

PEACE BE WITH YOU  
[written in oral form]

Romans 12:9-21  
15th Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

September 3, 2017  
Gordon Allaby

~~~~~

**We are a Peace Church.**

**We Mennonites are a Peace Church.**

And, the world needs to know and **feel** our message.

~~~~~

Tilting the balance of civility are leaders who are purveyors of fear, greed and hate. And, they are sanctioning the crusaders for white supremacy, oppression and violence.

It seems more leaders are dancing in the fascist parade.

A strong voice for peace and social justice is desperately needed.  
However, we do not need more leaders, even for our own cause.

We need more followers.

We need more brave and dedicated followers of Christ, who will speak out and live out Peace and justice.

~~~~~

Our voice / our message must be clear and loud.

We are a peace church, and we do not affirm violence for any reason.

We reject white supremacy, and white privilege must be dismantled.

We support reconciliation and the UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous Peoples.

We receive and welcome the weak, the downtrodden, the exploited and refugees.

We respect all people as equals, regardless.....

We do grace and love.

And, we will NOT do violence and destruction.

We are pacifists.

We are a peace church.

~~~~~

All these things must be stated, and in more ways than just from a pulpit.

Martin Luther King Jr., while visiting Bethel College in Kansas, was asked what churches' should do to support civil rights. He answered [paraphrased] put a sign in the front of your church stating your support. He said that your community needs to know your position, and once you put it on a sign, you can't waver or be quiet ever again.

We should have large signs in front of our churches that state our Christ inspired devotion to peace.

~~~~~  
Alas, it is troubling that our peace message is not cogently heard.  
Too often peace is whispered or even muffled.

This is perplexing because there is no doubt that Jesus lived and taught non-violence, empowering the weak and doing grace and social justice.

I fear that our squabbling over moral purity, concerning sexuality, has greatly tarnished our influence on society.  
The demise of our national church is shameful.

We should know that our homes do not need to be in perfect order and sanitized in order for us to go out and help others in need.  
Perhaps, we need to drop the mirror and keep a better watch on following Christ.

Moreover, there are some Mennonites that selfishly consider peace to be only a personal matter, and not for the community or society.  
They think doing peace in the secular domain is not possible.  
That is the Two Kingdom ideology, and it degrades into dismissing God as not being over all of creation, including governments.

~~~~~  
Nevertheless, I think I'm mostly preaching to the choir today, and that is fine.

We need to be reminded, encouraged and recharged.... because we constantly hear a VERY different message from our culture.

We receive daily doses of information and persuasion that are counter to the ways of peace,..... and they take their toll on us. Those messages can subtly sink in, and affect our belief system.

~~~~~  
The media perpetually tells us that we must do violence to stop violence.  
And so, we begin to believe that it is best that cops carry and use guns.

We are told that soldiers fought and killed for our freedom, yet governments can NOT grant freedom; government can only take freedom away.

Even so, we think we are free because of wars fought. That is a lie. All wars are political and for political reasons, and they are laundered with the myth of Redemptive violence.

~~~~~  
Movies, games and our culture are saturated with “Redemptive Violence.”

Redemptive Violence is when violence is used by the “good guys”, who are always us,... to get rid of/ take care of the bad guys, .... all with the rationalization that it is for a “greater good.”  
Therefore, violence and war are accepted as a “necessary evil.”

~~~~~

Necessary Evil!

How can followers of Christ embrace / condone evil for any reason????

Yet, more often than not, we think that violence is the final option, wrongly assuming it will end the problem.

Yet, problems must be solved. They cannot be destroyed.

~~~~~

Just so we don't become humanistic elitists with a peace and justice message, Paul reminds us, in our text,.....to first and foremost--Love.

"Let love be genuine." And, love is from God.

~~~~~

Verses 9-12 remind us to be avid followers of Christ.

This why we do peace and social justice.

This is who we are.

Also, in these verses, Paul explains how our regular social interactions should be.

~~~~~

Verses 10 to 21 deal with the exceptions--our adversaries and enemies.

In essence, Paul presents a four step method for dealing with enemies, which, by the way, parallels Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5.

The four steps are, and you may want to write them down:

**One:** love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, and bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.

Simply put: affirm your enemies valid interests and pray for him or her.

This can be difficult, especially when our emotions are wrapped up in a conflict, but try it. It is hard to hate or harm someone that you are praying for.

And, ..... in the process of doing this, we should learn why an adversary is behaving that way.

In most cases they have some valid reasons.

In addition, by striving to love, understand and by praying for our enemy/ adversary we likely will NOT be seduced into devaluing or degrading them, which is what our culture does to enemies.

~~~~~

Do we know what motivates Kim Jong un?

We are lead to believe he's crazy.

Perhaps, listening and affirming his valid needs would be cheaper than nuclear war?

~~~~~

Step Two: from both Jesus' and Paul's teachings, "be reconciled to your brother and sister. Come to terms quickly with your accuser, **and do not repay anyone evil for evil.**

In everyday language: talk to your brother or sister and seek an agreement. We must be pro-active and vigorous in confronting a broken relationship, especially through communication. Also, this means that we must be open to healing and compromise. And of course, avoid enhancing the cycle of violence.

