

Who Are the Peacemakers?

Hespeler, February 1, 2026 © Scott McAndless – Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany

Micah 6:1-8, Psalm 15, 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, Matthew 5:1-12

This is an interesting time to be a Christian preacher. There is so much going on in the world that is distressing, and much of it is deeply political in nature. We can talk about international politics that affect us deeply, such as the tensions in NATO over Greenland and questions of Canadian sovereignty.

And then there are the politics that may not affect us personally but that are still deeply disturbing. An outstanding example of that over the past little while has been the rising tension and violence in Minnesota and other parts of the United States over immigration matters.

As I watch these and other similar political developments, I, like most anyone else, have strong personal reactions. I go through feelings of shock, sorrow, anger and outrage. To deny those feelings would be to be inauthentic. So, the question becomes how I can be an authentic preacher in such times?

No Expert

I am not a political commentator. Nor should I be. It is not my job to tell people what party to vote for, and the church needs to be a place where we accept different political opinions.

What is more, I am no expert in politics or international laws and treaties. I do not have any special knowledge of immigrants, refugees or how their cases and claims should be handled. So, who am I to tell you what to think about such matters? If you want to understand those things, you should listen to those who have studied the issues, not me.

But what do I do when those who do claim to be experts on those matters step into my area of expertise? What if, for example, the American Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency (commonly known as ICE) starts to tell us how to interpret the Bible?

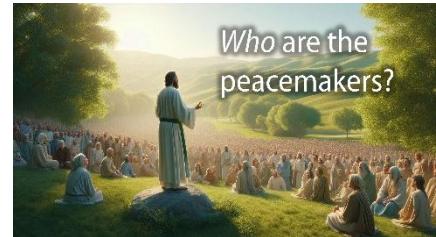
Last month, ICE, which has been given a huge budgetary increase and a mandate to hire thousands upon thousands of officers, put out a recruiting video. Except it wasn't just a recruiting video. It was a biblical commentary.

A Recruitment Video

The video showed images of ICE agents at work. Decked out in combat uniforms and employing all manner of high-tech equipment from helicopters to night-vision goggles. They are brandishing both lethal and less-lethal weapons.

Such images of ICE at work are themselves nothing new. They may be disturbing, but anyone who has been paying attention has seen them before. What caught my attention were the words – the only words – that were part of the ad.

They appeared in Gothic letters (and yes, there was a message in the font choice – there is an association with certain political ideologies). The words that appeared over the



montage were taken directly from the English Standard Bible Translation of our reading this morning: **“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.”**

Now, as I said, those are the only words in the whole ad other than the contact information at the end. So, you may wonder why I would call it a commentary. How can you comment on a text without, you know, commenting? But, as we all know, a picture can be worth a thousand words. The pictures that accompany these words speak volumes.

Aggression and Violence as Solutions

They are all images that convey aggression and hostility. No actual violence is shown, of course, but the potential for it seems present in every frame. And the aggressors are clearly the ones who are being called “peacemakers” in the video.

The soundtrack of the video is a particularly dark cover of the song *“Everybody Wants to Rule the World.”* And that idea that there are bad people out there who want to take over the world seems to be the only justification for the aggression and violence of the so-called peacemakers. Their aggression is the only thing that can counter the evil of everybody else who wants to rule the world.

Enemies

So, all of this amounts to a clear commentary on this one verse from the Gospel of Matthew. It is telling us, in no uncertain terms, what Jesus meant when he spoke of peacemakers.

And what he meant, clearly, is that the world is full of people who want to rule the world to destroy it. These are the enemies; they are *other*. They are different from us. Given that this is a celebration of the work of ICE, they are overwhelmingly immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers and members of various minority communities.

And if that is the situation, then clearly there can only be one response. Such enemies and the danger to peace that they pose can only be defeated by overwhelming violence and repression. Therefore, a peacemaker is someone who engages in that kind of violence.

This interpretation is also saying that Jesus said that people who carry out such violence are blessed. They are endowed with special divine favour.

Sons of God

It also strangely implies that they are men. As I said, this ad uses the English Standard Version. And the ESV is the only major version that translates the final part as “sons of God.” They do this, as is explained in the preface to the translation, for dogmatic and not grammatical reasons.

The word in the original context of the Gospel of Matthew means children. Even the King James Bible translated it that way over 400 years ago. But the makers of this ad chose an outlier translation for a reason. They are also declaring that the kind of peacemaking they are talking about is a masculine endeavour. It is something done by big burly men.

