

“Blessed are the peacemakers”

January 30, 2011

Text: Micah 6:1-8, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31

I.

In the aftermath of the recent rash of horrific violence ... in Tucson, Arizona ... here in Miami ... and just this past Monday in St. Petersburg, Florida, we cannot help but be reminded—once again—of the problem of violence in America.

I assure you, in the foreign press, this dark element in our American culture has been a common theme about our country for decades. Compared to other, modern nations, there is a violent strain in our nation that stands out. This ought to concern us.

We see this in the movies that we produce, in the lyrics of our music and in the increasing number of senseless deaths from guns.

It is numbing to our human sensibilities, isn't it? The violence, in all of its forms, with only casual consideration of consequences. The causes of the violence, of course, are complex and multi-layered. But that is nothing new.

The question all of this evokes is—simply put—*What kind of a world do we want to live in?* Isn't that the question? Is this who we want to be as a nation and as a people?

At times, I am in suspended disbelief at the world I see evolving out there. Aren't you? For example, after the tragic rash of violence of recent weeks, one would think there would be a building momentum for more *gun control* and the need to tighten up state gun laws. NOT the case ...

In fact, just a few days ago, I read in the paper where the Florida State Legislature was making preparations to do just the opposite: to make the gun laws even more lax.

And you probably read where one of our state representatives was going to introduce a bill where people could openly carry guns, even on our college campuses.

I had to re-read that to make sure I had read it correctly. Such an idea is so utterly abhorrent and ill-conceived that one hardly knows how to respond. Can you imagine that? I don't even want to go there. So, what's happening to us? How did we get here?

Again, *What kind of a world do we want to live in?*

II.

In thinking on all of this and putting together the sermon for this morning, a verse from

our reading this morning from **1 Corinthians 1** keeps coming back to me. Paul is talking to the Corinthians about the power of the cross and the contradiction it presents to those who sometimes think they have all the answers.

Where is the one who is wise, Paul asks? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age ... in other words, the ones who think they know so much? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?

The *wisdom of the world*, at least in the United States, seems to be: a fascination with guns and with military might that can, instantly, put any rogue nation in its place. And all of this, as if the power and might of arms ruled the world.

Again, the question, *What kind of a world do we want to live in?*

III.

In our response to all of this, we need to deal with both symptoms and causes—simultaneously. The immediate symptoms, of course, have to do with the sheer number of guns that are out there.

The issue with guns is not about the constitutional right to bear arms. Even though the intent of the *framers* has been taken out of context and, therein, distorted—by the NRA and its legions of supporters—still, that is not the issue. The issue is about limiting the amount of weapons to some sane level for community living ... and, for sure, to limit the availability of more violent weapons.

Here is where the logic on this seems so clear.

The variable in this debate is not people. There will always be some percentage of human beings harboring evil, potentially violent impulses. This is a constant in our human situation.

However, the variable that *can* be controlled is the too-easy availability of guns. This all seems so obvious. And in recent times, it's gotten to the point where the escalating availability of more violent weapons (with excessive capacity to kill) has gone off the charts.

In dealing with the causes of violence, things get more complicated and multi-layered.

1. As always, there is the cycle of poverty that help produce gangs and sociopaths of one stripe or another; in other words, the conditions that produce angry young men.
2. As some have noted, there's the lack of civility in public discourse; at times, around political events ... and all the time on talk radio.

3. There is also the situation with *mental health* in our nation and the networking that falls between the cracks on *mental health patients* and the ease with which they can acquire lethal weapons to act out their sometimes-paranoid and evil impulses.
4. And, again, there is the problem with the unbelievable availability of guns

IV.

Whatever the causes and symptoms, as Christians and as human beings of good will, all we can do is seek—with commitment and zeal—to try and do better. And a good starting point in this is to listen to the voices of faith.

How, indeed, does God want us to live? What are the highest purposes towards which God wants us to live our lives?

In the best of Jesus, which is in the Sermon on the Mount, the *beatitudes* of Jesus set a tone for us. When you hear these words, how do they make you feel?

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

And, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.*

Don't they uplift your spirit? Don't they excite in you a sense of compassion and goodness of heart towards people in general, and in particular towards the poor, the downcast and the dispirited?

The more we study the Bible and get to know Jesus—who he was, how he lived his life, what he taught—the more we realize the importance of being peacemakers. Clearly, God wants us to find ways of uncovering common ground and living together in peace.

In fact, God has great passion for this. Imagine, for a moment, the vision of God's peaceful kingdom from the prophet **Isaiah**, from Isaiah 11:

This peaceful kingdom will be a place where ...

The wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid.
The calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them.

*The cow and the bear shall graze, and their young shall lie down together;
And the lion shall eat straw like the ox ...*

*And they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain ...
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord.*

Biblical visions of peace and shalom cry out through the scriptures again and again.

V.

The goal in all of this is to lead us to make decisions today that can save us from regret and sorrow tomorrow. Certainly, the goal for any Christian Church is to be a voice for peacemaking with our families, our communities and in the world.

The pain that violence brings is unspeakable and it has a life of its own. When we think of the bereaved families of the two fallen police officers ... the spouses and children involved, the extended families and their friends, our hearts overflow with sadness and sorrow. It hurts!

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. We must find strength and reassurance in these words from Jesus.

I was reading again the account of events following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. On the day of the assassination, in Indianapolis, Indiana, Robert Kennedy, whose brother, John F. Kennedy, had been the victim of an assassin's bullet four-and-a-half years earlier, mounted the back of a flatbed truck and faced a sea of African-American women and men. He'd been campaigning for president.

At one point in his carefully chosen words, he commented: *It is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in?*

In his words that night, in response to the darkness that had swept over our nation, Kennedy quoted the Greek poet Aeschylus to call people to hope in the days ahead:

Even in our sleep, wrote the poet, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.

The wisdom this points to is peacemaking.

And of course, two months later, Robert Kennedy himself was shot to death in Los Angeles during his continued campaign for president. And once again, America mourned about what might have been.

What might have been, if ...

VI.

Blessed are the peacemakers. Peacemaking is a life-style. It is a way of being. It is the way we talk to one another. It is the choices we make everyday.

It is the people we hang out with and spend time with; it is the movies we see, the music we listen to, the books and magazines we read and the causes we support.

In the sacred writings of all religions, God calls us to become peacemakers. God calls us to rise to the high calling of **Micah 6:8**:

With what shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before God on high? God has told you, O mortal what is good; and what does God require of you but ...

- *To do justice,*
- *Love kindness,*
- *And walk humbly with your God.*

That's what peacemaking looks like.

Our peacemaking makes the world we live in a better world, every day. Doing justice, loving kindness and walking always with a humble and grateful spirit.

With a passion, God wills for a better tomorrow; for a day when—as **Revelation** sounds out—God dwells with all people.

CHECK IT OUT:

God's vision of a new heaven and a new earth ... what would it look like?

*And God will wipe every tear from their eyes ...
Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more ...
For behold, I am making all things new.*

O what a day!

All praise be unto God! Amen!

Dr. Jeffrey E. Frantz
Miami Lakes Congregational Church, *United Church of Christ*
6701 Miami Lakeway South
Miami Lakes, FL 33014
On the web at www.mlchurch.com

