

BLESSED ARE THE PEACE MAKERS & KEEPERS

Adapted from Doug Koop “Do the R-I-G-H-T thing” in *ChristianWeek*. October 1, 2011, p. 22.

Text: Matthew 5.1 – 16 (in pew Bible p. 958 / in large print Bible p. 1490).

Intro: -Remembrance Day should be a time of:

- reflection on the price that was paid for our freedom.
- meditation on the privilege we all enjoy as free people.
- dedication to respect law, order, and life.

-the West’s sacrifice in 20th & 21st centuries for the cause of peace has been great:

- W W 1, W W 2, Korea, Viet Nam, Middle East, Central America, Chile, Rwanda, Bosnia.
- we mourn the 158 Canadian soldiers, 4 Canadian civilians, 1 Canadian diplomat, and 1 Canadian correspondent who have lost their lives in Afghanistan since 2002.

-we live in a fallen world where war is not God’s will but it is the world’s way.

Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask (James 2.1, 2).

-is this how we honour those who served our nation?

- returning violence for violence / perpetuating hatred, strife, and killing.
 - insanity = repeating the same thing & expecting different results.

-today’s text comes from a large body of teaching known as the Sermon On The Mount.

- often misunderstood:
 - some, like Old Order Mennonites, claim that it is God’s plan of salvation & compliance = salvation.
 - others, like Gandhi, think that it is a “charter for world peace” and beg the earth to accept it.
 - still others tell us that it does not apply to today, but at some future time.
- Jesus is focused on the character of his followers.
 - poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hunger & thirst after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness (v. v. 3 – 12).
- Jesus calls us to preserve (salt v. 13) and guide (light v. 14).
 - result = “good works” which will glorify God (v. v. 15, 16).

Take Home Point:

-followers of Jesus should make a positive and enduring impact in Canada.

- temptation is to curl up and hide from the new normal of the 21st century.
- it’s the 21st century = mantra to endorse any moral excess and wrong.
 - here are 5 best practices based on the acrostic R-I-G-H-T to help us make a difference in Canada as peace makers-keepers.

1. REST

-our society is tired:

- red-lining life = stressed out, burdened, and weary / *too busy to notice*.

-if Christians honoured and followed the 4th Commandment (honour the Sabbath / restrict work to 6 days) *we would be able to make a difference*.

- must allow our bodies and souls *to regain balance & poise*.

Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light (Matthew 11.28 – 30).

-as a Church Family, as a family, as a married couple *we need to take time out together*.

- it will make such a difference.
- illust.: Sharpen Before You Cut.

-model and grant rest to others.

- illust.: Joseph In Zambia.

2. IMAGINATION

-we need rescue from the rut of employment, spending money and technological gadgets

- illust.: *The Man With The Muckrake* in Pilgrims's Progress. p. 233.
- when we honour the 4th commandment of rest, we can begin to reflect on food for our souls & spirits.
 - poetry, literature, art, music are channels of beauty, joy, and wisdom.

-society will be healthier when Jesus' followers are renowned for cultivating and supporting noble qualities.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you (Philippians 4.8, 9).

- illust.: Gordon MacDonald

3. GENEROSITY

-our society tends to be self-centred.

- is giving or receiving hard for you? / how generous is your spirit?

-statistically, the church leads our community in giving but we can afford to give more.

- illust.: North American Giving & Spending Habits
- L.A.C.C.'s Christmas Project for the Bridge = \$10.00 / person.

-our society will be healthier when the church models generosity more vigorously.

4. HOSPITALITY

-when we are rested properly, creative with our imaginations and generous in our spirits, we will be ready to act Christianly toward others.

- our society *is lonely.*
- we insist on our rights & self realization.
 - Canadian Charter Of Rights may have weakened the quality of community and family.
 - **illust.:** The Isolation Generation

-remember, everyone yearns to feel welcome.

- a strength of L.A.C.C.

