



Mending the DIVIDES

GOING DEEPER

DISCUSSION GUIDE

MARCH 24, 2019

Discussion Guide

BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS

CONNECTING:

45 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A WAY OF CONNECTING WITH ONE ANOTHER SO THAT YOU MIGHT PARTNER IN THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN YOUR LIVES.)

- IN WHAT WAYS DID GOD MOVE IN YOUR LIFE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS DID YOU RESPOND TO HIM?
- WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE THIS WEEK? IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, DID YOU INVITE GOD INTO THIS CHALLENGE?
- HOW HONEST HAVE YOU BEEN WITH US? (GRACIOUSLY THANK GROUP MEMBERS FOR THEIR HONESTY IF THEY STATE THEY HAVE HELD BACK.)

GETTING STARTED:

10 MINUTES

- IN WHAT WAYS, IF ANY, MIGHT YOU SAY THE WORLD IS AT WAR WITH ITSELF? WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO BRING PEACE INTO THESE SITUATIONS?

DIVING INTO THE TEXT:

60 MINUTES

(THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS ARE INTENDED TO PROVIDE YOUR GROUP WITH A SIMPLE ROAD MAP THROUGH THE TEXT. FEEL FREE TO USE THESE QUESTIONS IN WAYS THAT BEST FIT YOUR GROUP AND THE DYNAMICS OF YOUR OWN MEETING.)

- DISCUSS THE MEANING OF RECONCILIATION AND ITS USE IN THE WRITINGS OF PAUL.
- READ 2 CORINTHIANS 5.17-21 ALOUD. PAUSE AND READ THE TEXT ONCE MORE, SEEKING TO HEAR THE TEXT AS PAUL'S WORDS TO A PEOPLE WHO ARE AT ODDS WITH PAUL.
- ACCORDING TO PAUL, WHAT CHANGES HAS GOD MADE POSSIBLE? SEEK TO FIND AS MANY AS POSSIBLE.

- PAUL NOTES THAT ONE OF THE CHANGES GOD HAS MADE POSSIBLE IS HOW WE APPROACH BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS. LIKE GOD, WE CAN BE RECONCILERS (PEACEMAKERS). WHAT MIGHT THIS LOOK LIKE TODAY?
- DO YOU SEE MANY PEACEMAKERS AMONG GOD'S PEOPLE TODAY? WHY MIGHT THIS BE THE CASE?
- IF GOD HAS MADE IT POSSIBLE TO BE A PEACEMAKER (ONE WHO RECONCILES RELATIONSHIPS) WHAT MIGHT HINDER THIS WORK FROM BEARING FRUIT IN OUR LIVES? COULD YOU ELABORATE?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO OPEN OUR LIVES TO GOD IN SUCH A WAY THAT WE MIGHT BEAR THE FRUIT OF PEACEMAKING?
- WHAT, IF ANYTHING, KEEPS US FROM OPENING OUR LIVES TO GOD IN THIS MANNER AS INDIVIDUALS? AS A GROUP?
- WHAT MIGHT IT LOOK LIKE TO BEAR AND EXPERIENCE THE FRUIT OF PEACEMAKING AS A GROUP?
- CONSIDER CLOSING BY PRAYING FOR THE GRACE TO BEAR THE FRUIT OF A PEACEMAKER.

CONTEXT, BACKGROUND, AND COMMENTARY

RECONCILIATION

IN THE ANCIENT GREEK WORLD, THE TERM RECONCILIATION AND ITS COGNATES REFERRED TO THE PROCESS OF RESTORING UNDERSTANDING AFTER A PERIOD OF HOSTILITY OR DISPLEASURE BETWEEN THE INVOLVED PARTIES. THIS PROCESS WAS UNDERSTOOD TO TAKE PLACE IN LEGAL SETTINGS AND WITHIN RELATIONSHIPS. HOWEVER, THE ANCIENT GREEKS DID NOT UNDERSTAND RECONCILIATION TO BE A PART OF THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE. IN PAGANISM, NO REAL RELATIONSHIP WITH THE GODS EXISTED TO BE RESTORED. RATHER, INTERACTIONS WITH THE GODS WERE TRANSACTIONAL IN NATURE. THEREFORE, THE

PROCESS OF APPEASING A GOD WAS THE PROPER WAY TO RELATE TO THE GOD.

