

## **"Rebuilding the Bridge of Peace"**

**Luke 10:5-6**

**November 13, 2016**

Luke 10

5 Jesus told them, "When you enter a home, greet the family, 'Peace.' If your greeting is received, then it's a good place to stay. But if it's not received, take it back and get out. Don't impose yourself."

It occurred to me when studying the gospel this week, trying to find my own peace, that Jesus had none. Throughout his whole adult life he was bothered to the far reaches of his soul.

He was bothered in his soul when he watched his fellow Jews who were oppressed and abused by the Romans. He was bothered when he saw how the religious leaders of his own faith beat down further the already-suffering Jewish people with onerous taxes and strict purity laws. Jesus was bothered to his soul when he saw his people forgetting about their most important relationship—the one with God—in favor of the things of this world that they couldn't take with them into the afterlife, false gods like money, property, and power.

Jesus looked all around him and he could not find peace anywhere. Everywhere he went, he was denied any measurable peace. The Pharisees and Scribes harassed him on every street corner, in every market square, and in every synagogue, asking him loaded theological questions that were designed to trip him up. Crowds did what they do best; they crowded Jesus, demanding healings, miracle working, and preaching, without any care as to the toll their demands were taking on him.

Even the disciples crowded Jesus, asking him for endless explanations and assurances, some of them warning Jesus that he was getting too controversial, that he was putting all of them in danger. He was threatened by clergypersons and laypersons alike, chased out of town after town, plotted against by his oppressors and even by his own people—he was a marked man, and he knew it.

Yes, Jesus was bothered to his soul, possessed by the need and calling to preach the good news for all people, not just for

the religiously privileged of his day. Jesus was bothered to his soul, called, as he was to heal the sick and blind, to feed and clothe the poor, and to bring social justice to a world without any.

No, he did not bring peace to his troubled time and place, and he did not promise a peaceful world then or in the future. He did not soothe the troubled heart. It was not his mission.

Rather, it *was* his mission to fire people up in the gospel, to stir up the lazy heart so that its owner was compelled to do justice and love compassion, *especially, especially*, for the least of them.

Listen (or read) carefully what Jesus is saying to those he is commissioning for ministry: "When you enter a home, greet the family, 'Peace.'" Jesus says to *offer peace*, to lead with your best foot forward. This is done with eye contact and a hand outstretched or hands together at your chest, a symbol that you offer what perhaps you don't have for yourself. Jesus does not

promise, nor predict, that your gesture of peace will be returned, however.

If it is, I guess he would say that is a bonus. If a peace offering is denied you in response, 'don't sweat it,' he tells us. Instead, go find someone new to whom you can extend your peaceful greeting.

Peace. And quiet. I just need my mind to shut off for a while. It does not seem to want to comply. This past few days Chris and I have been in California meeting our new grandson, Nixon Christopher Dawson. 'Peace' takes on a whole new meaning when three -  $3\frac{1}{2}$  year olds, a  $1\frac{1}{2}$  year old, and an 8-week old baby are all clamoring for attention from Grams at the same time!

It brings you right down to reality when the three older grandchildren are racing around the yard on their scooters, yelling at the top of their lungs. The toddler is screaming, "Da Da" non-stop, no matter who he is around, and the baby needs a

feeding or a diaper change every five minutes and is letting you know all this in no uncertain terms. All the while the 60-inch flat screen television is playing and showing endless sing-songs on the Baby Einstein channel, and all the adults are talking loudly, too.

Hmmm. Jesus never warned me about this circumstance.

But in the midst of all the cacophony, here are a few peaceful things I thought up for this week, mainly in self-defense:

1. There are no more Constitutional amendments and propositions to try to read and understand so that we can decide how to vote on them;
2. There are no more political ads to mute on the television or radio or on your phones;
3. Best of all: You now don't have to worry any time soon about watching Season 15 of "Celebrity Apprentice!"

Seriously, if you are not feeling peaceful at all right now, you are in the best of company. Jesus is with you. Jesus feels your pain. Jack Nordin wrote me an email this week after I sent

the all-church email out. He reminded me that after this country's Civil War, the country was very divided, too. Families, churches, communities, businesses, and friendships were destroyed by the war and in its aftermath. I kind of feel like we have just been through a war, don't you? I seek peace now that the election is over, along with you I suspect, and there is precious little to be found. We are not alone; Jesus is with us in the turmoil, in the aftermath, and in the unpleasant reality of our present social climate, not with answers for us, but rather, with a call to action.

