

The Peacemakers

September 10, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

In the Letter you heard a few minutes ago, James wrote: *Know this, my beloved brethren, Let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for our anger does not work the righteousness of God. They who look into the perfect law of liberty, and persevere, being no hearers that forget, but doers that act, shall be blessed in their doing. If anyone thinks they are religious and does not bridle their tongue but deceives their hearts, their religion is in vain.*

These admonitions are in some respects reminiscent and suggestive of words spoken by Jesus some time before James wrote them. Jesus said from the Mount, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God* and these are, I believe, some of the most disturbing words that Jesus ever spoke.

Inner peace is certainly what we all want and what is most certainly promised by Jesus: *Peace I leave with*

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you my peace I give unto you, he said. So we come here often times in search of peace and we are not wrong to do so. But if we think that the peace of which the Bible speaks is a soothing syrup of the soul to be taken once a week as directed, we are most terribly mistaken. If we think it is the kind of peace that is so often offered by the world, a peace that soothes through forgetfulness, the peace of the second martini, the peace of a temporary euphoria then we have not heard Christ speak: *Not as the world gives, give I unto you*. The tranquilizers of the world are easily understood; the peace of God that blesses is beyond all understanding. It comes through struggle, it comes through pain. It is the gift of the Risen Christ whose hands still bear the imprint of the nails. In other words, there is no quick way to the peace of God. The blessedness of peace is for the peacemakers.

And this is the disturbing part of this passage, peace-Makers. Blessed are the peaceful, or peaceable, that

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would be simple enough. People of a peaceful disposition are usually happy. But the word is *passive* not active. We're speaking of peacemakers and the implication is that there is a job to be done...a job that requires action.

In times of acute conflict, nation against nation, race against race, generation against generation, strife in the home, in the streets, in schools, people as never before long for peace. Everyone talks of peace. The Churches pray for peace. But how many of us are really peacemakers? We have a Collect for Peace in the Prayer Book, but are we enlisting as active servants of Peace? Do we really want to assume the responsibility of making peace in a world or society in conflict, or, are we simply seeking to be left in relative comfort and tranquility like the mother of a large family who pleads for a little peace and quiet when things get too hectic. Jeremiah knew this in his day. *They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my*

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people lightly, saying peace when there is no peace.

The questions can be ugly, the answers are not easy.

Tension and conflict are not just out there in the world and the nation. They are sometimes in our homes, our businesses, our Churches, in our personal relationships. These might be termed examples of *intra-personal maladjustment*, or better known as just a plain old-fashioned *row*. Cain and Abel knew about this. First, there was the Fall and then the falling-out. There is no home, no community, no group of people working, playing, even worshipping together where there is never any amount of tension, where there is never anything that could be a *row* to one degree or another.

The temptation of the peaceable is to withdraw from this sort of trouble. As long as we can, we pretend it's not there. When it is forced upon us we try to smooth it over, to heal lightly. But the peacemaker is the one

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who wants to know the truth, the one who gives herself or himself with courage and patience to the work of reconciliation. They are the ones Jesus called *blessed*.

Closer to home is a question that has to be asked, one that underlies the tensions in the world, the nation, and in us as individuals. Are we at peace with ourselves? How much strife is created by people who really are not at peace with themselves by any stretch of the imagination? If, at times, our consciousness drives us to acknowledge that conflict exists *within* ourselves, we strive in all kind of ways to make our peace with God. We use this expression freely, but the New Testament has little to say about our making peace with God. It tells us something infinitely more important and liberating; *that God has made peace with us*.

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This is why Christ came, to proclaim and affect our peace with God. In the conflict of the soul, in the turmoil of the conscience, in the torment of guilt, *He* is the great peacemaker. It was for this he lived as the healer of souls; it was for this he died a living sacrifice, the *just* for the unjust.

This is no religious fantasy to be indulged within the Church. The moment men and women received and accepted this message they *knew* that there was a new power of peace alive in the world. They realized that the initiative of the *peacemaker* was alive in them, and they saw tensions and conflicts of their day in a new light. They reduced antagonisms to reconciliation; they discovered that the peace that Christ brings is not only between our souls and God, but also between the factious sections of humanity. The two are one. We cannot claim to have peace with God so long as we are dividing the world, the nation, society and ourselves into hostile camps. We cannot have peace with God so

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long as we refuse to recognize that our neighbor is one with us in the reconciliation that Christ has made.

In the pattern of the ever-present Christ, the *peacemaker* is the one who takes the initiative, who breaks the circle of hostility, who is ready to share the cost of reconciliation.

Remember what James said, *They who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being no hearers that forget, but doers that act, shall be blessed in their doing.*

AMEN