

FOLLOWERS OF THE WAY: "People of Peace." – October 2, 2016
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St. Matthew 5:9

A four-year-old and a six-year-old bought their mom a houseplant. She loved it until the sixth-year-old said with a sad face, "***There was a bouquet in the flower shop that we wanted to give you. It was lovely, but it was too expensive. It had a ribbon on it that said 'Rest in Peace.' We thought it would be just perfect since you are always asking for a little peace so that you can rest.***"

What is the world's greatest need this morning? What is more uncertain than next month's election? Larger than the danger of global warming?

Clearly, it is the need for world peace. The ubiquitous face of violence in our streets, and the streets of the world causes us to weep for peace. To pray for peace. And yet, peace eludes us.

The Greek word used for 'peace' in verse 9 is 'eirene' and it has multiple layers of meaning. It can mean the absence of war, or more deeply, a lack of anger, rage, hate or envy. It may also convey a sense of unity or harmony, a feeling of serenity that eliminates division and brings about harmony.

When I reflect on all of these Beatitudes, I am struck by the way Jesus weaves his values throughout, to show our need for peace.

Poverty pitted against wealth is contentious, and results in arrogance and insults. It becomes divisive when self-worth is determined by what we own. Thus, Jesus first calls for the cessation of our addiction to money and things.

Then, He calls for compassion to be shown for those who suffer, because they are our equals.

Next, come the meek who are willing to grow and change in their knowledge and understanding of life, and the world around them.

Jesus then blesses those who long for righteousness, for the world to treat everyone with equity. Then, Jesus calls us to create a society in which mercy is the mark of each relationship.

And today, Jesus speaks to us about being focused on one thing: a beautiful world in which God's will is done and harmony reigns. This is the goal Jesus was speaking about that day on the mountain side. Unfortunately, history intruded.

Those first followers saw Jesus crucified on Roman wood. It appeared as if all Jesus taught and did, failed. The hope he had brought forth in the hearts of so many, now rips their hearts apart. The groups that had followed Jesus through the villages and walked upon the trails, now stopped and returned to their homes.

There had been thrilling, white-knuckle experiences, 'E-ticket' rides; but all of that now appeared to be over.

For most, yes. But, not for all. For some, Jesus' words were engraved on their hearts; the promise of the Kingdom of God was still their calling. Some of his closest friends gathered beside the empty tomb, perhaps with a profound need to share memories and speak of the future.

As they spoke, they realized how good it was to meet and remember, and maybe it would be a good idea to meet again. They might even come up with a plan to teach others what Jesus had taught them.

So the Church began, and remembering what Jesus had said, they started looking for Jesus' return. But, it didn't happen. Even St. Paul gave up on the idea. In his last letters, he revised his story. With so many other things going on in the world and the church, the teachings of Jesus took a back seat, and his vision of world peace was taken over by other movements and programs. The Way of Jesus was forgotten. The "Beatitudes," were disregarded.

Tranquility is not possible until we are at peace with the One who created us. Our serenity must be centered in Jesus, for only he is the 'Change Agent' we so anxiously need. Only Jesus can complete us and make us whole again. St. Paul told us, "***Christ is our peace.***"

Stanley A. Fry calls the "Beatitudes" "***Jesus' Toolbox.***" I like that! When we practice these Beatitudes, we prod the world toward the completion of Jesus' vision for world

serenity. To those who are listening with their 'heart-ears', Jesus says "***Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called the people of God.***"

And, the wonderful promises Jesus gives, will make your life beautiful. Alleluia.

Amen.