It makes me wonder if we, as Americans and as Christians living in America, have been too complacent? If there is one thing this election season has done, it has caused us all to confront some truths about ourselves. We have been made more aware of our fears, both rational and irrational. We have been made more aware of our prejudices, both justified and unjustified. We have had to prioritize our priorities; we have had

to pick and choose issues and leave other issues for others to put atop their lists of priorities. We have been forced to answer the questions about what it means to be both American and Christian. And we have been made painfully aware that people we love deeply, people with who we share life's blood, people with whom we work and play and worship, and people whose hearts we thought we knew well, did not see this election choice with our same eyes.

Today, the reality is that the truth may *not* set us free—not at all. Today the truth may just plain hurt, and hurt us to the core. And it feels as though Jesus is right there with us, telling us, "I told you so."

There is a marvelous book that I read some years ago and that I keep going back to whenever my heart is troubled. It is called, *the Anatomy of Peace*. On its face, it's about troubled teens in families and how the family can replace chaos with peace. But the underlying message of the book is more universal. In

reviewing it this week one particular passage leapt out at me and demanded to be read with intention. It said, "However bleak things look on the outside, the peace that starts it all, the peace within, is merely a choice away."

I think this is what Jesus is saying, too. I think he is saying that peace is not an entitlement or something you can buy in the store or on-line somewhere. He is saying that you must create the atmosphere of peace by *making a choice* to choose peace over war, love over hatred, and compassion over law. This does *not* mean that we should not speak our truth or surrender our values. But from a position of inner peace, a choice made, comes strength of conviction and surety of action in the face of injustice.

I think Jesus is saying what the book is saying, too: choose peace before you go knocking on your neighbor's door, before you accost someone on how they voted, before you post that Facebook statement for all the world to read. We have to face the brokenness in our own soul before we have any business trying



to fix anyone else's brokenness, and we have to choose peace and lead with the heart of peace when we reemerge into the world.

I suspect peace will continue to elude us as an American people for some time to come. We will continue to feel defensive, and uneasy, perhaps vindicated or perhaps devastated. There will be no facile healing or quick forgetting all these hurts and these divisions. Still, Jesus tells us, and the gospel tells us, too, to keep offering to others a greeting of 'Peace.' If you find some peace in return, consider it a gift freely given to your troubled heart. If you find no peace offered back to you, then move on to another household and offer it once again....and again....and again, without ceasing. After a time, double back and reach out again.

As with any time after emotionally charged events in our collective lives, there are those deviant spirits who are compelled, by some imbalance within them, to lash out at others

just because they can. We are hearing about these isolated, but numerous, incidents now on the news. Not only must we as Christians and Americans publically denounce the harassment of immigrants, of religious groups, of women, of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered individuals, of persons living with disabilities, and of people who struggle with other life challenges, but we must privately teach our young ones that this is wrong, that this behavior is neither American nor Christian.

When we see it happening in our presence, we need to try and stop it. When we see an opportunity to sit down on the light rail or on the airplane or at a movie theatre next to person of another race or a person dressed in religious garb not our own, we need to do it and extend our greeting of peace to them. We need to live the gospel and show others our gospel truth. When we read a post of a person who is living in fear, we need to proclaim to them our message of peace, so they know they do not stand alone.

We rebuild the bridge of peace one brick at a time. We measure the space we see before us on the edge of the riverbank of civil unrest. We select our first brick, we lay it, we cement it, and we wait for it to dry so that it is solid. If we are successful in doing that with our first brick—and I have no idea what or how long that will take for me, or for you, or for anyone in our country—if we are successful in laying just one brick on our side of the river's bank, then and only then, we can think about picking up a second brick for placement in our bridge over these troubled waters.

If anyone happens by us, and remarks that it odd that we are trying to rebuild the bridge of peace in such a slow and determined fashion, just think what might happen if you would look that person in the eyes and respond to them: "Peace be on you in the name of the all-loving God. Would you like to join me?"

*May it be so.*