Therefore, accept each other just as Christ has accepted you so that God will be given glory
(Romans 15.7).

illust.: Biblical Hospitality Today

- when was the last time you opened your home to folk other than your usual circle of good friends?
- when was the last time you took a lonely / needy / hurting person out for coffee or a meal in a restaurant?
- are you willing to remain after the service for Coffee Fellowship to have contact with others in our Church Family?

5. TRUST

-when we are: rested, imaginative, generous, and hospitable then we will be able to trust others Christianly.

-today's culture conditions us to be cynical / cynicism = corrosive cancer.

- suspicious of authority & quick to criticize / complain.
- too often we curse the darkness rather than light a candle.
- jump to the wrong conclusions about the motives of others.

-as followers of Jesus, this undermines our ability to serve happily and with pleasure.

- marriages and relationships are ruined by discontent and cynicism.

-abide in a faithful, loving God who is still in control of life's situations.

- society will be healthier when Jesus' followers have a proper confidence in God.
- pray that God will help us to be people of good will and good deeds.
 - Jesus is focused on the character of his followers.
 - poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hunger & thirst after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness (v. v. 3 – 12).
 - Jesus calls us to preserve (salt v. 13) and guide (light v. 14).
 - result = "good works" which will glorify God (v. v. 15, 16).

Conclusion:

-how do we honour those who served our nation?

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.

-let us do the R-I-G-H-T thing.

- followers of Jesus should make a positive and enduring impact in Canada.
- grow in the 5 best practices based on the acrostic R-I-G-H-T to make a difference in Canada as peace makers-keepers.
 - Rested – get out of the rat race and into a Sabbath pace.
 - Imaginative – get out of the rut of survival mode and soar in beautiful living.
 - Generous – get out of the selfishness and flourish as a giver.
 - Hospitable – get out of the cave and into the fullness of friendliness
 - Trusting – get out of the vinegar bottle and into perfume bottle of trust in God and trust in others' potential.

-illust.: Mama Maggie Gobran

-Jesus always focuses on the character of his followers.

- blessed are the poor in spirit, mourn, meek, hunger & thirst after righteousness, merciful, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness (v. v. 3 – 12).
- Jesus calls us to preserve (salt v. 13) *and guide* (light v. 14).
 - result = “good works” *which will glorify God* (v. v. 15, 16).

-Closing Hymn: #452 Make Me A Blessing (all verses).

Sharpen Before You Cut

In late 1980's mission trip to a First Nations Bible college outside Pickle Lake, north-western Ontario.

Helped to develop campus by connecting wells, fixing boiler and sawing logs for fire wood (about 12 wood stoves must be kept burning over the long winter). What a thrill to slice through logs and feel the surge of the power tool in action. Exercised great care and respect.

New to using a chain saw:

- but I had the Cadillac of chain saws: a Husqvarna!
- also had a helper who would sharpen the saw throughout the day.

Repeated process throughout the day – cut and sharpen, cut and sharpen. I seem to remember that my friend sharpened my chain saw about once an hour.

A dumb question: why waste five to ten minutes every hour sharpening? This was “unproductive time.” Why not keep cutting, get the job finished, and head home an hour earlier?

Answer: because with every log that I cut, the saw became duller. And with the increasing dullness, the work became harder and less productive. Result: you actually head home much later and more exhausted.

Lesson learned: cutting and sharpening are both part of the task for processing fire wood.

Lesson applied: if we only give attention to sharpening in a haphazard way, when we need something beyond our natural reach or knee-deep in trouble, the cumulative results will be dullness of soul and personal failure. We will be in no position to help others and our work will be poorly done.

Gordon MacDonald

It is often unappreciated, but our heavenly Father has provided us [with] an imagination ... where we can visualize scenarios of possible futures for ourselves. The long future (what sort of man might I be in ten years?) and the short one (for what must I prepare today?).

