

## “PEACEKEEPING OR PEACEMAKING?”

Date: October 1, 2006

Text: John 14: 25-31; Philippians 4: 4-9

Peacemaking has been a special emphasis of the Presbyterian Church since 1981. The Peace Offering initiated at that time provides funds for significant endeavors to bring about a “peaceable kingdom.” 25% of the money received is used for local mission needs. Last year the money helped the After School program and this year the proposal is to support the Migrant Daycare on Brooklyn Ave. This denominational program, for whatever reason, has not received too much publicity at Batavia. I think we can agree, however, that given the state of family life and the tension in our world presently that “peacemaking” is something that desperately needs to receive our attention.

Both of our scripture lessons remind us of the importance of peace at three levels of life: internal, in relationships and in the world. The Biblical word is “shalom” and, at its root, refers to wholeness in every area of life. I believe very strongly that “wholeness”, beginning with our relationship with our Creator, holds the key to the future of humanity. Until we begin to “put it all together,” our newspapers are going to be filled with domestic tragedies and conflicts around the world.

My favorite passage in explaining “Shalom” is one I mentioned in this month’s newsletter and comes from Micah 6. The prophet is asked, “Why does the Lord require of you?” The answer goes beyond outward signs and acts. We are called to “walk humbly with our God, live gently in relationships and seek justice in the world.” Nothing better states what true peace is all about.

One means of deepening our understanding of “Shalom” is to make a comparison between “peacekeeping” and “peacemaking.” Peacekeeping has as its task separating adversaries. Johnny and Suzy are locked in combat on the family room floor because one has something that the other wants. The parents come into the room, and I remember this scenario well, and try to decide who started the ruckus. Generally that’s an impossible task and usually both children are sent off to their rooms for a cooling off period. Our soldiers in Bosnia were peacekeepers and the military is serving in a similar capacity in Afghanistan and trying to do that in Iraq.

Certainly peacekeeping plays an important role in society. You can’t have children beating up on one another. You can’t have nations brutalizing other countries or their own people. A referee is needed at every level of living to make sure that the game is being played fair.

Peacekeeping, however, only goes so far, whether it is families or nations. We have discovered the hard way that to police the world takes tremendous human resources, patience, time and even then it is not easy. The same could be said for controlling behavior in the home and in our streets. Recognizing the limitations of peacekeeping, a growing number of people are speaking more broadly of “peacemaking,” which is the attempt to get at the root causes of the differences between people and between nations. That’s exactly what Pope Benedict and religious leaders of the Muslim faith were trying to do this week when they met.

Surely in families it is not enough to merely separate arguing children over and over. At some point parents have to try to get at what is at the heart of the tension. One time in a marriage a wife was complaining about the lack of real conversation with her husband. She brought up the matter while at the breakfast table and he was reading the paper. His immediate response was “You want to talk?”

Here's the sports page. Let's talk about the Bills game." That might have been a bit of peacekeeping but it certainly fell far short of what his wife desired. or needed.

It seems to me that one of the big issues of our day is whether it is to be peacekeeping or peacemaking among the nations of the world. Obviously, as the only superpower, it might be assumed that we have the capability of putting anyone else in their place but even if we could is that really a long-term solution? Have we not seen in Ireland and the Middle East the limitations of police force? At some point in time, people and nations have to get together and discuss their differences. It seems to be working in Ireland; the Middle East is still struggling. These last few weeks and in days ahead our nation has been and will continue to wrestle with this very difficult question: do we want to try to negotiate and resolve differences through the UN or do we want to simply go off on our own and use our military might, maybe this time in Iran? One aspect of the present debate that has surprised me is that it is military people who have been raising the most questions regarding the cost effectiveness of using force in terms of expense and loss of life.

I have been proud that our denomination has chosen to lift up peacemaking as one of our primary concerns at every level of life. A pledge called a "Commitment to Peacemaking: The Believer's Calling" has been signed by more than 4,700 congregations; this undertaking represents a promise to incorporate peacemaking into the mission and ministry of their church. Perhaps our session will choose to look at this pledge some time in the future and consider signing it. Part of that commitment states

Responding to Christ's good news, the church goes into the world to point to and to become part of God's peace giving. God's peace is offered wherever there is brokenness – in individual lives, families, congregations, communities, nations and creation.

Would you agree with that statement?

Going back to the prophet Micah, "Peacemaking, The Believer's Calling" begins with our relationship with our Maker. Spiritual estrangement and disharmony literally eat away at the soul and creates barriers to wholeness. Certainly much needs to be done within families to create more wholesome situations and, obviously, the world needs all the peacemaking it can get. Do you remember the old song that had the verse that went something like this: "I'd like to teach the world to sing and build the world a home and furnish it with love?" That sums up what peacemaking is all about

Jesus said, "Peace, I give you. My peace, I leave with you." The challenge is to feel that inner "Shalom" and then let it radiate out into all our lives. We may ask in a world of great hostility where can I find this peace? It begins as we gather around the table. In breaking bread and sharing the cup, we find Christ as our peace. Then, we go forth to share the gift. The author of a book called "Stories That Changed America" in his dedication lifted up a dream we all have.

Dedicated to my children John, Pia, Lisa and Sherman  
In hopes they will continue the struggle to make the world a better place

Isn't that a great dream for the future? But our children need to see what peacemaking really means. They need to see people in this congregation living out the words of Micah in how we think and act this week, this month, this year.