THE OLD TESTAMENT MAKES LITTLE USE OF THE TERM "RECONCILIATION," BUT THE CONCEPT OF RESTORING ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHERS IS PRESENT, DESCRIBED AT VARIOUS POINTS THROUGH THE MOSAIC LAW (SEE FOR EXAMPLE EXODUS 22.1.). HOWEVER, THE JEWISH PEOPLE ALSO UNDERSTOOD THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD INVOLVED THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION, PARTICULARLY AFTER TIMES OF REBELLION. THE BOOK OF JUDGES PORTRAYS A REPEATED PATTERN OF THIS EXPERIENCE OF REBELLION FOLLOWED BY RECONCILIATION, A RIGHTING OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND HIS PEOPLE. IN THIS PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION, THE IMPETUS OF RECONCILIATION OFTEN RESTED WITH PEOPLE, APPROACHING GOD WITH CONFESSION OF SIN AND REPENTANCE.

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THE TERM "RECONCILIATION" APPEARS IN THE TEACHING OF JESUS AND PAUL. JESUS SPEAKS OF RECONCILIATION IN TERMS OF THE PROCESS OF RESTORING RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PEOPLE (MATTHEW 5.23-24), A MANNER WHICH FITS WELL WITH THE CLASSICAL USE OF THE TERM. IT IS PAUL WHO USES THE TERM IN A NEW MANNER, THE RESTORATION OF RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE AS INITIATED BY GOD, NOT PEOPLE. IN THIS USE, PAUL CONTINUES THE OLD TESTAMENT THOUGHT OF RESTORING A BROKEN RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, BUT HE PORTRAYS GOD RATHER THAN PEOPLE AS THE INITIATOR OF THIS PROCESS OF RESTORATION.

THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION IS A CENTRAL PILLAR TO PAULINE THEOLOGY. AT POINT, HE USES THE TERM AS A FUNCTIONAL EQUIVALENT FOR JUSTIFICATION AND RIGHTEOUSNESS (ROMANS 5.9-11; 2 CORINTHIANS 5.19; COLOSSIANS 1.20-22). PAUL'S USE OF THE TERM IN ROMANS 5.10 AND 2 CORINTHIANS 5.18-20 INDICATE THE PROCESS OF RECONCILIATION INVOLVES GOD'S UNILATERAL CHOICE TO DEAL WITH SIN THROUGH THE WORK OF JESUS APART FROM AND BEFORE ANY RESPONSE OF PEOPLE. THEREFORE, THE RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WHICH IS POSSIBLE BECAUSE OF GOD'S RECONCILING WORK IS A GIFT FROM GOD, EFFECTIVE WHEN RECEIVED BY PEOPLE. THROUGH CHRIST, GOD HAS REMOVED ENMITY BETWEEN HIMSELF AND PEOPLE, REPLACING IT WITH PEACE AND GOODWILL (COLOSSIANS 1.19-22). THIS IS A VERY DIFFERENT UNDERSTANDING OF RELATING TO A GOD THAN THAT FOUND IN PAGANISM. IN PAGAN THOUGHT, A PERSON WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR APPROACHING A GOD AND APPEASING HIM SO THEY MIGHT RECEIVE WHAT THEY DESIRED, THE RELATIONAL TRANSACTION HAVING ASSURED THE GOD'S FAVOR; THAT IS, THE GOD WAS THE OBJECT OF THE RECONCILING WORK SO TO SPEAK,

