

# Peace at All Times in All Ways

## World Communion Sunday / Peace & Global Witness Offering

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18  
College Hill Presbyterian Church, Tulsa

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"The past few months have added proof to the reality that living life in our society today involves being constantly bombarded with ever-increasing divisiveness and polarization. I'd venture to guess that simply watching and following the news has become a contributing factor of anxiety and depression in our country. And yet, avoidance isn't the answer either. The news is upsetting. It's exhausting. It's not the way we are called to be in relationship with our neighbors – locally and globally."

The opening sentences I just shared was how I opened my sermon, entitled, "Instruments of God's Peace" on this Sunday four years ago. Obviously, not much has changed in that regard in the years since, and have been made even worse by the effects of the pandemic.

Over the years, on this World Communion Sunday, when we also receive the annual Peace and Global Witness Offering, I pivot between preaching about the meaning and implications of Communion and the topic of peacemaking. This year, I thought it particularly important to emphasize the need to explore peacemaking and what that can mean in our individual lives, our congregational life, and in the life of our nation and entire world.

Therefore, it's important to start by recalling the words of Jesus in what is known as the Beatitudes section of the Sermon on the Mount, as recorded in Matthew 5, "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God**" (Matt. 5:9). Yes, as children of God, and particularly as followers of the ways and teachings of Jesus, we are all called to be peacemakers. This is an important part of our mission and ministry here at College Hill.

How are you and I, and us together as a congregation, doing in this regard? Perhaps it's best to start is with the question: What does "making peace" look like for you as an individual – in your home, your school or workplace – and for us together as a community of faith?

On one hand, being a peacemaker involves an **internal** personal sense of peace, that sense of being at peace within one's own skin. Perhaps we can describe it as serenity, **an internal quality of being calm and still even in the midst of the storms we face in life**. It is this internal peace of mind that, for many, seems more and more elusive and hard to hang onto, especially in these disorienting times.

On the other hand, there's an **external** sense of peace, a peace with others. Speaking of which, **have you noticed that you can't go very far down the road of talking about peace without entering the realm of politics?** So, let's look at the issue of how we might live out our calling to be peacemakers in the midst of divisiveness and polarization. A few years ago, the theme for the Peace and Global Witness Offering,

provided by the national **Presbyterian Peacemaking Program**, was entitled "A Season of Peace." It includes the following statement as part of its introductory material:

Peacemaking is our calling as Christians, today as in every age. And the way we make peace, especially in a violent and conflict-ridden world, is not by eliminating all conflicts but by learning to address them through peaceful means; namely, through dialogue, education, and knowledge.

**Dialogue, education, and knowledge. These three have the combined effect, at least for some, of minimizing ignorance, bias, and prejudice. They are also a non-violent way to deal with others with whom we find ourselves in conflict.** That Peacemaking Program material also rightly stated, "**The pursuit of God's peace is both an inner and outer journey where the well-being of one is held in the well-being of all.**" There is indeed a very real connection between living in peace and establishing justice for all persons. That's why I love the visual image painted in our Old Testament reading for today from Psalm 85:10, "Justice and peace shall kiss each other." It encourages us to imagine and work toward a world where justice and peace reign together.

This year's Peacemaking Program offers a reflection around the Epistle reading for today from 2 Thessalonians. The apostle Paul closed his letter to that community of faith with a benediction, "May the God of peace...grant you peace at all times in all ways. The Lord be with you" (v. 16). It's actually a prayer, and a daring one at that.

Historically, when Paul wrote this letter there was much turmoil in the church of Thessalonica, located in modern-day north central Greece. Roman oppression was prevalent and there was much hardship. That Christian community, we glean from Paul's letter, was beginning to go against the teaching that they had received, thus sowing seeds of anxiety and falsehoods in the community. He addresses their lack of action and their idleness. Yet, in this context, Paul finished his letter with words of peace.

This year's resource was prepared by the Rev. Marissa Galvan-Valle, pastor of Beechmont Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky. In her material she shares that Beverly Roberts Gaventa, in her commentary on Second Thessalonians, says that this prayer of peace is "remarkable for its completeness. It wishes: 'May the Lord of peace himself give you peace always in every way.' The writer, Paul, knows the trials and tribulations that the congregation is facing, whether it is from the outside or from the inside." There are certainly parallels within the Church today. "So, Paul desires an all-encompassing peace. [Applying this to us today] Gaventa states:

Whatever the faithful endure in the present, whatever rebellion and lawlessness threaten them in the future, and whatever perils exist because of their own disorder, they confidently expect to receive the gift of peace from the only one who is able to provide it. <sup>1</sup>

This resource concludes with something I want to share with you today. It involves **seven steps of action** that I think all of us should take to heart, and practice as part of our own **peacemaking efforts of seeking peace and justice**. They include: **reflect, change, participate, care, respect, heal, and believe**.

**Reflect:** Don't fall into idleness! Ask questions. Learn. What are the lessons that, for example, this pandemic has given us? What does this moment of time say about

peace? About justice? About love? About how these should be available for all? How can we find peace even in moments of great stress?

**Change:** If after asking questions you notice that your definition of peace is challenged, then change is needed — even if it means that you need to change the way you live, the way you go about relating to others, and the way you talk and act. Open your mind and heart to flexibility and change.

**Participate:** Don't give up in walking toward a path of peace. Don't stay in a bubble, confusing peace with "lack of conflict." Paul certainly did not do that. In all his interactions with the churches, he always sought a way of reconciliation and peace. Listen to other definitions of peace. I know that we are tired, but there is no time to retreat. Don't shut down! Participate.

**Care:** Care ... care ... care ... care ... care ... and care some more. Apathy, idleness and gossip have no business in God's kin-dom.

**Respect:** Even when someone does not think like you, talk like you, dress like you, live like you or love like you. Respect is all about seeing each other as human beings that are fallible, that are worthy, that are not perfect, that are deserving of humanity and not demonization. Every human being deserves to live in peace — at all times in all ways.

**Heal:** In this world of COVID-19, we think about physical healing, and that is very important. But having peace is also healing. War is devastating. Oppression hurts the human soul in such a way that it can destroy life. Peace heals! Working for a peace that means wellness for others is important. Working for a peace that gives rights to others is important. Working for peace as a way to eliminate the sin of trying to solve everything with war is healing — in a world that really needs to be healed.

**Believe:** And this is the last one. Believe that peace is always possible. Have faith in it. Find hope in it. Believe that the kin-dom of God, that the family of God is a real possibility and choice for this world. Believe, even when it seems bleak, that light and hope are possible. Believe! Believe! Believe! And live with the assurance, with the trust, with the unwavering knowledge that God's gift of peace that Paul gives as a blessing is our blessing as well.

May God's peace, peace always in every way, peace that is wellness and abundance for all be with you and with all the people of God, today and forevermore.

Amen.



PEACE & GLOBAL WITNESS  
SPECIAL OFFERINGS  
PEACEMAKING AND RECONCILIATION

<sup>1</sup> Gaventa, Beverly Roberts. First and Second Thessalonians: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (pp. 132–134). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition