

The Peacemaker
Give a Peace of Your Mind
January 22, 2017

PRELUDE – King of Love

**Worship Songs – King of Love / This I Believe /
Prayer**

Announcements – Video

Feature – What’s So Funny / Offering

Good morning everyone.

As Shannon said, today we’re continuing in our series, *The Peacemaker*. And of the four messages in this series, I think this is the one that I feel most passionate about because what I’m going to tell you today really gets to the heart of the matter. This gets to the bottom line issue of what it means to be a peacemaker.

And I suppose that, since I’m talking about the heart, I should probably also say that the heart of this message and, in fact, the heart of this entire

series goes back to the single message that I did on the Sunday following the recent Presidential election. I'm sure you remember all the anger and angst that was expressed by both sides – winners and losers. We heard some of it again last Friday.

That outpouring really bothered me because I felt like – and I still do feel like – not only does it not move us any closer towards being united as a nation but, more importantly, many Christians are being sucked into behaving the way everyone else behaves. It isn't even on our radar that Jesus might want us to approach those with whom we disagree in a different manner ...

... which is why we act just like everyone else in our conversations, in our Facebooking, our Tweeting and however else we express our opinions. For far too many of us, it's about “our side” (whether our side is liberal or conservative) ... it's about “our side” being right and “them” being empty-headed or intolerant or immoral and always, always “just plain wrong – so very

wrong.”

So, I gave a message which I called “Dreams and Nightmares” – a title which was inspired the words one commentator used to describe the shocking result of the election. “A dream come true for millions of Americans,” he said. “A nightmare for millions of others.”

In that message (which, by the way, is posted on our website if you would like to watch, listen to or read it), I focused primarily on one verse from the Apostle Paul’s letter to the Christians who were part of the church in the city of Rome.

Here’s what he told them (and us, as well, if we’re followers of Jesus):

*Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep
with those who weep. Romans
12:15 (NLT)*

And my main point in that message was that part

of what it means to be a Christian is that we empathize with people. We mentally and emotionally put ourselves in their place and try to see what they see and feel what they feel.

And we do that because, that's what our Heavenly Father did for us. That's why Jesus came to be our savior. God is a God of empathy. We sang about it earlier in the service: *on the mountain high or in the valley low, the King of Love my Shepherd is*. Whether we're rejoicing or whether we're weeping, our God is with us. He feels what we feel. And He loves us even if our feelings are not right.

Therefore we, if we're Christians, are empowered by the Holy Spirit to do that for one another and for the world around us. *And that's what brings unity of heart and spirit even when we don't agree on issues.*

And that's important because empathy isn't about compromising truth or giving up what you believe to be right. It's about caring for people,

loving people right where they are, whether they're right or wrong.

“So, if you're a political conservative,” I asked, “who do you know that's really upset about this election? Find out why and, as much as possible, weep with them. I dare you.”

And then I gave the same challenge to the politically liberal among us. “Who do you know that's really happy about this election? Find out why and, as much as possible, rejoice with them. I dare you.”

Afterwards, I had several folks – both liberals and conservatives – tell me that I just didn't get it.

- “How in the world can you be sad for those who are upset that Hillary lost?”
- “How can you be happy for those who are glad that Trump won?”

That really impacted me and I thought about it a

lot in the weeks that followed. I wondered, *what are we (who call ourselves Christians) missing, that such an idea would be so difficult to receive - even offensive to some people?*

At first I thought, “Maybe they just misheard me.”

- Maybe they heard me saying “you should be happy that Trump won, even if you aren’t” (which I wasn’t).
- Or maybe they heard me saying “you should be sad that Hillary lost, even if you aren’t” (which, again, I wasn’t).

Series Review

Anyway ... as I wrestled with this, I felt like the Lord impressed on me that that problem really isn’t a misunderstanding of empathy. The problem is *a lack of vision* that so many of us have – and not just the people who had the courage to push back on what I said in that message, but all

of us, including me. I put myself at the head of the line on this ...