And because of that, the purpose of peacemaking is to use all that violence to protect vulnerable and feminine women, most particularly represented by their boss, the Secretary of Homeland Security.

That is quite a lot of content to pack into a short video, but it is all there. And I don't think that the makers and those who approved the ad would disagree with me that that is the message that they are trying to get across.

Is That What Jesus Meant?

But the question is, is that a good interpretation of the verse? Is that what Jesus really meant when he said it? Finally, all my years of training pay off, and I have something relevant to say! First time for everything. I don't know if I can handle the pressure!

So, is that what Jesus meant when he spoke of peacemakers? Was he talking about people who use violence to eliminate those who are different and who disagree with you? Can you achieve peace by silencing dissent and suppressing those who resist? It may seem as if that can result in a state where there is no conflict. If that is not peace, then what is?

Pax Romana

Such an idea of peace certainly did exist in the time of Jesus. They called it the Pax Romana, or the Roman Peace, and it had been established by none other than Caesar Augustus.

Augustus had sent his legions all over the world, and using the latest in military tech, they had destroyed anyone who disagreed with him. And when no one can oppose what you want to do, there aren't any wars. Augustus proclaimed that he had established universal peace, the Pax Romana. He even built himself a massive peace prize, which he called the Altar of Peace in Rome.

And that was the world that Jesus lived in – a world under the Roman Peace. In that world, anyone who opposed what Rome wanted to do or withheld what Rome wanted to take was brutally eliminated. So Jesus knew such a concept of peacemaking. He could have embraced it. But is that what he is referring to in this verse?

What Jesus Was Talking About

The answer, quite simply, is no. The peacemaking that Jesus was talking about was not something that could be achieved through the violent defeat of those who threaten the tranquillity that you want.

We see that in the very word that Jesus used. The word is *εἰρηνοτοιοί*, and it has a dual meaning. It is as much about doing peaceful things as it is about bringing about a peaceful outcome. And that means that you can't make peace without being peaceful – at least, not the kind of peace that Jesus is talking about.

This becomes clear when you see the same word used in the Letter to the Ephesians. There the writer declares that Jesus himself is our peace and that he made peace (that is the same word) by breaking down the dividing wall and bringing people together with God in a new humanity. Most importantly, it states that Jesus made this peace by sacrificing himself on the cross. (Ephesians 2:14-16)

So, the kind of peace that Jesus is talking about can only be made by bringing people together, not by exclusion or segregation. And it can't be made by acts of war, but only by acts of peace. It cannot be made by insisting that everyone do things your way, but by acts of self-sacrifice and mercy.

A Bad Commentary

So, let me speak today with clarity and from my own area of expertise and declare that this biblical commentary made by American Immigration and Customs Enforcement is just plain wrong. Let me further suggest that federal agencies should avoid trying to interpret the Bible. It seems to me that such efforts will not only lead us to bad interpretations, but also to some pretty dark places!

But I can hear their objections from here – maybe even some of yours as well. The objection is that, if that is what Jesus means, well, Jesus must be wrong. The objection is that you can't make peace without knocking a few heads together because that is just how it works in the real world.

Objection to the Passage

That is, in fact, the objection that is always made to just about everything that Jesus says in this entire passage that we read from the gospel this morning. None of it is practical; none of it seems like it would work in the real world.

The poor in spirit seem neither happy nor blessed because of their situation. The meek hardly seem to be poised to inherit the earth. On the contrary, the aggressive and violent seem to be actively taking it over right now.

And when people actually hunger and thirst for righteousness sake – when they stand up for someone who is being harassed or arrested because their skin is darker or because they are different – what happens. We've seen it. They are not blessed. They get shot down in the street.

Rejecting the Wisdom of the World

What Jesus says in this whole passage is contrary to all of the wisdom of this world. So, if you want to reject what he says, you are not going to be alone. I fully expect that the world will continue to try and make peace by violently attacking those who would oppose it.

But, for my part, I will continue to believe that those who try to create peace on earth using the weapons of war may be able to create, for a short while, a bit of space where they get to do whatever they want and no one dares to challenge them. And I will continue to acknowledge that the strong and wealthy will inherit the earth (or so they will think) by their exercise of power.

But I will know that they will ultimately fail. Their peace is never a lasting peace because Jesus was right. You can't make peace that way.

Jesus came to announce a different way of doing things – a different kind of kingdom. And maybe if we could just get past denouncing his approach and declaring that it could never work, we could get the kind of peace that can last because it is the kind of peace that transforms the whole world from the inside out.