AND THIS RELATIONSHIP WAS SHALLOW AT BEST. ACCORDING TO PAUL, PEOPLE ARE THE OBJECT OF GOD'S RECONCILING WORK. THIS UNILATERAL CHOICE AND WORK ON GOD'S PART DISPLAYS HIS MERCIFUL CHARACTER WHICH LEADS GOD TO SEEK TO BE IN DEEP UNION WITH PEOPLE. THIS EXPERIENCE OF THE MERCIFUL CHARACTER OF GOD RESULTS A SENSE OF JOY IN ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (ROMANS 5.11). IN KEEPING WITH THE TEACHING OF JESUS, PAUL NOTES GOD'S RECONCILING WORK SERVES AS AN EXAMPLE FOR THE SHAPE AND NATURE OF THE GOSPEL AND THE MINISTRY OF SUCH (MATTHEW 5.9; 2 CORINTHIANS 5.17-21).

THE TEXT

2 CORINTHIANS 5.17-21:

THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

IN 2 CORINTHIANS, PAUL IS FIGHTING TO RETAIN HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY IN THE EYES OF THE CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS. TEACHERS CLAIMING TO BE SUPER-APOSTLES HAD COME TO CORINTH IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING PAUL'S MINISTRY IN THE CITY. THESE MEN TAUGHT PAUL DID NOT DISPLAY THE PROPER CREDENTIALS TO BE RECEIVED AS AN APOSTLE. THIS SITUATION FEELS VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE CONTEXT OF 1 CORINTHIANS. IN THIS FORMER LETTER, PAUL WAS SEEKING TO UNIFY A DIVIDED CONGREGATION. HOWEVER, THE SEEDS OF THESE DIVISIONS MAY LIE WITH THE WORK OF THESE TEACHERS, SOMETHING WHICH PAUL ONLY LATER CAME TO REALIZE (1 CORINTHIANS 1-4).

IN CHAPTER 5, PAUL ARGUES THAT THE AUTHENTICITY OF HIS MINISTRY CAN BE SEEN IN HOW HE SPOKE TO AND MINISTERED AMONG THE CORINTHIANS (2 CORINTHIANS 5.11-15). UNLIKE A RHETORICIAN WHO USED SPEECH TO PERSUADE AN AUDIENCE TO AGREE TO AN IDEA TO WHICH HE HIMSELF WAS UNATTACHED, PAUL SPOKE HONESTLY OUT OF HIS OWN EXPERIENCE WITH GOD. HIS MINISTRY WAS COMPELLED BY GOD'S LOVE, NOT FALSE MOTIVES, AND IT BORE THE MARKS OF A NEW WORLDVIEW ROOTED IN CHRIST (2 CORINTHIANS 5.16).

HAVING ARGUED FOR THE AUTHENTICITY OF HIS MINISTRY AND MESSAGE, PAUL TURNS ASIDE TO DESCRIBE HOW HE CAME TO UNDERSTAND THE WORLD AND PEOPLE AS HE DOES. HE NOTES THAT IN CHRIST, HE AND OTHERS BECOME NEW PERSONS, INCAPABLE OF LIVING IN OLD WAYS ANY LONGER (2 CORINTHIANS 5.17). IN PAUL'S WRITING, THERE IS SOME LACK OF SPECIFICITY AS TO WHAT IT MEANS TO BE "IN CHRIST." DOES IT MEAN TO BE IN RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRIST, TO BE UNDER THE SPHERE OF HIS CONTROL AND INFLUENCE, OR DOES IT MEAN TO BE CAUGHT UP IN THE WAKE OF THE REDEMPTIVE MINISTRY OF CHRIST? LIKELY, PAUL HAS ALL IN MIND, WITH SPECIFIC NUANCES OF THE PHRASE SERVING HIS PARTICULAR NEEDS IN THE MOMENT. HE ARGUES

THAT THIS CHANGE TO A NEW WAY OF BEING RESTS COMPLETELY UPON THE WORK OF GOD, AN OUTWORKING OF HIS MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION THROUGH THE PERSON OF JESUS.

RECONCILIATION IS THE PROCESS OF MENDING THE RELATIONAL DIVIDES BETWEEN PARTIES SO THE RELATIONSHIP MIGHT BE WHOLE. ACCORDING TO PAUL, RECONCILIATION BEGINS WITH GOD AND IS A STATE GIVEN TO PEOPLE AS A GIFT. THROUGHOUT THE LETTERS OF PAUL, RECONCILIATION IS USED AS ANOTHER WAY OF REFERRING TO GOD'S REDEMPITIVE ACT OF JUSTIFICATION OR MAKING RIGHTEOUS. PAUL ALSO REFERS TO RECONCILIATION AS THE PROCESS OF COMING TO PEACE IN ONE'S RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD (COLOSSIANS 1.19-22; ROMANS 5.9-11).

PAUL IS CLEAR HIS MINISTRY IS WHAT IT IS NOT SIMPLY BECAUSE HE EXPERIENCES A RIGHTED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, BUT IN THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, PAUL IS CALLED TO JOIN IN GOD'S WORK OF RECONCILIATION. PAUL CLARIFIES GOD'S WORK OF RECONCILIATION INVOLVED MAKING IT POSSIBLE FOR THE WORLD TO BE IN RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM BY SENDING CHRIST INTO THE WORLD. THIS MINISTRY OF CHRIST DEALT WITH THE CRUX OF WHAT BROUGHT ENMITY BETWEEN GOD AND PEOPLE: SIN. THEREFORE, TO BE CALLED INTO THIS MINISTRY IS TO BE CALLED TO CARRY OUT THE MINISTRY OF CHRIST IN THE WORLD. SOMEHOW, PAUL IS PART OF GOD'S DEALING WITH SIN; THAT IS, GOD IS WORKING THROUGH PAUL TO DEAL WITH SIN. PAUL EXPLAINS THIS INVOLVES BEING GIVEN A MESSAGE OF RECONCILIATION, THE GOSPEL. HOWEVER, PAUL ENVISIONS THIS MESSAGE IS MORE THAN WORDS. IT INVOLVES ACTIONS. PAUL SEES HIMSELF AS ONE OF CHRIST'S AMBASSADORS, THE PHYSICAL SUBSTITUTE FOR JESUS EMPOWERED TO CARRY OUT THE FULL DUTIES OF JESUS IN THE WORLD. IN MANY WAYS, THIS IS IMAGE OF GOD LANGUAGE (GENESIS 1.26-28). AS A PHYSICAL REPRESENTATIVE OF JESUS, PAUL IS MOVING ABOUT IN LIFE IN PLACES LIKE CORINTH, DOING THE WORK OF JESUS, CALLING AND LEADING PEOPLE TO A RESTORED RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD WHICH IN TURN LEADS THEM TO A RIGHTEOUS LIFE. HERE WE SEE THAT PAUL SEES GOD'S WORK OF RECONCILIATION AS ONE WHICH REVERBERATES INTO THE LARGER LIFE OF THOSE WHO RECEIVE THIS WORK, LEADING THEM TO THE LIFE GOD ORIGINALLY INTENDED.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE IN PAUL'S ARGUMENT IS HIS INSISTENCE THAT THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION IS GOD'S MINISTRY, ONE DONE THROUGH HUMAN AGENTS. IN THE SAME WAY THAT GOD MADE A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO BE AT PEACE WITH HIM THROUGH JESUS AS ENFLESHED GOD, SO TOO, IS GOD STILL AT WORK MAKING A WAY FOR PEOPLE TO BE AT PEACE WITH HIM THROUGH PEOPLE. WHILE THE WORK OF DEALING WITH SIN LAY SOLELY WITH JESUS ON THE CROSS, THE FOLLOWERS

