

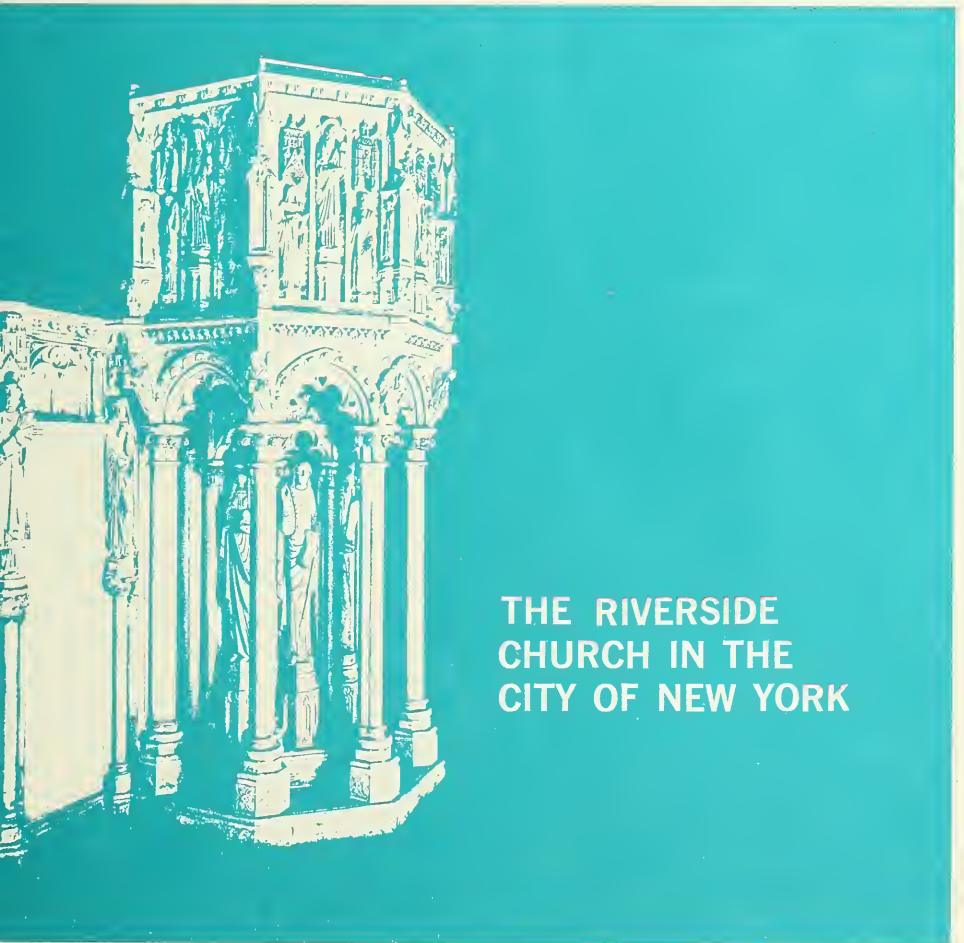
SERMONS

FROM RIVERSIDE

PROFILE OF A PEACEMAKER

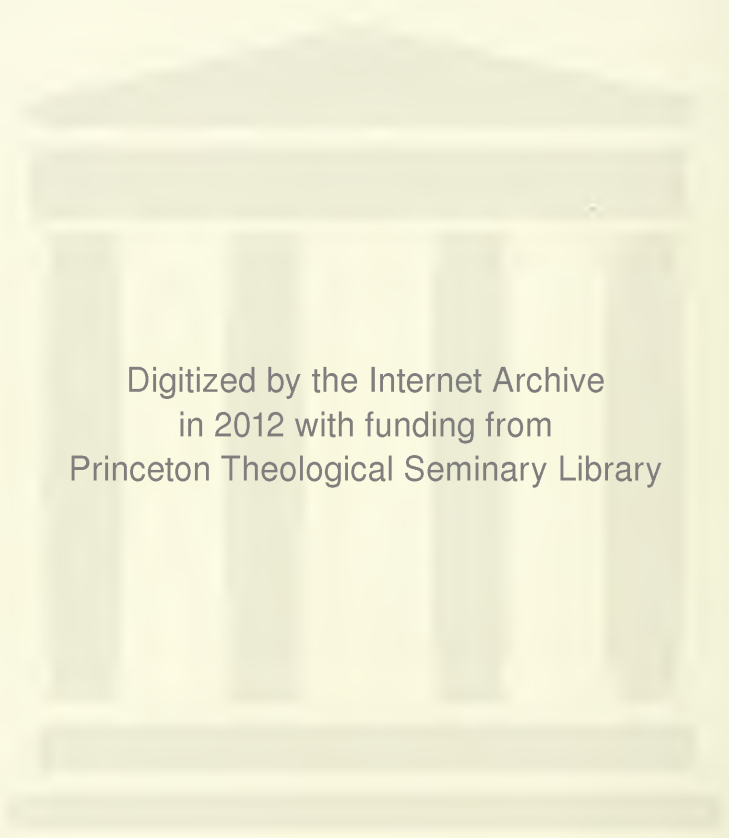
*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for
they shall be called sons of God."
Matthew 5:9*

Dr. Ernest T. Campbell



THE RIVERSIDE
CHURCH IN THE
CITY OF NEW YORK

FEBRUARY 11, 1973



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PROFILE OF A PEACEMAKER

*"Blessed are the peacemakers, for
they shall be called sons of God."*

Matthew 5:9

In my imagination, I can see an ad in the classified section of today's New York Times that reads like this:

"WANTED - by the World - Peacemakers,
full or part-time. Demand growing.
Long hours but deeply rewarding work.
Only experience necessary, an experience of love. To apply, contact
nearest church or synagogue."

Let us acknowledge as a people that we are tired. Tired of shooting matches and shouting matches. Tired of enmities and polarities. Tired of filial, social and political strife. Tired of having to divide the world into friend and foe. The cry of the heart and the need of the hour is peace.

Peacemakers have high priority with us, and peacemakers had a high priority with Jesus. In one of the most sublime and memorable utterances of His teachings on the hill, Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God."

A Christian, I take it, is one who not only believes in Jesus but one who also believes with Jesus in the values that He prized. Loving Christ and making peace are inseparable commitments.

* * *

"Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God." These words belong to the Beatitudes of Jesus. They were delivered first to the disciples, but in a timeless way they lay claim to the allegiance and attention of all who bear the Master's name. The single word "peacemaker" occurs only here

