

Judges 6:20-24, Matthew 5:9

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What should we expect?

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For many in the global west, God's offer of peace doesn't really surprise us.

We don't have much of a cultural sense of what we owe to God. For many of us, morality is only a matter of what humans owe to one another. The horizontal is everything. And the vertical relationship – our relationship with God – is often a sort of optional add-on.

In scripture, the world is much more interconnected. Disrupting our horizontal relationships affect our vertical relationships and vice versa.

In the world of scripture, offense against God harms all order and peace, shalom is broken. Shalom – as Ricky mentioned last week, could be described as order or “harmony.” Right things in the right places. And when harmony is disrupted, God's house is vandalized and we owe damages.

Remembering the gift

God is a generous gift-giver. But God's gifts are given with such consistency that they can stop feeling like gifts and we become entitled children. We remind ourselves of the gift when we take communion and when we confess our sins.

I deeply appreciate the way that the Book of Common Prayer in the Anglican tradition helps to give words to a prayer of confession:

Almighty and most merciful Father, we have wandered and strayed from your ways like lost sheep. We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts.

*We have offended against your holy laws.
We have left undone those things that we ought to have done; and we have done those things that we ought not to have done; and there is no health in us. But you, O Lord, have mercy upon us sinners.
Spare those who confess their faults.*

Restore those who are penitent, according to your promises declared to mankind in Christ Jesus our Lord.

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And grant, O most merciful Father, for his sake, that we may live a disciplined, righteous and godly life, to the glory of your holy name.

Amen.

And as we read in 1 John 1:9, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”

When we should reasonably expect hostility, God extends peace.

II. Peacemaking: Looking like our Father

But we don’t just receive peace from God and hang on to it like a football. When we follow Jesus, we are becoming people who resemble our heavenly Father, Yahweh Shalom.

Jesus says “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” - Matthew 5:9

Dangerous Assumptions

Dangerous assumptions (*Bad ideas*) about what it means to be a “peacemaker” can lead to great deals of harm.

Bad ideas about Peacemaking include:

BAD IDEA #1: Peacemaking is a personality trait

Enneagram 9 (Peacemaker): “They are usually creative, optimistic, and supportive, but can also be too willing to go along with others to keep the peace. They want everything to go smoothly and be without conflict, but they can also tend to be complacent, simplifying problems and minimizing anything upsetting.”¹

But when Jesus uses the word, He’s not referring to a set of personality traits.

Peacemakers...

1. Avoid insults and slander (Matthew 5:21-22)
2. Seek reconciliation with their spiritual family (Matthew 5:23-24)
3. Try to avoid legal disputes when possible (Matthew 5:25-26)

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4. Don't seek revenge (Matthew 5:38)
5. Love and pray for their enemies (Matthew 5:43-48)
6. Forgive others (Matthew 6:14-15) and are
7. Slow to judge others (Matthew 7:1-6)

Check out a Bible Project video on Peacemaking² for more details.

BAD IDEA #2: Peacemaking means accepting injustice

When Yahweh gives Gideon the gift of peace, it's not just the end of hostility. It's the start of something new – a restoration project.

Gideon immediately gets up and chops down his father's idols. He rallies men from all around the region to go to battle. He sends most of the guys away because God has a pretty wild plan for how it's all going to get done.

Then...justice is served. Midian is defeated.

⁷ Of the greatness of his government and **peace**
there will be no end.
He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and forever. – Isaiah 9:7a

BAD IDEA #3: Peacemaking means staying silent

In Matthew 18:15-17, Jesus gives specific advice for what you do when someone in the church sins against you. And if the sin isn't properly dealt with in private, you get more people involved...

¹⁷ If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. – Matthew 18:17

Jesus deeply cares about justice, and justice requires speaking up. For yourself when you experience injustice, and speaking up for others when you see it.

BAD IDEA #4: Peacemaking means a lack of conflict

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In the pursuit of true peace, even-keel, good vibes will probably be disrupted. In many cases, healthy conflict is where we learn to love one another. We express our needs, the depth of these needs, we work to be considerate, and pursue a path forward. And sometimes conflict is an expected byproduct when we're doing the right thing.