OF JESUS WERE HIS PHYSICAL REPRESENTATIVES DECLARING THE POSSIBILITY OF THIS RECONCILED WORK OF GOD, DISPLAYING THIS RIGHTED RELATIONSHIP IN THEIR OWN LIVES, AND BRINGING ABOUT THE REVERBERATING RESULTS OF RECONCILIATION IN THE WORLD WHICH SURROUNDED THEM. PAUL'S OWN WORK AMONG THE CORINTHIANS POINTS TO THE REALITY THAT HE UNDERSTOOD HIS ROLE AS A MINISTER OF THE GOSPEL TO INVOLVE PEACEMAKING (RECONCILING). IN HIS FIRST LETTER PAUL SOUGHT TO MEND THE DIVIDES BETWEEN FACTIONS IN THE CHURCH (1 CORINTHIANS 1-4), BETWEEN THOSE IN SUING ONE ANOTHER (1 CORINTHIANS 6.1-11), BETWEEN THOSE WHO DIFFERED OVER EXPOSURE TO IDOLATRY (1 CORINTHIANS 8.1-13), AND BETWEEN THOSE ABUSING THE LORD'S TABLE AND THOSE ABUSED (1 CORINTHIANS 11.17-34).

REAL LIFE WITH BLAKE:

WITH EACH PASSING DAY, MY HEART BREAKS A LITTLE BIT MORE AT THE STATE OF OUR WORLD. WE LIVE IN A WORLD WHICH IS DEEPLY DIVIDED, AT WAR WITH ITSELF. ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS KILL AND MURDER THOSE WHO DO NOT AGREE WITH THEM, EVEN AS WHITE EXTREMISTS SLAUGHTER THOSE WHO DO NOT LOOK LIKE THEM. WAR, THE CHOSEN INSTRUMENT USED TO SETTLE DISPUTES LAYS THE FOUNDATION FOR DEEPER AND MORE SERIOUS DISPUTES. POLITICAL TRIBALISM IS ALL THE RAGE, AND PEOPLE WHO ARE FLEEING THEIR COUNTRIES OF ORIGIN FOR SAFETY ARE DENIED THEIR HUMANITY AS THEY ARE PORTRAYED AS INVADERS, NOT PEOPLE WHO ARE DESPERATE FOR A BETTER LIFE. RAISING ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS ABOUT THE PRESENT STATE OF AFFAIRS DIVIDES LIFELONG FRIENDS AND SPLITS CHURCHES. THE TRAJECTORY IS FAIRLY EASY TO DISCERN. KEEP THE PRESENT COURSE AND WE WILL TEAR THIS WORLD AND ONE ANOTHER APART IN SHORT ORDER. SO, DO WE THROW UP OUR HANDS AND SAY, "LET IT BURN!"? I SUPPOSE THE ANSWER DEPENDS ON YOUR ESCHATOLOGY, YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF HOW GOD'S PLAN OF REDEMPTION IS MOVING TO ITS CLIMAX. THOSE WHO HOLD TO ANY FORM OF DISPENSATIONAL FRAMEWORK ARE THE FIRST TO DISENGAGE. IN THIS SYSTEM OF THOUGHT, GOD WORKS IN DIFFERENT WAYS IN DIFFERENT ERAS. THIS ERA IS MEANT TO COME TO A FIERY END, SO LET IT BURN. HOWEVER, HOLDING TO A DISPENSATIONAL FRAMEWORK IS RATHER DIFFICULT IN LIGHT OF SCRIPTURE AND THE WHOLE OF CHURCH HISTORY. BIBLICALLY AND TRADITIONALLY, OUR GOD IS A GOD WHO WORKS THROUGH COVENANTS, NOT IN ERAS. PRESENTLY, WE ARE PART OF GOD'S COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM, A COVENANT WHICH IS NOT FULFILLED UNTIL GOD BLESSES ALL PEOPLE THROUGH HIS PEOPLE. THINK RESTORE THE WORLD! SO, DISENGAGEMENT IS NOT REALLY AN OPTION FOR THE PEOPLE OF GOD. SO, WHAT, IF ANYTHING,

CAN WE DO?