in the New Testament. As in English, so in Greek, it is a compound word. It comes from εἰρήνη the word for peace from which the name Irene derives, and also from the verb ποιεῖν which means "to make" or "to do" or "to cause." Quite literally the word could be translated, "Blessed are those who do peace, who make peace, who effect peace."

Jesus is suggesting here that peace is not a state into which human beings drift. We may drift into hostility but we do not drift into peace. Peace must be actively sought and achieved. Wherever you see peace you may be sure that someone has worked on it. It is not enough in the light of this beatitude to yearn for peace, to seek for peace, even to have found peace. We are called to make peace.

It should also be noted that a specific kind of peace was in Jesus' mind at this point. Not that other levels of peace are not important. From the context it is clear that Jesus is not here so much concerned with the promotion of general well-being, even between the nations. He is not speaking here about helping other people individually to find their peace with God -- however important that may be. The focus is uncomfortably specific. The reference is to those who disinterestedly come between two contending parties and try to make peace. These God calls his sons because they are like Him.

I think Floyd Filson says it succinctly and aptly when he describes the people Jesus had in mind as "Those whose attitudes, words and actions preserve friendship and understanding where it exists, and restore it where it has been destroyed by human friction and strife." 1

We are not called to some generalized view of peace. We are not called to some spiritualized view of peace. We are called upon to mediate the disputes that are part of our everyday life. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God."

In attempting to move Jesus' words from the hill country of Galilee to a metropolitan area 5,000 miles and 2,000 years away, I asked myself what a peacemaker would look like in our time. I propose this profile.

