

The Peacemaker
The Peace Core
January 15, 2017

PRELUDE – Jesus

**Worship Songs – Jesus / Alleluia, He Has
Loved Us**

Prayer – Naomi

Video – Ministry Moment

Feature Song – Soldier / Offering

Good morning everyone! Thanks volunteers who made it here – full band, tech, childcare.

I think that song is a good way to pick up where we left off last week in this series, *The Peacemaker*, because there's so much conflict and divisiveness in our world and in our relationships that it's a real struggle, a real battle to find peace ... which sounds a little odd when you say it like that because most people think of peace as *the absence of conflict*

(which it's not), so to say “you have to *battle* for peace” seems contradictory.

But it's true.

It's often a great challenge to establish peace. It's often *an even greater challenge* to maintain peace once it's been established ... which is why, quite frankly, many of us choose to be *peace-fakers* instead of *peace-makers*. It's a lot easier to ignore conflict than to face it (at least for a while). It's a lot easier to pretend that everything is OK when it isn't (at least for a while) ...

... which is why, last week ...

We defined “peacemaking” as the courageous, proactive effort to resolve conflict and restore harmony whenever necessary.

As one author puts it:

- Peacemakers don't run *from* the fight; they run *to* it.
- Peacemakers don't "shush" both sides; they intervene on behalf of both.
- Peacemakers don't demonize their enemies; instead, they remember and value that those folks are made in the image of God.

Peacemaking is courageous and proactive.

Or, as I said last week: *peacemaking isn't for pansies!*

Peacemakers do what it takes to resolve conflict and restore relational harmony *and that matters* because without relational

harmony, it's almost impossible for there to be wholeness and well-being in our lives ...

... which is why Jesus, in his most famous sermon ever – the Sermon on the Mount, said ...

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

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

“Furthermore,” Jesus says, “when you do that, you will be living a life consistent with

what it means to be God’s image bearer and God’s offspring. You will be acting as God himself *would act* and *has acted* in this world” (which is a sure-fire prescription for happiness) ... for God is first and foremost the “God of Peace.” He is the Peacemaking God.

In fact, the whole story of the Bible – and the entire mission of God – can be summarized in terms of peace.

- In the beginning, God creates humans and to live in peace in a perfect and beautiful creation.
- But humans disobey God and peace is destroyed.
 - Adam and Eve blame each other,

become mistrusting of each other. And that conflict and tension becomes a perpetual issue between men and women in general.

- Cain murders his brother Abel because of jealousy and becomes a hunted and haunted man. And the cycle of violence continues.

- Eventually, God *courageously and proactively* becomes a man in the person of Jesus of Nazareth to bring peace – to resolve the conflict between humanity and Himself and to eventually restore harmony to all of creation – through His death on the cross. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “He himself becomes our peace.”

- And one day, the Bible tells us, Jesus will come again as the Prince of Peace to usher in a kingdom of everlasting peace.ⁱ
- And in the interim, as children of the God of Peace, as the spiritual offspring of The Peacemaking God, we who believe in Jesus and follow him are called to be peacemakers.

If anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creation. The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

2 Corinthians 5:17-18 (NIV)

So then let us pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.

Romans 14:19 (NIV)

And those “things which make for peace” – that’s what we’re going to be talking about in the *third and fourth* weeks of this series ... but before we get to that, today – in the *second* week of this series – we need to talk about “the Peace Core.”

What’s In Comes Out

And when I say “the Peace Core” I don’t mean the Peace C-O-R-P-S. I mean the Peace C-O-R-E. I mean what’s at the core of your being; what’s going on deep down inside of you.

And the reason that matters is that whatever is going on “in there” eventually affects what goes on “out here.”

Or, as Jesus puts it:

A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart.

What you say flows from what is in your heart. *Luke*
6:45 (NLT)

If you have conflict and tension and turmoil in your heart, that's what's going to come out of your mouth; that's what's going to come out of your life.

And instead of being a peacemaker, you're going to be a peace-breaker. You're going to be a person who causes conflict; a person who damages and maybe even destroys relational harmony.

Jesus' brother James makes the point even more directly:

What is causing the quarrels and fights among you? Don't they come from the evil desires at war within you? James 4:1 (NLT)

Now, I'll just throw this out for whatever it's worth: for some of us, what Jesus and James say here might be *the single most important thing we've ever heard, relationally speaking ...* because our whole life has been one long string of strife – one relational catastrophe after another – and we can't figure out why.

Are we just unlucky? Do we “just happen” to keep choosing impossible people and situations and then finding ourselves in never-ending conflict?