²⁸ *In the morning when the people of the town got up, there was Baal's altar, demolished, with the Asherah pole beside it cut down and the second bull sacrificed on the newly built altar!*

²⁹ *They asked each other, "Who did this?" When they carefully investigated, they were told, "Gideon son of Joash did it."*

³⁰ *The people of the town demanded of Joash, "Bring out your son. He must die, because he has broken down Baal's altar and cut down the Asherah pole beside it."*

³¹ *But Joash replied to the hostile crowd around him, "Are you going to plead Baal's cause? Are you trying to save him? Whoever fights for him shall be put to death by morning! If Baal really is a god, he can defend himself when someone breaks down his altar." - Judges 6:28-31*

When we're pursuing the kind of peace that God wants for our world, some people will not be happy. That's why Jesus says:

³⁴ *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."*
- Matthew 10:34

How many enemies did Jesus make? How did the Prince of Peace end up in front of a crowd of people begging for his execution? Not by being a jerk and an agitator, but by pursuing truth and justice.

BAD IDEA #5: Peacemaking empowers abusers

We need to get crystal clear about what forgiveness does and doesn't mean.

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In Matthew 18, Jesus tells this parable about a servant who owes a great deal of money to a king. The king forgives him this extraordinary debt. Then this same servant is owed a small amount of money by one of his piers:

“He grabbed him and began to choke him. ‘Pay back what you owe me!’ he demanded.

²⁹ *“His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.’*

³⁰ *“But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.”*

- Matthew 18:28b-30

Forgiveness is letting go of exacting penalties. But you can forgive and leave a context where your safety is threatened.

You can both forgive someone and report them to the proper authorities. You can forgive someone and still need to work through a great deal of raw emotions due to damage. Pain is part of the healing journey.

And you can forgive your enemy, and recognize that the best way to love your enemy is to allow them to face real accountability for their actions.

If you are in an abusive situation, you can both follow Jesus’ call to forgiveness and seek real justice. In fact, seeking justice is probably one of the best ways to love your enemy.

BAD IDEA #6: Peacemaking will be easy

Gideon gets it wrong: *“When I return in triumph, I will tear down this tower.”* - Judges 8:9 ³

Gideon catches up with the enemy and the defeat is complete. But instead of celebrating this new peace – this gift from Yahweh – the very first thing Gideon does after the battle is return to these two towns. He tortures, kills, and destroys as an act of revenge.

But we are called to resemble our heavenly Father. Yahweh Shalom. The God who lets go of what He is rightly owed.

³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. ³⁵ But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. ³⁶ Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. – Luke 6:34-35

Becoming a true peacemaker

In our staff meeting, Pastor Trish said it so well: “those who are prone to absorbing injury probably need to stop absorbing. Those who aren’t, probably need to start.”

Wherever you find yourself, God is calling you to be a peacemaker who doesn't fit the stereotype. Yahweh Shalom – Yahweh who is Peace – wants His perfect peace to rule in your life. What peacemaking action is he asking of you today?

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Personal Reflection Questions

Open Up:

- What comes to mind when you hear the word “peacemaker”?
- Do you feel a sense of surprise when God extends an offer of peace to you? Does it feel like a gift?

Dig In:

Read **Matthew 5:43-48** and **18:15-35**

- Where are you being called to resemble your Heavenly Father and extend peace to others?
- How does Jesus’ teaching on conflict in Matthew 18 help us to have a healthy view on what forgiveness is and isn’t?
- What is a false “peace” in your life that God is calling you to disrupt? Where is God calling you to pursue true peace by rocking the boat?

REFLECTION

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References

- <https://www.enneagraminstitute.com/type-9/>
- https://youtu.be/3EkD-alQhT8?si=9J2lkGt_NT4yRsnY
- The word translated “triumph” is Shalom...peace. We’re meant to see some irony here. Gideon has memorialized this moment where Yahweh extends undeserved peace. Yahweh Shalom.