

“Blessed Are the Peacemakers”
a sermon by Kyndall Rae Rothaus,
concerning Matthew 5:1-12
for Lake Shore Baptist Church, Waco,
on January 29, 2017

Blessed are the protesters
for their collective voice cannot be silenced.
Blessed are the angry
for no cage can ever hold them.
Blessed are the outsiders,
for they will see uncommon wonders.
Blessed are the truth-tellers,
for their integrity, their impact, and their peace of mind
will outweigh their losses.
Blessed are the lonely,
for they will be joined by God.
Blessed are the misunderstood,
for their lives will become the art
that restores the soul of a people.
Blessed are the wanderers,
for they will stumble onto unprecedented discoveries.
Blessed are the trail-blazers,
for the path will make itself known to them.
Blessed are the broken,
for they will be given strength.
Blessed are the betrayed,
for God will not abandon them.
Blessed are the abandoned,
for they will be found.
Blessed are the lost,
for they will blaze a new trail.
Blessed are the flawed,
for they will know the beauty of imperfection.
Blessed are the prophets,
for their work is never without meaning.
Blessed are the rejects,
for they are the crown jewel of God.

Blessed are the trouble-makers.
When their cause is a righteous one,
the heavens rejoice and are glad.
Blessed are the exhausted,
for to them rest will be given.
Blessed are the confused, the doubting, and the curious,

for they will catch glimpses of the unknown.
Blessed are the fearful.
Whenever they ask, courage will be given,
for love is greater than fear to everyone who believes.
Blessed are those who have suffered,
for they will know compassion.
Blessed are those who do not give up,
for they will be rewarded with more than outcomes.
Blessed are those who set difficult but necessary boundaries,
for to them the whole world is open and their souls are free.
Blessed are the mentally troubled who, in plunging unbearable emotional depth,
have been given an uncanny intelligence.
Blessed are the children,
for they are our teachers.

Erin Conaway told a group of us preachers this week that he doesn't like preaching the beatitudes because it feels like we're trying to out-preach Jesus. I totally get that feeling. But I also don't think preaching is ever about making Jesus' words better. It's about making Jesus' words real again. Because as powerful as the Sermon on the Mount is, some of us have heard it so many times, we've forgotten how it felt to hear it fresh for the very first time.

Some of us are so comfortable in the church, we've forgotten God's blessing resides not with those who have it easy but with those for whom the journey has been difficult. Some of us are so hurt and shocked and broken and sad about the state of things around us, we have forgotten that God's people have repeatedly throughout history been the ones who mourn, the persecuted ones, the ones who hunger and thirst for righteousness among moral famine.

Our suffering, our loss is not an experience new with us. People of faith who seek to follow the way of love quickly become familiar with exile and defeat. The cross, after all, is one of our primary symbols.

So blessed are you when the burden is heavy, when the way is dark, when death looms close, when your job is on the line and your future uncertain, when your spirit is in turmoil. Blessed are you when in prayer you find no peace but instead sweat drops of blood. Blessed are you when it seems to all the world like you have lost and nothing can wake up the soul. Blessed are you when your suffering parallels that of Christ, for you are in really, really good company when it does, and yours is the resurrection from the dead. Yours is the hope of new life. Yours is the undefeatable, inexhaustible power of Christ at work. At work in your loss. At work in your sorrow. At work in your disappointment. At work in your fractured community. At work in the suffering world. At work in the streets where the forgotten beg for bread.

But do not expect to be rewarded or blessed for keeping the peace. *Peacekeeping* is the opposite of **peacemaking**. *Peacekeepers* value comfort more than truth. They fear growing pains. They would rather starve the soul than provide fodder to change.

Peacekeepers are often very nice who would never want to hurt anyone's feelings. They are rarely disliked because they never do anything to rock the boat. Peacekeepers are faithful and loyal guardians of the status quo, and even when they can see the status quo needs shifting, they advocate for slow, gradual, almost imperceptible change, slow enough that none of their friends must feel the discomfort of movement.

Peacemaking, by contrast, can be grueling and painful work. Peacemaking requires stark honesty about the fact that peace is not the same thing as staying comfortable, that your "peace" is not peace at all if your brother still suffers oppression, if your sister must sacrifice her dignity so that your way of life is not disturbed. If the peace and quiet you enjoy is the result of voices silenced by coercion, that isn't peace. Peacemakers do not protect their own tranquility at the expense of others. Peacemakers believe peace isn't peace unless it is peace for all. Jesus says, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

In the 1960s, Senator Hubert Humphrey, a civil rights champion, was hoping to be selected as Lyndon B. Johnson's vice presidential running mate. And so he recommended a compromise to black activists who were working for voting rights, arguing that his position on the ticket was at stake. Keeping the peace would help him win.

But the activists weren't there to keep the peace. They were there to expose the rampant lack of equality, to reveal the current fragile "peace" for the mere facade that it was. Fannie Lou Hamer famously responded, "Senator Humphrey, I been praying about you; and I been thinking about you, and you're a good man, and you know what's right. The trouble is, you're afraid to do what you know is right. You just want this job. I lost my job. Do you mean to tell me that your position is more important than four hundred thousand black people's lives? Senator Humphrey, I know lots of people in Mississippi who have lost their jobs trying to register to vote. I had to leave the plantation where I worked in Sunflower County, Mississippi. Now if you lose this job of Vice-President because you do what is right everything will be all right. God will take care of you. But if you take [the nomination] this way, why, you will never be able to do any good for civil rights, for poor people, for peace, or any of those things you talk about. Mr. Humphrey, I'm going to pray for you again."

After she challenged Senator Humphrey, Hamer was not asked to participate in future meetings. Fortunately, it was never up to Fannie Lou Hamer to change the system all by herself. Her powerful voice was one voice among a whole chorus of voices.

That's the beautiful thing about justice work. It's a team sport and there are no MVPs—only players and self-selected benchwarmers. You don't have to be a star. Just don't be a benchwarmer hiding behind the guise of keeping the peace. Step out onto the field of God's calling. When you fumble, you will find there is grace for you out there where the going is tough. You will find there are untold blessings for those who live anywhere but on the bleachers. Blessed is anyone with skin in the game.

Our collective voice cannot be silenced. Blessed is this communion of saints, this choir of resistance, this chorus of peacemakers, for ours is the hope of new life and the promise of God's favor. Amen.