We can find creative, even humorous ways to confront white supremacists,.....once we learn why they think that way and affirm their valid concerns.

We must not respond to violence with violence because that just feeds the firestorm of violence.

~~~~~

Step Three:

Jesus lived, and as Paul stated, "Make every effort to associate with the lowly."

"Make every effort to associate with the lowly."

Basically, associate with the powerless who need justice.

This advice is somewhat surprising, but shouldn't be.

Associating with the powerless not only benefits them, but it is also good for us. It keeps life in perspective, preventing us from the terrible state of elitist blindness and insensitivity when we think we are "entitled." From arrogance, the powerless are dismissed and devalued. So, we must get to know the powerless.

Moreover, we will learn more about what is really going on.

By associating in the manner of a guest, we can avoid being patronizing.

For example, we cannot do reconciliation **for** the indigenous. We must release our stance of power, and allow them to lead the way, .. if we really mean what we pledge.

~~~~~

Step Four: **transform evil!**

Part of what Jesus said in Matthew 5 was "turn the other cheek", but he continued with the examples of giving your coat, and carrying the pack farther for you adversary.

By No means are Jesus' teachings acts of submission and defeat.

Jesus was advocating bold and creative resistance. They are acts of defiance that refuse to accept the evil.

Paul put it, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**In essence: transform evil!** We must take the initiative, be aggressive and transform evil into good.

This can be called doing "Transforming initiatives."

They are initiatives that will touch the heart of an adversary because they show love and compassionate justice.

~~~~~

These four steps of peacemaking are effective. Not only when integrated in our community and personal lives, but they work on the world scene, too.

For example: for many years, back in the 70s and 80s, the Western world was harassed by the terrorism of the PLO. Finally, someone got wise and asked them, “why are you doing terrorism?” And, we discovered that the PLO wanted to be heard; they wanted to talk and have their “valid Interests” dealt with. And for a while, the Western powers listened and responded, and the PLO terrorism stopped. **The violence stopped.** Peacemaking does work!

Sadly, Israel and their allies stopped listening and resumed their injustices against the Palestinians: violence beget violence.

~~~~~

This message is a call to all believers to share the love of God, and to show those in the captivity of evil that there are non-violent alternatives.

To be sure, defying violence does demand bold and risky love. It means **not** being seduced by our culture. And it may mean standing out against culture declaring there are better ways to solve the problems of evil and violence.

~~~~~

Will a loving, non-violent approach always work / will it always end violence?  
NO, of course not.

But a violent response adds to the violence, it diminishes love and it is Not the way of Christ.

~~~~~

Peacemaking does work!  
It is the way to heal the world; It is being a part of God’s unfolding Kingdom. But, it can’t be faked, and we comfortable Mennonites must know that.  
Living the peace of Christ starts with LOVE, genuine love.

Plus, peacemaking is not a badge of righteousness that we put on our label as one puts a trophy of past achievements on a shelf.

Peacemaking is present tense and it is action. It is a constant choice!

Love and Peace are a constant, daily choice.

And, .....more often than not..... IT IS SMALL.

When we talk about peacemaking, we generally think of the world stage. And, we can get pretty passionate about the stupidity and the injustices of world politics,..... BUT.... we can’t all join Christian Peacemaker Teams.

They are doing a wonderful ministry in very difficult and dangerous situations, BUT that may not be our calling.

~~~~~

I think when we get passionate about something, we tend to want to lay it all out in one lump sum – to fix the problem once and for all.

And, that desire is arrogant.

We tend to believe that following Christ / giving our everything to God is like taking a \$1000 bill and laying it on the table, declaring, “Here is my life, Lord, I’m giving it all, take it.”

But, the reality for most of us is that God sends us to the bank, and has us cash in the \$1000 bill for quarters.

Following Christ is going through life putting out 25 cents here, and 50 cents there.

It is listening to our neighbour’s troubles, instead of saying, “Sorry, I don’t have the time.”

It means mending broken relationships..... and not participating in gossip and negative criticism.

It means loving and praying for those who hurt us.

It could mean writing a letter to your MP.

It means getting to know someone before you judge them.

Following Christ way is to “do”/ “be” as Christ everyday--a constant, daily choice.

~~~~~

WE MUST proclaim that we are a peace church, and we must live it.

And that means:

One – love and pray for your enemies, and affirm our enemies valid interests.

Two – talk to your brother or sister and seek an agreement.

Three – Make every effort to associate with the lowly.

Four – Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Do “Transforming initiatives.”

~~~~~

This is NOT easy; we know that. We know that following Christ is not easy.

Yet, it may help to be reminded that it isn’t merely about self discipline.

The way of Peace / the way of following Christ is accepting and receiving God’s love.

**God loves us and affirms our valid interests;**

Following Christ is listening: **God desires communication with us.**

Following Christ is discovering that we are powerless without God; we are the lowly. And, God associates with..... even us.

And, the way of Christ / the way of peace is letting go of our need to control. It is surrendering to God..... realizing that God is God, and we are not.

~~~~~

God IS active in the world and in our lives; God's kingdom is unfolding: .... righteousness, justice and goodness are happening.

~~~~~

Peace begins in the heart, but doesn't end there. Peace be with you!