The problem is a lack of vision. Specifically, we just don't have it in our head that part of our calling in this world as followers of Jesus ... and by the way, I should be clear that what I am saying this morning is really directed towards Christians and so, if you're *not* a Christian – if you don't believe in Jesus as your savior and you don't follow Him as your Leader – you don't have to do any of what I'm going to talk about this morning.

You're welcome to *try it*, and if you do, I think you'll see that Jesus was really pretty smart and it's worth knowing what He says about things. But, what I'm going to say is not binding you or on an expectation of how you should live your life. This is what Jesus tells His followers to do.

Anyway, as I was saying ... the vision problem that affects so many Christians is that we don't have it in our thinking that a huge part of our calling in

this world is to be men and women of peace.

“Blessed are the peacemakers,” Jesus said, “for they will be called the children of God.” Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

So, we talked about what that meant in the first week of this series.

Jesus is saying, “if you want to increase your overall level of happiness (which is what He means by the word “blessed”), then embrace a lifestyle of peacemaking. Make it a habit to do the kinds of things that resolve conflict and restore harmony in your relationships and in your world.”

By the way, that’s how we’ve defined “peacemaking” for this series.

“Peacemaking” is the courageous, proactive effort to resolve conflict and restore harmony whenever necessary – whether that’s in your own personal relationships or as you interact with the world around you.

And in the first week of this series we saw why Jesus said that peacemaking would make His followers happy. When you embrace a lifestyle of peacemaking, you will be living a life consistent with what it means to be God's offspring. You will be acting as God himself *would act* and *has acted* in this world.

For of all the ways God is described in the Bible, the number one term or phrase (in one form or another) is the "God of Peace." In fact (and we saw this last week), the whole story of the Bible – and the entire mission of God – can be summarized in terms of peace.

- Peace created
- Peace destroyed because of sin.
- Peace won on the cross.
- Peace available in the hearts and in the communities of those who know Jesus
- And peace that will be established once and

for all in this world when Christ returns.

Our God is “The Peacemaking God,” so it is only natural that his children also be peacemakers.

And that’s the goal of this series: how do we do that in real life?

Well, last week, we learned that the foundation of peacemaking is the internal peace that we ourselves possess. For the truth is ...

You can’t be a person of peace *externally* – you can’t be a peacemaker – unless you yourself are peaceful *at the core*.

We say it all the time around here: *you cannot give to others what you yourself do not possess.*

Jesus said that if you and I have conflict and tension and turmoil in our hearts, that’s what’s going to come out of mouths and out of our lives.ⁱ And instead of being *peace-makers*, we’re going to be *peace-breakers*. We’re going to be people who

cause conflict; people who damage and maybe even destroy relational harmony.

And we discovered that what it takes to establish and maintain peace at the core of our lives pretty much comes down to two things:

- Peace with God that comes when we trust Christ as our savior.
- Peace with self that comes by constantly cleaning out the emotional and spiritual garbage that tends to build up in our hearts and choke out peace.

We don't have time to go back through what that is but, if you were not here last Sunday, I strongly suggest if you struggle with internal peace that you check out the message on our website or our app.

Two Thought Experiments

So, the “Peace Core” (as I called it last week) is the foundation of being a peacemaker. And, today, we’re going to add to that foundation by turning the focus outward. Instead of looking at what’s going on inside, we’re going to talk about what we perceive when we look “out there” at the people and the world around us.

And the way I want to get into this is to do a little thought experiment for a few minutes. And then I’m going to read you a story from the Bible and then we’ll tie it together and try to make a few applications.

So, first, the thought experiment: we’re going to put up a few pictures on the screen and as you see each one, what is the first thought that comes to you about the person or people you see?

Here’s the first one.

Picture 1

Ok, here's the next one.

Picture 2

And the next.

Picture 3

And the next.

Picture 4

And one more.

Picture 5

Ok, now that we've done that – and we'll come back to it shortly – I want to read a story which will probably be familiar to you if you've been around church for a while.

It's set in the ancient city of Nineveh which was, apparently, a very wicked place because the Bible tells us that God decided to send the Hebrew

prophet, Jonah, to announce that judgment was coming.

