

“The Art of Peace and Cooperation,”
A Sermon Offered by Pastor Cheryl Schalm
October 10, 2021

Good Morning,

“Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me!” This song always brings back memories of when our children were younger. Whenever they would start to bicker and fight, and with six of them, it was frequent; I would break out singing “Let there be peace.” My singing literally became a deterrent. There were several of our girls who would actually start crying and march off screaming, “Just stop, stop it already.”

I didn’t! I kept singing that song right through their high school years. At our kid’s dismay, even their friends came to expect it. In fact, one of our daughter’s boyfriends would sing with me when a Schalm sibling feud broke out. He’s now married and not to our daughter!

We laugh about it now! But that song, the lyrics still play through my mind as frequently today as they did back then. Whether sitting in the bleachers or on the side-lines watching a game, attending meetings, reading a newspaper or watching the news, I am reminded of the constant refrain of, “let there be peace and let it begin with me.”

For certain, learning the art of peace through cooperation is crucial to any relationship or entity. The wisdom of give and take, versus the foolishness of me first, my way or the high-way, makes for a more workable and courteous environment for all. It allows for dialogue and discussion, contemplation and consideration.

Cooperation is the art of compromising on many little things while keeping our eye on one big thing. Cooperative relationships and entities flourish over time. But, wherever and whenever people fail and refuse to cooperate with each other, the seeds of dissatisfaction, frustration, and competition are sowed. There is no peace. Rather, there is anxiety, restlessness, chaos, and anger. We witness this in families, friendships, places of employment and social groups; places where individuals or entities engage in an unwitting contest or battle to get their way or to receive their deemed fair share. These types of struggles have always served to create far more problems than they have solved. From biblical stories to today’s

headlines, the results of such battles have proven to be unnecessarily tragic and devastating.

While it may not be a familiar or more talked about Bible story, “The Wise Ruling of Solomon” serves as one of my favorites. It’s a story of two prostitutes. Both women live in the same house and with no one but the other being present, they give birth to baby boys within three days of one other.

During the night one of the women’s babies dies when she lays on him. Grieving and angry, both women go and stand before King Solomon. Pleading her case, one woman accuses the other woman of getting up in the middle of the night, taking her son and replacing him with her dead son while she slept. She told the King that when she awoke in the morning to nurse her son — he was dead! But then when she looked at him more closely in the morning light, she saw that it wasn’t the son she had borne.

To this, the accused, grieving woman shouted, “No! The living one is my son; the dead one is yours.”

But the first woman was sticking to her story and insisted that, “No! The dead one is yours; the living one is mine.” And so they argued back and forth before the king.

As any parent or person exhausted from witnessing continuous feuding and argument can relate, the King grew weary. By all indications, he had heard and observed enough. “Bring me a sword,” the king demanded. “This one says, ‘My son is alive and your son is dead,’ while that one says, ‘No! Your son is dead and mine is alive.’ I give the order to “cut the living child in two and give half to one and half to the other.”

However, before the King’s order could be carried out, the woman telling the truth; the woman whose son was alive said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!” She was so deeply moved out of love for her son that she opted to lose the battle in order to gain life for her son.

But the other, grieving woman said, “Neither I nor you shall have him. Cut him in two!”

The king, in his wisdom, then gave the ruling that the living baby not be killed but rather, given to the first woman; as he proclaimed her to be his rightful mother.

There are so many powerful elements to this story. The first being, the wisdom of King Solomon and the way in which he could detect the true identity of each woman through their words and actions.

It's important here to note that when King Solomon took over the throne from his father, King David, he sought after God. He recognized and acknowledged himself as **God's servant**. He went before God saying, "Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern **your** people and to distinguish **between right and wrong**."

The Lord, being pleased that Solomon had asked for this said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have you asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor."

We can do little more than to imagine how the outcome of the story of the "Wise Ruling" might have played out, void of Solomon's wisdom. How important the message in this part of the story is. Without a servant's heart and a desire to serve God's people, it is difficult at best, to employ a cooperative spirit that aligns with the wisdom of God. Something else worth noting here is how Solomon was able to discern the identity of the living boy's mother through her character and sacrificial actions. Let us make no mistake, our true identity as Christians is revealed through our character, actions and spirit of cooperation.