IF WE LOOK CLOSELY AT THE TEACHING OF JESUS, GOD HAS GIVEN US A MECHANISM FOR DEALING WITH THE DEEP DIVISIONS WE FIND IN OUR WORLD: PEACEMAKING (MATTHEW 5.9). PEACEMAKING IS THE PROCESS OF MAKING SOMETHING SHATTERED WHOLE. TO MAKE PEACE IS TO MEND THE DIVIDES. TO MAKE PEACE IS TO MEND THE DIVIDE BETWEEN THE ISLAMIC EXTREMIST AND HIS FELLOW MUSLIM WHO INTERPRETS THE KORAN THROUGH A MORE GENEROUS LENS. TO MAKE PEACE IS TO MEND THE DIVIDE BETWEEN THE WHITE EXTREMIST AND THE PEOPLES OF COLOR OF WHOM HE IS SO DEEPLY AFRAID. TO MAKE PEACE IS TO SEEK TO BRING AN END TO POLITICAL TRIBALISM AND TO RESTORE DIGNITY, HUMANITY, AND VALUE TO THOSE HARMED BY THIS TRIBALISM. SOUND IMPOSSIBLE? PERHAPS. SOUND UNPOPULAR? MOST DEFINITELY. HOWEVER, JESUS DIDN'T SAY IT WAS A POPULAR APPROACH. IN FACT, IN HIS OPENING WORDS OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT HE CALLS OUT SOME OF THE MOST UNPOPULAR PEOPLE IN HIS DAY, AND OURS, AND HE CALLS THEM BLESSED. THESE PEOPLE WHOM JESUS' CULTURE AND OUR OWN VIEW AS MISFITS AND OUTCASTS ENJOY THE SPECIAL FAVOR OF GOD. PEACEMAKERS ENJOY THE SPECIAL HONOR OF BEING VIEWED AS THOSE WHO ARE PART OF GOD'S FAMILY.

WHY DOES GOD LOOK SO FAVORABLY UPON PEOPLE WHO MEND DIVIDES? IT COULD BE BECAUSE PEACE LIES AT THE HEART OF THE CHARACTER OF GOD, A DEEP UNIFYING WHOLENESS (DEUTERONOMY 6.4), A WHOLENESS HE CREATED US TO BEAR (GENESIS 2.24). IT IS THIS DEEP CHARACTER OF WHOLENESS WHICH MOTIVATES GOD TO BRING WHOLENESS TO OUR LIVES ONCE MORE (JOHN 14.27). IN FACT, PEACE IS SO DEAR TO GOD THAT RESTORING PEACE (PEACEMAKING) IS THE HEART OF GOD'S REDEMPTIVE WORK (2 CORINTHIANS 5.17-21). PEACEMAKERS ARE DEAR TO GOD BECAUSE THEY LOOK A WHOLE LOT LIKE GOD. THEY ARE HIS KIDS! BUT, THERE IS A CATCH. TO RECEIVE GOD'S PEACE, TO BE RESTORED TO OUR ORIGINAL STATE OF BEING MEANS THAT PEACE BECOMES CENTRAL TO WHO WE ARE. WE BECOME LIKE GOD. WHEN A DEEP UNIFYING WHOLENESS BECOMES SUCH A DEEP PART OF US THAT LIKE GOD, WE CANNOT HELP BUT MOVE TO RESTORE THAT WHICH IS BROKEN. LIKE GOD, WE GO FORTH AND MEND DIVIDES.

SUCH IS OUR CALLING AS CHILDREN OF GOD, BUT IT IS A CALLING DROWNED OUT BY THE NOISE OF WAR WHICH SURROUNDS US, A NOISE TO WHICH WE WITTINGLY AND UNWITTINGLY CONTRIBUTE. BUT IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THIS WAY. WE CAN RECEIVE GOD'S PEACE, EXPERIENCE HIS PEACEMAKING, AND STEP FORTH AS HIS PEACEMAKERS, MENDING THE DIVIDES.