That might be the problem.

Or, it might be that *we're* the problem. Because we are not at peace internally, because there is a war within us, the seeds of relational chaos keep coming out of us. And unless and until we address what's going on in our hearts – unless and until we somehow figure out how to establish and maintain peace internally – we're going to keep on planting those seeds and harvesting the same results. The same pattern is going to keep on repeating itself.

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

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

So, let's talk about the internal war and what it takes to establish and maintain peace. Let's talk about what it looks like to be peaceful at the core.

Peace With God

And let's start with the most fundamental core issue of all: peace with God.

How does that happen? Why is it even necessary?

The Apostle Paul explains it like this in the 5th chapter of his letter to the church at Rome:

Since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done

for us. Romans 5:1 (NLT)

And the implication here is that unless and until you and I *are* made right by our faith in Jesus, we are not at peace with God.

Now, a lot of people don't understand this. A lot of people think that everyone in the world starts out "right" with God and the way you get "wrong" with God is you *do something* really bad – something so wrong that you are no longer right with God.

In other words, you start out having peace with God but then you do something terrible to mess it up – you commit some really gross sin which then puts you at odds with God.

But reality is exactly the opposite. Reality is that everyone is *already* at odds with God for everyone is born into sin as a sinner. Reality

is that part of the internal war going on in everyone (whether they realize it or not) is a war against God. God says “here’s how you should live” and all of us say, at some level: “nah – I don’t really care what You say. I’m going to do it my way.” That disobedience is evidence of a deep problem of rebellion.

And something has to be done to address that state of war and bring about reconciliation ... which is what Jesus did ...

... as Paul further explains:

While we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son ...

Not only is this so, but we also boast in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Romans 5:10,11 (NIV)

And the reason we boast in God is because we can't boast in ourselves.

- It's *God* who makes the way of peace.
- It's *God* who provides for reconciliation through what Jesus did in his death on the cross.

As we also always say around here, *it's not about what we do for God, it's about what God does for us*. We call that “grace” – being treated far better than we deserve or can earn.

Of course, the question is “what do we need to do to receive that gift of grace and reconciliation and come to peace with God?”

Many of us already know this, so I'll try to explain it as quickly and as simply as I can – as simple as “ABC.”

First of all “A” ... Agree that you are in need of a savior.

You and I have to agree with God that we are sinners which is not easy to do because it's offensive to us. No one – especially nice people like us - enjoys the idea that they are an enemy of God.

But that's the first thing.

Second, “B” ... Believe that Jesus died for your sins and that He rose again.

Trust that what He did on your behalf is enough; that you don't need to try to make

up for or atone for your sins, which is also not easy to do. No one likes being a charity case but that's exactly what we are. We can't do a thing about our situation. It's all grace and it's all God.

Then, finally, “C” ... Come and follow Him.

“Come to me and follow me” – that was Jesus’ invitation to whoever would listen; whether that person was a great saint or a great sinner or a great skeptic (which pretty much covers all of us in this room). Come and join His movement and community called “the church.” Learn what He says about how to live. And then, as He gives you the ability, live like Him.

Agree, Believe and Come – that’s how we are reconciled with God once and for all

through faith in Christ. That's how we have peace with God at the very core of our being.

And I think some of us need to take this step today. If you want someone to help you with that, stop down front after the service.

Now, as I was researching and preparing for this message, I read a lot of articles and sermons that pretty much stopped right here, as if once you have agreed, believed and come to Jesus, you're done. You have peace.

But, while it's true that coming to Christ is the key to *establishing* peace internally, it's also true that *maintaining* peace at the core takes more than a shift in our standing

before God.

Everything does rest on that – you can't be at peace at the deepest level of your being without having peace with God – but it takes more than that to experience peace on a daily basis.

Clearing Out the Clutter

A couple weeks ago, I had an experience which I think might be a pretty good object lesson on this.

For about five days, from December 23rd through December 27th our house was filled to overflowing with lots of people, lots of food, and lots of presents; plus lots of baby toys and baby noise and baby food and baby diapers; plus lots of dogs (who didn't always

get along with each other) and, occasionally, doggie pee-pee and doggie doo-doo.

And, on the fifth day of Christmas, the clutter of it all was just too much. My house was a wreck. A fun wreck. A joyful wreck. A filled-with-people-who-I-dearly-love wreck. But I was overwhelmed. I was stressed out. I kept going behind everyone picking up messes, cleaning up messes.