As you probably know, Jonah wasn't too happy about that, so he tried to run and hide. No way he was taking that assignment! But, as you probably also know, God figured out a not-so-pleasant way to get Jonah's attention and then told him again: "Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you."

And this time, Jonah listened.

In chapter 3 verse 4 of the Book of Jonah we read that ...

On the day Jonah entered the city, he shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" *Jonah 3:4 (NLT)*

After his ride in the belly of the great fish, Jonah wasn't going to mess around. He got right to the point: "The deal is done, the decision is made and

judgment is coming.”

But, then, something quite unexpected happened.

The people of Nineveh believed God’s message, and from the greatest to the least, they decided to go without food and wear sackcloth to show their sorrow. Jonah 3:5 (NLT)

They didn’t make excuses. They didn’t try to justify themselves.

Instead, they seemed to understand why God would judge them and they agreed with it – so much so that they repented and changed their ways!

And ...

*When God saw that they had put a stop to their evil ways, he had mercy on them and didn’t carry out the destruction he had threatened.
Jonah 3:10 (NLT)*

Now, as a preacher or a prophet, that's what you want to happen, right? That's why you do what you do. You want people to hear what God says, examine themselves and then respond appropriately.

But that's *not* what happens.

The Bible says that ...

This change of plans upset Jonah, and he became very angry. Jonah 4:1 (NLT)

Now, that's just bizarre.

A preacher preaches an eight word sermon and a massive number of people respond in an overwhelming manner. In the whole of scripture, there is nothing like this recorded anywhere. Even Jesus himself never had results like this.

This is a great victory. It ought to be cause for

great celebration.

But it isn't. Instead, Jonah is angry.

And he says ...

*“Just kill me now, LORD! I’d rather be
dead than alive because nothing I
predicted is going to happen.”*

Jonah 4:3 (NLT)

Now we see a clue as to the issue.

Jonah holds very dear an image of himself as “prophet” and by giving mercy to the people of Nineveh instead of judgment, God is not reinforcing that image.

And that makes Jonah angry. All he can think about is how he looks like a failure. “Nothing I predicted is going to happen.”

So, God challenges him:

“Is it right for you to be angry about this?”
Jonah 4:4 (NLT)

But Jonah doesn't respond.

Instead, the Bible says that ...

Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.
Jonah 4:5 (NIV)

You can almost hear him thinking:

- God said he was going to destroy this place!
- He sent me to *preach* that it would be destroyed!
- And I'm going to sit here forever if that's what it takes because *I am a prophet!*”

And that's what Jonah does. He sits. We don't know for how long but we do know that, at some point, God decides to do a thought experiment

with Jonah.

The Bible says that He causes a vine to spring up so Jonah can have some additional shade. And Jonah is very happy about that. Apparently, the shelter he built wasn't very good.

But then God sends a worm to eat the vine and it dies. And *then* God sends a scorching east wind and the sun blazes down on Jonah's head so strongly that he grows lightheaded and faint.

And this makes him angry. He really needed that plant.

But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?"

*"It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead." Jonah 4:9
(NIV)*

Now, there's a little more to the story – a little

more to this thought experiment – and we’ll come back to it shortly.

But, first, I want to go back to those pictures we saw a little while ago. (And I promise, this is all going somewhere!)

What did you think when you saw this picture?

If we could be really honest, some of us would admit that our first thought was something like “whiners” ... “snowflakes” ... “Trump won, get over it.”

What did you think when you saw this picture?

If we could be really honest, some of us would admit that our first thought was “thugs” ... “troublemakers.”

What did you think when you saw this picture?

If we could be really honest, some of us would admit that our first thought was “right wingers” ... “Bible thumpers” ... “haters.”

How about this one?

If we could be really honest, some of us would admit that our first thought was “spoiled” ... “one-percenter” ... “stuck-up.”

And the last one?

If we could be really honest, some of us would admit that our first thought was “wetbacks” ... “freeloaders.”

