

# Instruments of God's Peace

## World Communion Sunday / Peace & Global Witness Offering

*Psalm 85:8-13    Matthew 5:1-12*  
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 leading cause of 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.

Admittedly, it's hard not to pick a side and then vehemently defend our own opinions in ways that lead to even more divisiveness. At times we label others as 'haters' when indeed we may harbor hatred as well. Then we come to church and hear the familiar words, ascribed to Jesus, "**Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God**" (Matt. 5:9). That comes from the section called The Beatitudes in the Gospel of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. It's part of a long list of characteristics to which Jesus calls us to exhibit as those living out what he describes as the "kingdom of God," or as Matthew states it, the "kingdom of Heaven." We usually refer to it as the realm of God or kin-dom of God.

As children of God, then, we are all called to be peacemakers. So how are you and I, and us together as a congregation, doing in that regard? Perhaps it's best to start with what it means to be a peacemaker? **What does making peace look like for you as an individual – in your home and workplace? What does making peace look like for us as a congregation?** For all who identify themselves as Christians? Do I dare ask, what does peace making look like for us as a nation?

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.

On the other hand, there's an **external** sense of peace, a peace with others. I don't want to specifically address in this sermon the issue of peacemaking in the context of exhibiting military aggression, let alone going to war. Saying that, let's sincerely pray that the rhetoric between the leaders of our country and North Korea don't lead us into war. And hopefully, I will not have to address that in the near future. 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?

Instead, I want to address the issue of how we might live out our calling to be peacemakers in the midst of divisiveness and polarization. On this World Communion Sunday, when we pay special attention to our connectedness with all God's children across the globe, we also collect the annual Peace & Global Witness Offering that goes

to support the national Presbyterian Peacemaking Program, as well as our own peacemaking efforts within this congregation. A few years ago, the theme for the offering 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 of minimizing ignorance and prejudice. They are also a non-violent way to deal with others with whom we find ourselves in conflict.**

The promise of Jesus, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" acts, then, as both words of comfort and of challenge. Reflecting both those internal and external elements of peacemaking, that Peacemaking Program 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 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.

Exploring the subject of peacemaking is an invitation for us to catch a vision of what God intends the world to be. The Bible presents a vision of "shalom." Shalom is the Hebrew word that envisions a world that seeks justice, peace and the well-being of all. We are indeed living in a world that is starved for a fulfillment of that vision. It is our task to feed that hunger.

How do we, then, put the often-bad news of the world around us into the context of God's Good News. One of the things I like most about Christianity, when it is functioning at its best, is its underlying message of liberation and civility – as in the Golden Rule, treating others as we would like to be treated. For it is indeed liberating to take even one step, however small, in the direction of God's vision of shalom and a world at peace.

**The goal of peace, using its broadest definition, includes any ministry and program that works for the wholeness and well-being of all of God's creation.** That includes ministries that offer God's peace wherever there is brokenness – in individual lives, families, congregations, communities, nations, and the environment. Peacemaking can mean contributing to the needs of a local food pantry, as we do regularly here at College Hill. It can mean the establishment of a neighborhood health clinic. It can mean the effective running of an after-school program, a domestic violence initiative, a prison ministry, anti-bullying education, supporting an organization that promotes equality or reconciliation, projects that help those who are coping in the midst of a tragedy or natural disaster, or overcoming an addiction, and in new ways of living that promote a healthy environment.

As individuals and as a congregation I invite us all to continue to study, reflect and discuss the issues involved with justice and peace - and then put them into action. In that way, we become instruments of God's peace. I invite us to keep in our hearts

and minds the image in Psalm 85:10, of a world where "justice and peace shall kiss each other."

On this World Communion Sunday, as part of the celebration of our oneness and unity with brothers and sisters across this sanctuary, across the street, across the nation, and across the globe, strive, as children of God to be peacemakers. May that always be a primary guiding principle for our life and ministry here at College Hill. For it's one of those issues that fall into the category of: If you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem. So, what part will you play? Will we play?

Amen.