Now, I am by nature a person who likes things clean and organized but this was over the top. I was becoming obsessive. I could not stop. And the more I cleaned and organized, the more irritated I was.

And as much as I tried to remind myself of what we talked about before Christmas (and talk about before every Christmas) that “it’s

not about me. I am the Lord's servant," I had reached my limit.

And it was time for them all to *go*. Anywhere. Other than my house.

And they finally did.

And an amazing thing happened. When they left, all the clutter went with them. And a sense of peace and calm was restored in my home.

The point I'm making is that sometimes, there is so much clutter in our hearts that we have no room for peace. And until the clutter is removed, we're just not going to have peace at the core.

There's a fascinating story in the Gospels where Jesus meets a man whose heart and

soul was *literally* cluttered; *demonically* cluttered. In Mark's telling of the incident, Jesus and the disciples sailed across the Lake of Galilee to the region of Gerasenes.

When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an impure spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him anymore, not even with a chain. For he had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do

you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? In God's name don't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you impure spirit!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

Mark 5:1-10 (NIV)

So, Jesus obliges and sends the demons into a herd of pigs, who then run headlong off of a cliff. Mark tells us that the people of the town then went out to see what had happened.

When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been

*possessed by the legion of
demons, sitting there, dressed
and in his right mind.*

Mark 5:15 (NIV)

A huge change, wouldn't you say? All the junk that was in his soul – literally – had been removed and he was at peace.

And just to be 100% clear ... sometimes the reason some of us have no peace is because there is a demonic force operating in our lives.

I'm not sure how that happens – the Bible doesn't tell us how this guy ended up with a legion of demons – but sometimes it does. My observation is that a lot of times it's because we've said yes to something very dark and evil in our lives.

And if that's the situation we're in, the first thing we need to do is to make peace with God in the way we just talked about. A/B/C – agree, believe, and come.

And if we've done that, if we're Christians, then we need to have some folks who are strong in the Spirit to pray with us and pray over us until we're released. We don't make a big deal about it here at NHCC but we do that and if you need that, come talk to Kitti down front at the end of the service.

That said, for most of us, we're not possessed by a legion of demons like this guy was, but there is a legion of clutter and junk in our hearts that keeps us from experiencing peace. And the solution for us is the same as it was for this guy: *an encounter with Christ that cleans out the clutter.*

“Well, what kind of clutter are you talking about, Rick?”

I suppose just about anything could become “clutter of the heart” if you let it but, as pastors, we’ve done a lot of counseling with folks over the years and we’ve seen the same types of peace-destroying issues again and again. So, I want to give you a list of six of those issues that seem to be pretty common; six pieces of junk that have the ability to crowd out peace in our lives.

These aren’t in any particular order, by the way, but the first one is ...

Issue 1. Unforgiveness and bitterness that comes from being wounded by another person.

That person might be a parent, might be a spouse, might be a teacher, might be a friend or a co-worker, who knows. Someone, somewhere along the line, wounded us and it may not have even been intentional, but we were hurt.

Here is how you know if you are bitter:

- If you have a self-protective approach to relationships, you're probably bitter;
- If you have anger at people who are not the problem, you're probably bitter.

You're transferring your baggage from the past to a person, or persons, in the present – you're applying a filter to people and events that are unrelated to what happened before.

And as long as you remain bitter, peace at

your core will be very difficult.

If you want peace, you have to let go of your bitterness by forgiving the offender. And by forgiving, I don't necessarily mean things go back to the way they were. There is a difference between forgiveness and reconciliation and restoration of a relationship.

Forgiveness means “You owe me for how you've hurt me, but I'm not going to take that out of you. I'm going to let go of the debt. I'm going to stop ruminating and obsessing over how you hurt me and what you owe me.”

If you want to clear out the bitterness, you've got to either look that offender in the eye, or if they're not around anymore,

you've got to do that in your heart, and let it go. Forgive them just as in Christ God forgave you (which is why making peace with God is the foundation of internal peace).

And keep on forgiving (70x7 Jesus said) because rarely does forgiveness stay nailed down.

Issue 2. Unresolved grief that comes from being wounded by tragedy or misfortune.

This piece of clutter is characterized by thinking “What life/fate/God did to me back then is the reason my life today is not what I want it to be. Somebody died (or) some big plans that I made for my life - I thought I was going to go this direction and then I didn't. I thought I was going to have kids - I didn't.”

Some tragedy or misfortune has caused grief. And it *should* cause grief. But grief needs to resolve and when grief doesn't resolve then it becomes clutter that blocks internal peace.