A Question of Perception

Now, I am not going through this exercise to be critical or condemning of anyone here or watching online – because I thought some of those same things, too.

The reason I'm taking everyone through this experiment is to point out that for very few (if any) of us, our first thought was, "now, *there's someone* who has dreams and desires, cares and concerns, needs and problems that are just as important and legitimate to *them* as *mine* are to *me*." For most of us, that's probably not even our *last* thought.

"Well, come on Rick. That's because their dreams and desires, cares and concerns, needs and problems *aren't* legitimate. They *aren't* important. In fact, they're just messed up. And the sooner they come to their senses and realize that, the better off we'll all be."

And that could be true. Probably is true in some cases.

But that's not what we're talking about. What we're talking about is being a person of peace in our world and how that's related to the way in which we perceive others – their dreams and

desires, cares and concerns, needs and problems
– *in comparison to ourselves.*

And the Bible is very clear about that for those
who are followers of Jesus.

Paul writes to the Philippian Church:

*Do nothing out of selfish ambition or
vain conceit. Rather, in humility
value others above yourselves, not
looking to your own interests but
each of you to the interests of the
others.*

You know what that means? And I'm going to get
real personal here.

It means as a an old-white-guy conservative-
evangelical Christian, I do not have the right to be
so self-centered and so conceited as to think that
my interests – my dreams and desires, cares and
concerns, needs and problems – are any more
valuable than those of the people or groups we
just saw.

Now, that doesn't mean I need to agree with them. Doesn't even mean I need to help them. This is about how I *perceive* the others in my world, especially those who are not like me.

... which is what Paul says in the very next few sentences:

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage. Instead, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. Philippians 2:3-7(NIV)

In other words, the attitude that Jesus had was “it’s not about me.” In his time on earth, Jesus – the Prince of Peace – didn’t have to be first, right, loved, respected or anything else ... *even though*, as God in the flesh, he could have rightfully demanded all of those things. He wasn’t nothing

but he *made himself* nothing.

See, this is not about who is right or wrong. This is about valuing others as much as we value ourselves.

That's the point God was making with Jonah. The purpose of His thought experiment was to reveal to Jonah how little he valued the inhabitants of Nineveh.

After Jonah said he was angry about the plant; so angry he wished he was dead (Jonah was a real drama queen ... or king ... or whatever) ... after he said that ...

The Lord said,

*“You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.
Jonah 4:10 (NIV)*

In other words, “Jonah, this plant was just a disposable object, a literal throwaway, here today and gone tomorrow.”

And if you think is worth making that big of a deal over something that trivial ...

“Why should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left?”

Jonah 4:11 (NIV)

In other words, “Why would I not want *them* to live even more than you wanted *your plant* to live? Why would I not show mercy in response to their repentance and spare them?”

Two Ways of “Being”

Now, we have no idea how Jonah responded at that point because that’s the last verse in the book of Jonah. That’s where the story ends.

I do wonder, however, if the reason the story ends there is because it's meant to be a challenge to us – *how are we going to respond?* Are we going to perceive the inhabitants of our own personal Nineveh in the way that Jonah did? Or in the way that God did?

And there is a huge difference.

To God, Nineveh was *people* ...

... people who, apparently, were clueless about spiritual reality. “They can’t tell their right hand from their left,” God says of them.

They don’t have the spiritual background that Jonah does. It could even be that they’ve never before known that God even exists, let alone has a standard for how human beings are supposed to live – something that Jonah would have known from birth.

And so, when they repent, God has compassion for

them.

But what did Nineveh represent to Jonah? It represented not people, but success or failure as a prophet. Nineveh would either reinforce or tear down the image of “fire-breathing prophet” that he had developed over the years. Nineveh was there to prove him right ...

... which meant that, to Jonah, the inhabitants of Nineveh were not really *people*; they were merely *objects* ...

... no different from the plant that existed only to provide him with shelter from the hot sun.

And this gets to the heart of the matter. This gets to the bottom line issue of what it means to be a peacemaker.