* * *

First, a peacemaker is one who is slow to give offense. The peacemaker tries to be as easy as possible on the sensibilities of others. By nature or by accident we give offense enough. We need not, any of us, contrive to give more. It is noteworthy that while Jesus frequently offended people, He offended them not by his person but by His convictions. It is my belief that the abrasive life style that many of us adopted almost by necessity in recent years has run its course and served its purpose. The clamoring of the human spirit now is for a restoration of civility.

It was Edmund Burke, frequently quoted in other directions, who said, "Manners are more important than law." Charles McCabe, the veteran sage of "The San Francisco Chronicle," said once about manners; "They are like the zero in arithmetic -- they may not be much in themselves, but they are capable of adding a great deal to the value of everything else." 2

A peacemaker is one who is slow to give offense. He is even concerned that his good not be evil spoken of. I give you two illustrations from my own field with the hope that they may suggest illustrations in yours.

A minister friend of mine has been across the years a distinguished educator. In his early fifties a reputable college in recognition of his talents conferred on him an honorary doctor's degree. Needless to say, the recipient was quietly pleased. Presently it was announced that coming to head the church staff on which this man worked was a preacher who had no doctor's degree. Without any fanfare or stir this saintly friend requested that henceforth on church sta-

tionery, on church bulletin boards and in church announcements his doctorate be eliminated.

The other instance concerns a pastor in a city of some one hundred and seventy-five thousand people. It is the custom in many churches when members are received from other churches in the same community to announce somewhat triumphantly that Mr. and Mrs. Roger Jones are coming to us from the First Methodist Church of this city. But this man would always say of those who were crossing church lines within the community, "Mr. and Mrs. Roger Jones come to us from a sister church in our community." A peacemaker is one who is slow to give offense.

Of course, there are many axes still to be ground. There are causes on every side which require that voices be raised and posts be manned on behalf of the oppressed. It is of grave importance to this nation that the question of amnesty be speedily and properly resolved. It is vital to this republic's health that we do something about our cities and about the disparity in the spread of wealth between the haves and the have-nots.

I am not suggesting that we ought to pull back or be less concerned. Felix Frankfurter once noted that when your doctor tells you to cut back on meat it doesn't mean that he wants you to become a vegetarian. There is such a thing as balance. It is my judgment that the loud clamant voice in our time is becoming increasingly counter-productive. It is possible, I believe, to wage a campaign for what we regard as a righteous issue while still maintaining respect for the sensibilities of other people. A peacemaker is one who is slow to give offense.

* * *

Secondly, a peacemaker, in this profile at least, is one who is slow to take offense. Some folks carry their own tempests with them. They seem possessed of portable storm facilities. They are exceedingly chip-

py. They are blighted by rabbit ears and elephant memories.

In baseball a few years ago the National League lost one of its ablest umpires because an ex-player proved too sensitive to critical remarks that were levelled at him from various dugouts around the League.

We cannot prevent other people from saying or doing things against us. But a peacemaker is one who is determined to live above this kind of calumny. We cannot keep the disparaging remark from being dropped, but we can keep that remark from getting inside and working up in us the acids of revenge and retaliation. As Paul put it in I Corinthian 13, "Love never keeps a record of wrongs."

I confess that the counsel that I am sharing with you is not easy for me. Bear in mind that I labor with the handicap of being both a redhead and a Leo -- and an Irishman to boot! Over the past ten or twelve years by reason of the position that I held, and in part by reason of my own stupidity, I have been involved in many vitriolic exchanges, most of which took place in the form of mail correspondence. I know it to be true that a soft answer still turns away wrath. I am convinced that we get nowhere arguing ad hominem. The argumentation that prevails at the end of the day deals with substance and not with personalities.

When someone rips me off in a letter I can in all candor respond as H.L. Mencken used to respond to his critics: "Dear Madam, You may be right. Sincerely, H.L. Mencken." Moreover, even our severest critics have at least some common ground with us in that they are equally concerned about the same subject. Some of the good people who have written to me regarding Billy Graham are as concerned as I am about the status of religion in America. Their analysis may not jibe with mine, but we do share at least the platform of that common concern.

