

Church of the Lutheran Confession's
Ministry By Mail

"Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God." Romans 10:17

17th Sunday of Trinity

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Scripture Readings

Proverbs 25:6-14; Luke 14:1-11

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941)

#395 V:1-5 | #464 | #391 | #409



Prayer of the Day

Lord Jesus Christ, You have made peace between God and sinners through Your cross. Grant us humble hearts, faithful prayer, and wisdom from above, that we may sow peace and bear the fruits of righteousness; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.



Sermon Text

(James 3:16-4:6 ESV) For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice. But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere. And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace. What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions. You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in

us”? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Theme

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

In Christ Jesus, who promises us a peace unlike any found in this world—a peace that leads to a life lived with confidence and without fear, dear fellow redeemed:

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Mt. 5:9). So says Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount. Yes, BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS! But what is involved in being a peacemaker? The peace of which Jesus and His apostles speak is, first of all, that deep and satisfying peace between each of us as individuals and our God. It is a peace based upon the atoning work of Jesus Christ and received as a gift from God through faith in Jesus as our Savior, even as we are led to repent of and forsake our sins.

Second, those individuals whose hearts have been won by the gospel and who are indeed the sons and daughters of God can and ought to become peacemakers. Their lives reflect the peace within their hearts and the certain confidence that their futures are secure in Christ. They, in turn, can establish and promote peace among people in this world by their words and actions. The peace we enjoy with God, then, becomes a peace we experience and are to foster between ourselves and others.

Let us consider today how PEACEMAKERS ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO CULTIVATE, first of all, FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS; secondly, A PROPER PRAYER LIFE; and thirdly, HUMILITY WITH FAITHFULNESS!

I. The first step toward that goal is for each of us to examine our hearts carefully to see the motives that move us to speak and do the things we speak and do. Why is it that bitter and angry words can so easily flow from our lips in our conversations with family and friends? Are we jealous of those around us? Do they seem to have more things than we have? Do they seem to receive things that, in our minds, we believe we deserve more than they do? Why is it that, at times, we feel better about ourselves when we cut others down rather than build them up? Does this not reveal an attitude of selfish ambition that ultimately will hurt both the object of our anger and ourselves?

Yes, where “jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice!” Consequently, as we examine our hearts, may we be led to repent of such sins and instead CULTIVATE THE FRUITS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS! The fruits of righteousness include “wisdom,” which is “pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.” My dear friends, we possess absolute truth in the words of God, not in our own thoughts and words. Our thoughts, suggestions, and desires, which are based upon our preferences, are not absolute truth. Consequently, as we deal with one another, may our words reveal our understanding that we may, at times, be wrong; that there may be better ideas than the ones we currently possess; or that we may not have all the information that others have. The goal of any discussion, after all, ought

not to be that our personal wishes prevail, but that the good and gracious will of God be done and that the lives of all may be enhanced by the decisions made and the actions undertaken. As peacemakers, therefore, we will want to seek to resolve issues in a proper and equitable fashion—guarding our tongues and guiding our actions so that peace is sown and blessings are experienced.

II. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS! PEACEMAKERS ARE INDIVIDUALS WHO, secondly, CULTIVATE A PROPER PRAYER LIFE! James writes: “What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions.” How often squabbles begin when people’s wants and desires are not met! We want, expect, and, at times, demand certain things, and if we cannot secure them, we are ready to fight for them. That is certainly true of relationships between nations, even as it is true of relationships within families. How sad! Our desire for pleasure becomes coveting, which leads to fighting, with the result that soon everything spins out of control!

James suggests that at the root of this problem is a poor prayer life. He suggests that we frequently fail to approach God concerning our legitimate needs. We roll along in our lives, doing well and depending pretty much upon ourselves. We tend to forget just how dependent we are upon the grace and blessing of God. We do not often face “great” difficulties, and thus Satan leads us to believe that we really do not need much help—certainly not from God.

That is one side of the problem. The other is that when we ultimately do turn to God and implore His blessing, we do so improperly, asking for things we do not need and, many times, for things we ought not to have. We believe that if we were only a little richer, we would be much happier. We suggest that if God were just not so very strict in certain areas of life, we would be much better off. Yet God, in His wisdom, hears our prayers and responds in precisely the way that is appropriate for our situation and that will bring about His intended blessing.

My dear friends, we are God’s children by faith (cf. Gal. 3:26). We are upheld and protected by His gracious hands (cf. Jn. 10:28–29). Our future is certain in our Lord. Let us, therefore, turn to our God with absolute confidence, remembering to conclude our prayers for material blessings with a “not my will, but yours, be done” (Lk. 22:42). God will provide for our every need in ways far beyond our expectations and perfectly suited to our individual situations. Let us not act as if God were absent and our futures depended solely upon our own hands. No, let us strive to be peacemakers—PEACEMAKERS CULTIVATING A PROPER PRAYER LIFE—which, in turn, will help draw us closer to our God and move us to rejoice in His providential care.

III. BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS! Yes, PEACEMAKERS WHO, finally, CULTIVATE HUMILITY WITH FAITHFULNESS! James writes: “You adulterous people! Do you not know

that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. Or do you suppose it is to no purpose that the Scripture says, 'He yearns jealously over the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'? But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.'" Now, those are some harsh words coming from the pen of James. He is confronting the Christians of his day, even as he confronts us today, with the very real possibility that we are guilty of spiritual adultery—loving this world more than our Savior!

As we examine ourselves, let us frankly ask whether this is indeed true. What are the things that are most important to us—the physical things of this world or the spiritual matters relating to God? If we have no time for daily devotions but can spend several hours on our various screens, do we love God or the world? If we have adequate money for our favorite beverages and forms of recreation, but there never seems to be enough to provide our God with the "firstfruits" (cf. Ex. 23:16) of our labor as an expression of our appreciation for what He has done and continues to do for us, do we love God or this world?

It is important for us always to remember that we have been saved by grace—that is, by the undeserved love of God. We have not saved ourselves, nor could we ever do so. By nature, we are "dead in our trespasses" (cf. Eph. 2:5) and deserve only His judgment! The path to eternal salvation is through repentance over sin and simple faith in the forgiveness of our sins for the sake of Jesus (cf. Lk. 24:47). While those truths are so very humbling, for we cannot boast that we are good enough for God, they are also the basis for our hope and confidence regarding the future! Your sin has been forgiven by grace. You have been saved by grace. Our complete dependence upon God for our salvation brings with it our greatest confidence and security. If our salvation were dependent upon our own works, we could never be sure that we had done enough. Because our salvation is dependent upon the love of God and the work of Jesus Christ, however, we know that all will be well with our souls! God has promised us salvation by grace through faith, and He will keep His promise!

My dear friends, the Holy Spirit has filled our hearts with faith. He yearns within us and for us. He desires that we heed the words of our Savior and promises that He will abide within us. Let us cultivate a proper sense of humility that will lead us to remain faithful to Him until that day when He calls us home to Himself in heaven. When these thoughts remain primary in our hearts, we will find that we have no desire to argue about mastery over the things of this world. Rather, our greatest goal will be the ultimate good of all those with whom we come into contact in this life. Then we will be genuine peacemakers. In that role, we will experience God's distinct blessing. Yes, BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS! Amen.

Pastor Em. Paul Nolting

Mankato, MN