We said last week that you can't be a peacemaker unless you have peace yourself on the inside. You also cannot be a peacemaker unless you see people as people and not as objects.

Stated more positively, peacemakers see people as *people* and not as *objects* who merely serve some utilitarian purpose in their lives.

How do you know if you're seeing people as objects?

Well, it's not a black and white thing – there's somewhat of a sliding scale with “object” on one end and “person” on the other and how we perceive and treat others falls somewhere on that scale.

But, in general, when you think of the needs and desires of others as secondary to and less legitimate than yours, you're thinking of them as objects and not as people. They are either allies who support you, enemies who threaten you or beings that are simply irrelevant.

For example, to Jonah, the inhabitants of Nineveh were just objects because their destiny wasn't as

important (in his mind) as his. All that really mattered in the situation was whether or not his need to be “the prophet” had been met. So, the fact that God spared them served to make them his enemies! They were a threat to his self-image. And so he sat on the hill watching and waiting and hoping for their destruction.

I’ll get a little closer to home and make it even more personal. This morning when I got up, Jetta was sick. And all of a sudden I had things added to my agenda for this morning which is not a good thing. I have very little margin energy-wise and timewise on Sunday mornings. And each time she told me what she needed me to do for her my reaction was not one of peace. You know why? Because she had become an object to me instead of a person with needs and desires as important and legitimate as mine. She was something that needed to be “done” that I didn’t have time to do.

It’s amazing how whenever I preach something, God seems to find a way to make me actually live

it. Brother.

Anyway, if you want to be a peacemaker – someone who is able to resolve conflict and restore harmony, you have to see people as people and not as objects.

Of course, some might say, “Ok, Rick, that’s all well and good but you haven’t actually made the case that the ability to be a peacemaker is tied to how we perceive others.”

So let me explain why it matters so much.

When others treat *you* as an object – someone whose needs and desires don’t really matter, someone who is merely an obstacle or a stepping stone or totally irrelevant – how do you feel about them? You’re guarded and cautious around them! It’s almost impossible to be at peace with someone who treats us an object and not a person ... which means it obviously works in the other direction.

As long as I perceive the crabby guy who lives next door or who works with me or goes to school with me as a “pain in the butt” (an object) there’s very little hope that things will get better.

As long as I perceive my ex-spouse (or my current spouse for that matter) as “a jerk” (an object) I’m almost guaranteed that he or she will be one. In fact, I actually *need* them to be a jerk so that I can be right and justify my continued bad attitude and behavior towards them.

As long as I perceive my children or my parents as headaches that won’t go away – as long as they are objects to me – I will unconsciously repel them. And they will become my enemy or somehow learn to use me as an ally or, eventually, just ignore me.

And if I continue to perceive the nameless, faceless people who wait my tables, check my groceries, answer the phone when I call to complain about my cable not working, teach my

kids math and reading – if I continue to perceive these individuals as “human machines” – objects designed first and foremost meet my needs, then I will find the world to be cold, distant, unsafe and unfriendly.

And that’s one way to live – where others are simply objects to me.

But there’s another way; a better way. It’s the way modeled by God himself at Nineveh and in Jesus of Nazareth: to see others as people created by God, loved by God, and therefore worthy of love and compassion even when they’re wrong, even they don’t deserve it, even when I don’t agree with them, even when they treat me poorly.

If we’re going to be instruments of peace in this world, let the same attitude that characterized Christ must be the attitude that characterizes us.

Let’s pray to that end.

<prayer>

Feature – Walk a Mile in My Shoes

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Next week, final message – “Peace Rules” – how to handle various situations in ways that lead to peace; what it means to forgive someone and what forgiveness does and does not mean for relationships going forward; whether or not to intervene in conflicts and how to do that.
2. Football Sunday on Feb 4th
3. On Feb 11th, “At the Movies” returns – how Hollywood communicates the gospel without knowing it. Great time to invite people who don’t typically go to church.
4. Expect a lot of visitors, that’s why volunteer fair as you leave today is so important. Hospitality and ministry. *Highlight tech area.*

Endnotes

¹ Luke 6:45