REAL LIFE WITH YOU:

THE WORLD IN WHICH WE LIVE IS AT ODDS WITH ITSELF. BETWEEN THE INCREASING PARTISAN NATURE OF OUR POLITICS, THE HUNKERING INTO OPPOSING CAMPS OF ORTHODOXY, AND THE RISING ANIMOSITY BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIFFERING CULTURES AND COLOR OF SKIN IT IS NOT HARD TO SEE THE TRAJECTORY OF THE WORLD, AND WE ARE JUST SCRATCHING THE SURFACE. BUT IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE THIS WAY. IT WAS NOT MEANT TO BE THIS WAY. OUR GOD IS ONE WHO EXISTS IN A DEEP, ABIDING UNITY, PEACE WITH HIMSELF. HE CREATED US TO LIVE IN THIS SAME PEACE, AND WHEN WE SHATTERED IT, HE HAS MOVED HEAVEN AND EARTH TO RESTORE US TO OUR INTENDED STATE. HOWEVER, TO RECEIVE GOD'S PEACE, TO BE RESTORED TO A DEEP AND ABIDING UNITY IS MEANT TO BRING PEACE TO THE FOREFRONT OF OUR MINDS. PEOPLE WHO LIVE AT PEACE CANNOT TOLERATE A WORLD LIKE THE ONE IN WHICH WE LIVE. RATHER, LIKE GOD, THEY MOVE FORTH TO REPAIR IT, TO MEND ITS DIVIDES, SHARING THEIR PEACE WITH OTHERS. THEY LIVE AS PEACEMAKERS.

THE FUNNY THING (IN A TRAGIC WAY) IS THAT MANY OF GOD'S PEOPLE TODAY ARE MORE INTERESTED IN CARRYING PEACEMAKERS THAN BEING A PEACEMAKER. THE ONLY WAY THIS CAN BE THE CASE IS WHEN GOD'S PEACE HAS BEEN REFUSED, WHEN WE HAVE REJECTED HIS OVERTURES OF PEACEMAKING, FOR TO RECEIVE HIS PEACE IS TO LIVE AS A PERSON OF PEACE. SO, PERHAPS, MANY OF US NEED TO START OVER, WITH GOD THAT IS, SO THAT WE MIGHT START OVER WITH ONE ANOTHER. PERHAPS, EACH OF US MIGHT RETURN TO THE CROSS AND WITH HUMILITY RECEIVE WHAT ONLY GOD CAN OFFER, A MENDED LIFE, A MENDED HEART, PEACE. THEN, WITH GOD'S PEACE WE MIGHT GO FORTH AND BE HIS PEACEMAKERS.

AS FOLLOWERS OF CHRIST, WE HAVE A RHYTHM OF RETURNING AND RECEIVING WITH THE CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S TABLE. WITH THE LORD'S TABLE WE CELEBRATE BOTH THE WORK OF GOD AND ITS RESULTS. IN THE BREAD AND WINE, WE CELEBRATE AND RECEIVE ONCE MORE THE RECONCILING WORK OF GOD WHICH DRAWS US AS A UNIFIED PEOPLE TO A SINGLE TABLE. WE RECEIVE WHAT GOD HAS DONE AND WHAT HE HAS MADE POSSIBLE, PEACE. WE ALSO SEE WHAT OUR LIVES ARE TO BE AS WE MOVE AWAY FROM THE TABLE. WE ARE PEOPLE WHO NOW POSSESS PEACE AND OFFER IT TO OTHERS. WE LEAVE THE TABLE AS PEACEMAKERS. AS WE CELEBRATE THE LORD'S TABLE, THESE REALITIES MUST BE KEPT IN MIND AS WE ASK FOR MERCY AND GRACE TO SEE THEM TAKE ROOT IN OUR LIVES. PERHAPS AFTER YOUR NEXT CELEBRATION OF THE LORD'S TABLE, YOU MIGHT REFLECT ON THESE TRUTHS AND TALK OPENLY WITH JESUS ABOUT THEM.



SENIOR
PASTOR
BLAKE
SHIPP

 twitter.com/blake_shipp

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