

Sunday Centerpoint

Key Takeaway:

1. Peace is more than the absence of conflict. The Hebrew concept of shalom points to wholeness, harmony, and healing in relationship, not simply avoiding people or situations that cause tension.
2. Avoidance is not peacemaking. Cutting off relationships, blocking people on social media, or retreating into communities of like-minded people may bring comfort, but it does not bring the open, expansive life that Jesus described.
3. Acceptance is not the same as approval. We can welcome people as individuals of great worth & value to God without endorsing every choice they make. This is, in fact, how God has treated us.
4. Peacemaking is personal responsibility. Romans 12:18 calls each individual to pursue peace as far as it depends on them. Peace is not someone else's job.
5. Children of God look like their Father. Peacemakers are identified as children of God because they reflect the welcoming, reconciling nature of God himself. The question is not just whether we believe this — it is whether we are living it.
6. The peacemaker's mindset centers on two questions. Who will I welcome into my life? And how will I share God's love with them?

Discussion Questions:

1. The preacher drew a distinction between avoidance and peacemaking. Can you think of a relationship or situation in your own life where you have chosen avoidance and called it peace? What was the difference between how that felt and what genuine peace might have looked like?
2. The sermon pointed out that Jesus actively welcomed people his culture had been taught to avoid, and that he defined "neighbor" as the very person his listeners had been raised to look down on or fear. Who is that person in your context — the one you have been conditioned to see as an outsider?
3. The preacher said, "We can accept someone without approving of his or her choices." Where do you find that line most difficult to hold in practice? What makes it hard to separate acceptance from approval?
4. The sermon described conditional acceptance — "I will welcome you if" or "I will welcome you when." What conditions, spoken or unspoken, do you place on who gets access to your life, your table, or your community?
5. The sermon ended with two questions: Who can I welcome, and how can I love them? How would your answers to those two questions change the way you spend your time and money this week?

Practical Applications:

1. Reach across a divide. Identify one person in your life with whom you have allowed distance to grow — whether through avoidance, silence, or conflict. Take one concrete step toward them. Send a message, make a call, or invite them to share a meal.
2. Examine your table. Think about who regularly has access to your home, your time, and your life. Ask honestly whether your inner circle reflects the open-handed welcome of God or a set of unspoken conditions. Then invite someone new in.
3. Practice the two questions daily. For the next seven days, begin each morning by asking: Who can I welcome today, and how can I love them? Keep a brief journal of what you notice.
4. Pursue a peace you have been avoiding. Identify one relationship where conflict or tension exists and you have chosen distance over resolution. Pray specifically for that person each day this week, and ask God to show you what pursuing peace in that relationship would require of you.

