

## Wesley United Methodist Church

September 30, 2018

“Be at Peace with One Another.”

Mark 9:38-50

One person armed with the Gospel of peace can change the world. Telemachus did. Who was Telemachus? He was a monk who lived in the 5<sup>th</sup> century.

And his story is a story of courage. He felt God saying to him, “Go to Rome.”

He was in a cloistered monastery, but he put his possessions in a sack and set out for Rome. When he arrived in the city, people were thronging the streets.

He asked why all the excitement and was told that this was the day the gladiators would be fighting in the coliseum, the day of the games, the circus. He thought to himself, “Four centuries after Christ and they are still killing each other for enjoyment?” He ran to the coliseum and heard the gladiators saying, “Hail to Caesar, we die for Caesar” and he thought, “this isn’t right.” He jumped over the railing and went out into the middle of the field, got between two gladiators, and tried to stop them. The crowd became enraged and stoned the peacemaker to death.

When the emperor of Rome, Honorius, heard about the monk he declared him a Christian martyr and put an end to the games. Legend has it that the very last gladiatorial game was the one in which Telemachus died.

Jesus said, “Have salt in yourselves – be at peace with each other.”

Sometimes it seems we have gladiatorial games going on inside the church, inside our homes, or at work. And the games have been going on for as long as we can remember. Who will be a Telemachus? Who will be the monk who jumps into the arena, sacrifices himself, and brings peace? Peace can be made but it sometimes comes at a heavy price.

My question this morning is why are we so often at odds with one another?

Why don’t we have peace in our lives?

First, we do not have peace in our lives because we fight to protect our turf. Turf wars can be so petty. Jesus encountered this in his disciples. One day as they are walking around the area of Capernaum, John, the disciples whom Jesus loved, comes up to his master and gives a report. Teacher, he says, we were out among the people and we saw a man who is not one of us. He was driving out demons and he was doing this in your name. Now we know that he has not been trained like we have. He has not been chosen as we have so we told him to stop.

Do you hear what they did? They pushed him off their turf.

It is obvious that the disciples expected to be congratulated. “Good for you!” they expected. “After all we can’t let this Kingdom of God business get out of hand.” How little they understood where Jesus’ teachings would soon take them. They were the chosen people, the Jews, but soon the doors of Judaism would be open to the world. Moses saved the Jews, But Jesus would soon save the world. The Jerusalem Temple was the house of God but the Church around the world would soon house the Spirit of the Lord. Israel was God’s nation but those borders would soon be gone and a new Holy Nation without borders would be established. History would soon replace the Priest in the Holy of Holies with the priesthood of all believers. The disciples wanted to protect their turf, maintain control, but Jesus had a better way. They were to be facilitators not manipulators of a new kingdom. If others come along with gifts and talents do not hinder them. In Jesus’ words, “Whoever is not against us is for us.”

Here is an interesting statistic. The Society of International Law, in London, observed that during the last 3,550 years of recorded history there have been only 268 years of peace. That means that since the beginning of recorded history, the entire world has been at peace less than eight percent of the time!

What is even more interesting is that during this time in excess of 8000 peace treaties were made – and broken. Friends, that represents a lot of turf wars.

Why do we not have peace in our life? Because, at any cost, we fight to protect our turf and we fight to get the turf of the other person.

Second, we do not have peace in our lives because we destroy the weak among us. Before we look at this point, I want to shift your attention to the text.

At first glance it seems Jesus is covering several unrelated topics.

There is the disciples concern about the man whom they do not know driving out demons. Jesus addresses those concerns. Then he instructs them not to cause little ones to sin. It would be better to be thrown into the lake tied to a millstone than do such a thing, he warns. Then he tells his disciples to cut off their hand if it causes them to sin. Better to be crippled in this life than thrown into hell in the next. Finally, a fourth idea is presented. Salt. Be like salt Jesus says, be at peace with one another.

These ideas seem thrown together, four sayings of Jesus cobbled together by Mark, unrelated to one another. But maybe not. It would not be unusual in first century Palestine to compile several sayings together onto a single document. Papyrus, the paper of the day, was expensive and every square inch was utilized. But let me suggest that there is a relationship between these four images that Jesus presents. The relationship is found in the very least verse of chapter nine. In the command, "be at peace with one another."

Have salt Jesus says. Be like salt: preserve what is best. If others are working for the Kingdom, don't stop them. He is saying, don't fight turf wars in my name. Those who follow me and are weak, the children, the defenseless, the poor, protect them. Make sure that they too have peace in their lives. Have peace in your own life. Don't let sin cause war among the members of your body. Be salt. Preserve what is good by being at peace. Peace between God and us and peace between one another.

Actually, this teaching fits in nicely. Do not cause, Jesus says, one of these little ones who believe in me to stumble.

You may have heard the poem "A Bag of Tools" by Roy Sharpe.

Isn't it strange that princes and kings, and clowns that caper in sawdust rings,  
And common people like you and me are builders for eternity?  
Each is given a bag of tools, a shapeless mass, a book of rules;  
And each must make ere life has flown a stumbling block or a stepping stone.

This is a wonderful summary of the Gospel text. Each of us is given a bag of tools. And each of us must choose whether we will be a stumbling block bringing sin into lives of others, or a stepping stone bringing peace and holiness. Peacemaking is about stepping stones.

How do you think you're doing in the area of sin? Are you doing what Jesus suggested; that is, are you getting rid of those things which bring sin into your life? Think about that for a moment. Now how do you think God sees your efforts?

What may seem insignificant to us, and passes with hardly a notice, creates a much more dramatic display from God's viewpoint. King David was right when he wrote, "Who can discern his own errors? Forgive my hidden faults. Keep your servant also from willful sins; may they not rule over me." (Psalm 19:12-13)

Drastic sins call for drastic measures. We should be so intent on eradicating sin that we will cut out, remove, do away with any stumbling block.

Bad company corrupts good morals. Cut it off! Shut it down! Turn it off!

Say goodbye! Sin is radical and it must be dealt with in radical ways.

We must be at peace with one another; we must try to bring peace into the lives of others; and, we must be at peace with God. Have salt in yourselves, Jesus said, have salt.

When truth and love are combined in an individual or a church, then we are what Jesus called "the salt of the earth," and we're able to preserve and bring out the beauty of our faith. A faith that proclaims peace between God and humankind and peace between you and me. Amen.