

## Lent Compline Talks 2018 St Mary's Kidlington

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Compline, March 27th

### The Beatitudes

#### 8: Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God

Every week at the Communion we 'share the peace' with one another and as members of the church I guess that we count ourselves as 'children of God'. So, at first sight, unlike some of the other beatitudes, this beatitude does not sound either particularly controversial or demanding. We're all for peace, aren't we?

But what do we mean by 'peace'? The word has so many usages. We say "peace be with you" at communion, though we probably wouldn't when we meet a friend in the street - maybe that's the English reserve. We've all seen the American films where two hippies greet one another with "peace, man" and high fives. The muslims say "salaam"; Jews "shalom". At the start of his commentary on this beatitude William Barclay points out that the Hebrew *shalom* never means simply the absence of conflict, but always means '*everything which makes for a person's highest good*'.

And the beatitude talks about 'peacemakers' rather than 'peace-lovers'. Just wanting to avoid conflict and lead a 'quiet life' can itself be the cause of a lack of peace for others, and non-involvement is certainly not something that works for their 'highest good'. If we let a situation develop just because we want to avoid conflict, things can easily get worse. In that sense, non-engagement is not an option.

The peace which the bible calls blessed does not come from an evasion of issues, but from facing issues and conquering them. We have a perfect model in our Lord who faced the ultimate challenge and conquered it, so that he could say at the last supper "My peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you. (John 14)". So, the making of peace can be the result of struggle and effort, and is unlikely to come from a passive acceptance; that is submissiveness, not peace. And, of course, this applies both to our own internal struggles and in our dealings with the situations with which we are confronted.

If peace "shalom" means the highest good it must mean making the world a better place for *everyone* to live in. That means peace in our own hearts, where there is always something of a battle going on (at least for me) (Paul in his letter to the Romans says "The good which I want to do, I fail to do; but the evil that I would not, that I do"). This takes us back to the beatitude we discussed last evening - becoming 'pure in heart' - it's a real ongoing internal struggle.

Peace also involves developing right relationships with other people. We all know people who always seem to be involved in quarrels of some sort. The frightening rise in on-line 'trolling' and hate speech shows just how far we fall short of a peace that is 'for the highest good' of others. And we all know those lovely individuals who are the opposite, bringing people together, often selflessly and at considerable cost. It is God's work, and so our work, to heal breaches, to encourage people to live and work together in brotherly love. But we cannot give to another person or group that which we do not ourselves possess. So it's a circular process - to be a peacemaker we must first experience the peace that is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our own lives. In our public intercessions in church we frequently pray for peace often in response to some particular horror in the newspapers. But as I was writing this I became acutely aware how infrequently I pray for peace of all sorts in private. My school report would certainly read "Could do better!"

Christ himself made it clear that peace is not the absence of conflict. Luke reports Jesus saying "Do you suppose I came to establish peace on earth? No, indeed, I have come to bring division". While there is sin; sin of selfishness, of greed, there will always be division between good and bad. The peace that God brings is not a cessation of hostilities, tolerance, or the readiness to give way. True peace that the world needs calls for a complete change of nature. Reconciliation with God can then extend to reconciliation with other people.

Let's turn now to the reward; the peacemakers shall be called 'children of God'. In the old testament the "sons of God" was a description of angels, and only rarely implied human salvation. But in the new testament it is the reverse. The new testament usage is that believers have been born anew into God's family. If we are "children of God" then God is a very real sense "our Father" - hence Jesus taught us to pray to "Our Father in heaven". In the original Greek "sons of God" - which follows the Hebrew use of 'Bar' hence "Bar-nabas" the son of consolation; blind Bar-timeus; Bar-abbas (literally the son of the father). "Like father; like son" we often say thinking primarily of the genetic links that become perhaps increasingly obvious. Relatives visiting the new baby will sometimes say "He's got his father's nose or ears" (a bit far-fetched); but I have a photo of one of our works lunches a few years ago, and every time I look at it I think "What's my father doing there? Only to realise that it is me! The stoop, the hair are identical. My father meant a great deal to me not only in providing a loving home but as a great example. How much more so the reward of having God as "our Father" providing a loving home now and in eternity and also through his son our Lord, a supreme example of how we should live.

But children also have responsibilities to their father. In Jesus' time the son would usually be doing the same work as his father. "Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph the carpenter?" they asked when Jesus first started preaching in Nazareth. So, being sons or children of God implies quite literally that we should be engaged in the same work as 'Our Father', the God of Peace (to quote Paul); St Gregory of Nyssa called it "imitating God's love of us". Our Father worked through his Son Jesus during his earthly ministry; they continue to work today through the Holy Spirit; and, as "children of God" we, as Jesus' disciples, should also be 'peacemakers' with all that this implies.