During my Sabbath moments, I quietly dream through the conversations I am scheduled to have. I often think about the tasks that populate my to-do list. As I imagine, I ask questions: How could I be useful in that situation? What might I say if he or she ...? Can I be a better listener? What word from God might come through me? It is in these imagining moments that God's Holy Spirit paints possibilities on our minds.

And so it is with my Sabbaths. The inner blade is sharpened, and one re-enters the larger world with greater focus and spiritual energy.

I love the words of Rufus Jones, a biographer of George Fox, founder of the Quaker movement: "In all his planning and arrangements he exalted the place of hush and silence, and he taught his followers to prize the times of quiet mediation in their gatherings for worship, so that he left behind him a fellowship of persons who know how to cultivate the interior deeps within themselves and who had discovered how to make their own approach to God without external helps" (Gordon MacDonald, chancellor of Denver Seminary in *Leadership Journal*. Fall 2011, p. 85).

North American Giving & Spending Habits

Only 25% of Canadians give over \$325 / year (i.e. \$27 / month).

Americans spend:

- \$604 billion / year going out to eat ('11 est.).
- \$48.35 billion on pets, pet food, supplies, medicine, and vet care ('10)
- \$20.2 billion for video and computer games ('09).
- \$18.8 billion on home entertainment products ('10).
- \$10.5 billion on self-help products and services ('09).
- \$7 billion on on-line games and virtual goods ('10).
- \$5.9 billion on weight loss products & programs ('09).

(Matt Woodley, PreachingToday.com in *Leadership Journal*. Fall 2011, p. 57).

The Isolation Generation

Psychologist Philip Zimbardo notes that guys today are dropping out of life. Excessive internet use, video gaming, and online porn has resulted in an arousal addiction. By age 21, boys spend 10,000 hours gaming, two-thirds of that time in isolation. The average young man watches 50 porn clips per week.

... This is creating a generation of young men who do not connect well in traditional teaching situations and who lack social skills especially with women (Zimbardo video is at TED.com August 2011 in *Leadership Journal*. Fall 2011, p. 11).

Biblical Hospitality Today

John Ortberg, pastor of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in California writes: We ... [need to pray for God] to energize us in our regular lives. In the Bible we are commanded to practice hospitality, to make space in our lives for others. Of course, it usually no longer involves giving lodging as in Jesus's day. But often the phone will ring. It may feel like an interruption. (Of course, if you're an extrovert, you may love interruptions.) Out of sheer habit I may find myself answering with a grudging spirit. *What do you want? Make it fast. You're bothering me.* This does not help me feel like a pastor.

But there is another way. Wil Derske is a Benedictine monk; one of the guidelines of their community is "Let all guests who arrive be received like Christ, for he is going to say, 'I came as a guest, and you received me.'"

This has many applications. He writes that to accept a phone call is a chance to receive a guest. We can pause a moment before answering to change our inner attitude from irritation to welcome. Derske says he will say in a prayer of blessing just before taking the call: *Benedicamus Domino* – it might be the Lord! (John Ortberg "When God seems Far Away" in *Leadership Journal*. Fall 2011, p. 38).

Mama Maggie Gobran

Mama Maggie Gobran is a diminutive Coptic Christian who works in the slums of Cairo, Egypt, with destitute children, both Christians and Muslim, who “are hungry every hour.”

She was asked: Young people in the United States have a new social awareness. They want to help the needy around the world, yet sometimes they don't know where to get involved. How should they get started?

Mama Maggie replied, Jesus takes us always step by step. He doesn't reveal the whole all at once. So I would tell anyone who feels this: Please take another step and do something to the closest person – inside your family, inside your town, inside your church. You can encourage someone with a word. You can give a flower to someone. You can do something. When you do, Jesus will open the door for you for more. Take the step ! (“The Fire Within Mama Maggie” in *Leadership Journal*. Fall 2011, p. 45).