Another element or message of this story is revealed through the grieving mother. Grief like rejection, betrayal, abandonment, the sense of worthlessness and so many other things we experience in life can have powerful and lasting negative effects on us. When not addressed these things can lead to bullying, an over active self asserted ego and unhealthy competitive and combative spirits. Like the grieving mother, the idea of, "I hurt, so you should hurt," "If I can't have him, you can't have him," and "if not my way, then no way," becomes the principal by which we live. We seek justice for our hurt at the expense of everyone else. **We fight to win, regardless of what is lost in the process.** If we can't experience peace, no one is going to experience peace.

The third and final element or message taken from this story I want to share this morning is brought to light by the living boy's mother. Hurting and grieving herself over the possible loss of her son and the betrayal of her friend, she allows

LOVE to rule. And before we all make that proclamation, “I would have done the exact same thing. Who wouldn’t spare their son, even if it meant losing the battle;” I’m going to ask that we all take a moment to pause.

Let us all take a moment to reflect upon the times we may have **denied Love** the opportunity to rule; all the times in which we were unwilling to meet in the middle, to consider another way, to compromise, to forgive or to simply let something go.

Let us reflect upon all the times we have witnessed and/or experienced things where the Love of Christ was not demonstrated and/or could not be detected. While the truth may not be pretty, some of us if not most of us, have probably been a little bit headstrong at one time or another; wanting something done in a fashion resembling the popular song, “My Way.” Sometimes we may have even gotten so caught up in getting the “Win,” that we didn’t even recognize, or worse, didn’t care about the negative impact our uncooperative spirits were having on our families, friendships, places of employment, communities, churches, and nation.

Instead of working together for the common good, our actions can serve to divide and dismantle, leaving a bitter taste of discord, tension and animosity. While we may be of differing opinions, ideals, perspectives and worldviews; as Christians, we are to present these things and receive these things from other’s with humility and Christ-like love. Love is what should drive and motivate us, not the desire to force others to see and do things our way.

The best relationships and partnerships are those in which both parties learn how to give and take... with each party trying to give a little more than they take. I once heard it stated that being committed to one’s mate is not a matter of demanding rights, but a matter of releasing rights. This holds true for all our relationships, whether personal or professional.

The Beatitudes teach us that the peacemaker is blessed. God calls His children to be peacemakers. God’s goal is to achieve reconciliation. The most famous blessing in the Bible is found in Numbers 6:26, “The Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.” When God gives us His blessing, when He gives us His peace, He is saying, I want your body and soul to be at peace. I don’t want you to feel tension. I want you to be tranquil. I want you to be at ease. I want you to be at rest. I want you to have serenity. I want you to be calm.

Many business offices now have little rock gardens with water flowing over the rocks in their foyer. The water brings a calming effect to the office atmosphere.

Additionally, many people have them installed in their backyards. I recently visited friends who had a beautiful pond and small fountain in theirs. I fell in love with it! I imagined myself sitting out there in the early morning with my coffee and books. Our souls truly yearn for peace.

However, these soothing gardens, as beautiful and tranquil as they might be, cannot bring the lasting peace that God speaks of in His Holy Word.

Peacemaking is God's Spirit at work in us. God's peace is only attained when we let His Spirit work in our lives; when we are one with God and **with each other** in purpose and desire. We cannot achieve peace on our own. There are a lot of indifferent folks in this world church family, perhaps including ourselves from time to time. We need the presence of God's Holy Spirit to help us discern the ways in which we too, can serve to be indifferent. And we need His help to respond in love to the indifferences of others. Void of the Spirit's help, we will always experience tension and unrest in our lives.

The Good News is ~ we can experience a lasting peace when the Spirit of God is allowed to work in our hearts and in our lives. All that is required of us is a submissive and cooperative spirit. While families will still feud; friends will still be at odds; spouses will still spat; the leaders of countries will still fight; agencies will still compete amongst each other for tax dollars; and employees will still be at odds with their employers; as Christians, we can know peace by knowing and trusting the One who holds the power to calm all storms. While the storm might rage all around us, we are held by the Hands of the One in control.

As Christians, we serve as Christ's agents. We are His tools. We are called to be the peacemakers. He says, "Be reconciled to God and be reconciled to each other." Being peacemakers is not an option for Christians. It's part of our calling.

Peacemakers bring people together. With cooperative spirits, a steadfast commitment to God's Word and a determination never to detour from God's ways, may the peace of Christ reside within us; driving and motivating us to serve as His ambassadors of Love and peace.

AMEN