A man one time complained bitterly that people were circulating things about him that were not true. His counseling friend wisely said, "Be thankful they're not circulating some of the things that are true."

I said in that imaginary ad that the only experience required of a peacemaker is an experience of love. I mean by this an experience of God's love. For the edgy and hyper-sensitive people are usually people who are not aware of their own worth and standing before God and thus feel that they have no worth or standing in their own eyes.

Simone Weil was so right when she said, "God's love for us is not the reason for which we should love Him. God's love for us is the reason for us to love ourselves. How could we love ourselves without this motive? It is impossible for man to love himself except in this roundabout way." 3 A peacemaker is one who is slow to take offense.

* * *

Finally, a peacemaker is one who sees it as belonging to his Christian mission to mediate disputes between hostile and estranged parties. He understands this function to be not marginal but central to his religious profession.

Louis Evely the distinguished Belgian Roman Catholic priest has noted that, "The big obstacle to sanctify is that we're blind to mission: We don't realize that our life stopped being profane the minute we were baptized and that it became a cult, a liturgy, an office, an apostolate." 4

The aim here is to play the role of the third party. I acknowledge that in some of the larger social and political tensions of our time it is difficult to sustain the third party role. One begins as a mediator but easily becomes an advocate.

I had an experience within the year in which I became concerned about the tension building between Operation Breadbasket in our city and a large food chain. I felt impelled to offer myself as a mediator who might bring both parties together. I tried vigorously through several different means to get in touch with the president of the food chain, but I found that the allegation of the Breadbasket people was true, this chain simply would not talk. Blocked out as a mediator and increasingly skeptical about the company's good faith, I became an advocate and found myself eventually sitting in on company headquarters. This only means that someone else must come along to be the peacemaker in this case, or the conflict will never be resolved.

But the focus of Jesus' words is on inter-personal relationships. We need to remind ourselves that all the squabbles of the day are not national or international, social or political. In fact, I suspect that the stalemates that bother us most are not that remote or dramatic. They are more often near and commonplace. The frictions that wear us down are the frictions of the home, the office, the club, the school, the church, the shop. What are needed are some good oil spills on troubled waters in those places.

The tension points that trouble us will seldom if ever get out to where professional help will be either sought or given. Those tight little clusters and combinations that we get set into are given us by what has been called the "thrownness" of life. They can be attributed to what Charles Williams has dared to call "holy Luck."

Call it what you will, this is our parish. This is the field in which we either do or do not exercise the role of peacemaker in the Master's name.

In Even Hunter's book, The Blackboard Jungle, various types of people and their approaches to unpleasant situations are described. I tick these off so that we might better locate ourselves. There is

first of all the person who uses force to face an unpleasant situation. He is called a "Clobberer." He just moves in and clobbers everything in sight. Another who is either unaware of the problem or who is practicing "studied evasion," is called a "Slumberer." Still another resorts to weeping at the sight and is properly called a "Slobberer." And then there is the person who is genuinely confused and doesn't know what to do. He tries this or that and is therefore called a "Fumbler."

Clobberers, slumberers, slobberers, fumlbers. What we are called to be is none of these. We are called to be enablers. "Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God."

* * *

There will always be strife. This is implied in our Beatitude. But it is also implied that there will always be those who will strive to make peace. The question that lies open is whether we choose to be part of the problem or part of the solution. We cannot make peace happen anywhere, but as God's instruments we can let God make peace through us.

CLOSING PRAYER

*We thank Thee God for Christ-like,
irenic spirits whom we have known
across the years
whose efforts were used of Thee
to control hostility and achieve peace.*

*Teach us how to differ graciously;
how to speak the truth in love;
how to be angry -- and sin not.
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Amen.

FOOTNOTES:

1. Filson, Floyd V., The Gospel According to St. Matthew, p. 78, Harper & Brothers, New York, 1960
2. McCabe, Charles, "The San Francisco Chronicle," August 27, 1970
3. Weil, Simone, Guilt and Grace, p. 111, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1952
4. Evely, Louis, That Man Is You, p. 216 Paulist Press Deus Books, New York, 1964

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