront, not to take revenge but to restore broken relationships – to seek God’s shalom.

Shalom is the Hebrew word for peace, and it conveys a sense of wholeness and well-being in all aspects of one’s life. Peacemakers seek to make God’s shalom a reality. Jesus envisioned the kingdom of God as God’s shalom encompassing the earth.

In 1981, the General Assembly of the Christian Church met in Anaheim, California. A resolution at that assembly launched the Shalom Congregation Program. Developed by the Church and Society Department of Disciples Homeland Ministries, it was designed to be implemented in congregations, who were free to make changes as necessary to fit their situation. The Shalom congregation program enabled each congregation to determine the areas of program it wanted to emphasize. The options included domestic and familial issues, hunger, legislation, working on peace and justice issues, arms control, as well as the spiritual dynamics of the concept of Shalom.

FCCO quickly got to work. In April of 1982, the headline in Church Life read: “Countdown to Disaster – Peace Study Group.” The article began with these words, “This is your last week to decide if you are insane...” After this attention grabber, the meaning is explained. “This is the last week to decide if you are seriously concerned about the future of this planet and life for all God’s children. Join this committed group whose only insanity may be to consider the insanity

of nuclear war and want to do something about it.” The something they were going to do was a small group study on the book about the nuclear arms race titled, “Countdown to Disaster.”

Later that summer, on July 12, 1982, the Board unanimously voted to become a “Shalom Congregation” of the CC(DOC). FCCO made a one-year commitment to:

1. Send a representative to a national training event.
2. Integrate into worship and host/promote study and action experiences which lift up the vision of God’s Shalom
3. Submit a progress report at 6 months and a year-end report.

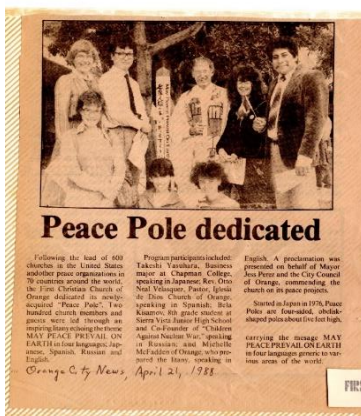
The report to the congregation said, “The document we voted on lists nine suggestions to implement the program. Our congregation was already doing all but one, so we have significantly moved toward the Anaheim Assembly’s resolution 8148 that “pursuing peace is the mandate for the church because the Prince of Peace is the head of the church.”

A church life article that same month said, (Church life – 7-20-82)

Here at FCCO, our Peace Task Force has been very busy helping to lift up the Biblical concept of Shalom [promoting] “Peacemaking” through Peace Sunday, special peace study groups, and cooperation with other peace groups.

In the coming years there were training events, educational opportunities, protests, unity walks, interfaith collaborations, the great peace march, and Peace Sundays.

On Feb. 28, 1988 the Peace Pole, located centrally in our courtyard, was dedicated. It was part of an international Peace Pole campaign, begun in Japan. It says, “May peace prevail on Earth,” in four languages, English, Russian, Japanese, and Spanish.



The planting of a peace pole at FCCO was sponsored by the church’s “Partners in Shalom Committee,” which was chaired by Beverly Kamp. Dr. John Smith was the newly installed pastor at the time of the dedication.

As was her passion and custom, Beverly Kamp, who later married David Weatherill was front and center at the dedication. She was a dedicated peacemaker throughout her life and a beautiful witness to us all.



For many years, the church letterhead, said, “A Shalom Congregation,” under the banner of our name, and then at some point, it stopped being part of our letterhead. Despite its absence in print, FCCO, has remained committed to the work of peacemaking, through our commitments to missions, the environment, the LGBTQ+ community, and the work of anti-racism. All of these commitments are expressions of our commitment to peacemaking. We remain “A Shalom Congregation.”

Today, Jesus is speaking to us! The call to peacemaking has not changed. The path of peacemaking has not changed. Nor has our commitment to peacemaking changed.

May we forever be “A Shalom Congregation,” and may our Peace Pole be a perpetual reminder of our commitment to be peacemakers. “Blessed are the peacemakers,” said Jesus. May we be numbered among the blessed.