Here's how you know if unresolved grief is an issue. If you have a fatalistic approach to life, you're probably suffering from this. When you think about new goals or you think about current projects, or even when you think about relationships, you think, "What's the use in even trying? If you love someone, they're just going to die. So why love? If you build it, whatever "it" is, it will just get torn down. Somebody is just going to shot out holes in it so why even bother to build?"

It's fatalism.

And to clear out the clutter on this one, what you need to do is what the Bible calls "lament."

Christians tend to want to make everything look happy, sappy and rosy and "praise Jesus about everything" (and we do need to praise Jesus) but there's this really great thought in the Bible called lament. Two-thirds of the Psalms are lament. And what happens is, in the Psalm, David, or whoever is writing, says, "God, this is what I know about your character; this is what I see about reality. This doesn't add up and quite frankly it sucks!" I use that language intentionally because that's what lament is: "This sucks!" But, lament always ends up with, "I don't see reality like you do Lord, so I still trust you

anyway.” This sucks, but I trust you.

Issue 3. Self-condemnation that comes from being wounded by our own sinful choices.

A lot of times, people who have this issue will say, “What I did to myself - the sin I committed; the foolish way I spent my money, or lived my life, or took care of my body (or whatever) is the reason my life is not as it should be” or “it’s the reason God is against me, because I did that.”

Several years back, we had a service where I put up the Ten Commandments and asked people to just reflect on them. Afterwards, a person come to me in tears saying “I’m just not going to go to heaven when I die.”

And I said, “Why is that?”

And this person said, “Because that list you put up – I’ve broken some of those. I’ve broken some of the big ones.”

And I said, “So Jesus only died for the little ones? And the big ones you’re just going to have to handle on your own?”

That’s how self-condemnation works where you just say to yourself, “I’m just worthless. I’ve committed the unpardonable sin.” And as long as you feel like that, you’ll not have peace at the core.

And to get rid of that clutter, you have to remind yourself of the truth.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

EVERY SIN – past, present and future – is covered and forgiven completely by the blood of Jesus.

And you'll probably need to do that on a repeated basis because that kind of thing doesn't stay nailed down too easily.

Ok, three more pieces of clutter than often need to be cleared in order to experience peace.

Issue 4. Resistance to God's will.

Could be scriptural ... could be circumstantial ... but you know what God wants you to do or not to do but you try to ignore it. That causes turmoil in your soul. That's a barrier to the peace God wants you to experience.

**Issue 5. Refusal to accept limitations
... living more like a human doing than
a human being.**

Committed to too many things.

Believing “it’s all up to me”

How do you know if you this is an issue? I mean, some people have different capacities of what they can do. What is too much for one is just right for another. So how do you know?

Big indicator is no time for God.

If you’re going to experience peace in your life, you have to clear this out. You have to accept your limitations and more importantly, put time for God where it deserves to be.

Final issue that has the ability to crowd out peace in our lives.

Issue 6. Lack of trust in God.

How do you know if you have this issue?

Stress about every little thing that doesn't go according to your plan.

Fear of the what-ifs?

Trying to scheme out every little thing.
Obsessing trying to control outcomes.

And unless you clear out this piece of clutter, you will not experience peace.

How do you do that? In the way Paul told the Philippians:

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. If you do this, you will experience God's peace, which is far more wonderful than the human mind can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:6-7).

Application

Now, I think you can tell that this is just sort of a quick and dirty list. You could easily think about it and add to it if you had the time.

But what I really want to get across to you in this is that in order to experience God's

peace on a regular basis, you need to take time out to think about these kinds of things *also* on a regular basis.

You need to examine your heart – better yet, ask God to examine your heart to point out to you.

“Be still, and know that I am God!” Psalm 46:10 (NLT)

So here’s what I want to do in the next few minutes. I want to put this list back up on the board and let’s just have silence for about two minutes and you just contemplate, where are you on these things?

And then I’m going to pray and the band will close us out with an appropriate song.

- Unforgiveness and bitterness that comes from being wounded by another person.
- Unresolved grief that comes from being wounded by tragedy or misfortune
- Self-condemnation that comes from being wounded by our own sinful choices.
- Resistance to God's will.
- Refusal to accept limitations ... living more like a human doing than a human being.
- Lack of trust in God.

Feature Song – Be Still

Response

Some need to do ABC ...

CLOSING COMMENTS

1. Intro class promo
2. Prayer Pastor

Endnotes

ⁱ <https://www.gty.org/resources/sermons/2204/Happy-Are-the-Peacemakers>