

“**Blessed are the peacemakers**” – that was the theme for the recent Synod of the South Australia/Northern Territory District of the Lutheran Church of Australia. Our God is a peace-making God. The Bible calls him “**The God of peace**” (**Romans 15:33**) We believe in God who sent his son Jesus Christ to die for our sins and be raised to give us a new life. St Paul said “**He himself is our peace**” (**Ephesians 2:14**). Jesus said “**Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God**” (**Matthew 5:9**). In a sense as Christians we don’t “make peace”, we simply live in the peace of God that we enjoy from knowing Jesus Christ, and with his help live in that peace with each other, beginning in the church. That should be obvious and people come to church looking for a bit of peace with God but churches are not always peaceful places to be.

Back in May every pastor in the LCA had to do training in peacemaking because we recognized that our churches are not always peaceful and we pastors sometimes contribute to that! At our August conference we asked pastors to tell us what recently “disturbed the peace” in their congregations. You can see some of them on the screen..... *“worship times and content, building projects, family conflicts, power struggles, ripple effect of small issues, 3rd party involvement, young v old in catering committee, Lutheran school supporters v non-supporters, personality clashes, role of pastor, poorly performing volunteers, youth v youth worker, carpets..”*

We also asked them to tell us what kind of behavior went with that disturbed peace in their congregations. Again you can see some of the responses on the screen.... *“right / wrong mentality, pride, gossip, poor communication, self-justification, hurt, loss of rights, broken relationships, blame, lack of forgiveness, denial, defensive, lack of resolution, toxic atmosphere, pain, frustration, bloody-mindedness, loss of control / power, unhealthy submission, passive-aggressive, hanging on to past grievances, interferes with mission, polarization, distortion, impatience, some prefer to be angry and get revenge, don’t see our hypocrisy, forced to take sides, root causes not dealt with.”*

Conflict is not necessarily bad, we simply disagree on something, but what we say after that and to and about the person we have had a disagreement with, that’s where we often get into trouble and things break down. James said in today’s reading: **“If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check. ..but no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in God's likeness.. (James 3:1-12)**

In days gone past people used to stand up and fight when there was conflict in churches, now they just get up and leave, sometimes quietly, sometimes with a bang! The peacemaking Jesus calls us to is not about running away from issues and people, but facing issues and the people we have issues with, with his help. So how can we be peacemakers, how can we restore relationships that have gone bad because of things said and done? The book “The Peacemaker” which every pastor is supposed to have read suggested we remember the “4G’s”. Not the following 4G’s – get your own way, get angry, get even, get others on your side! No, the 4G’s of peacemaking are very different.

1. Glorify God.

Paul said “**Whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God**”. (**1 Cor 10:31**) Make sure your motivation is God not self. Ask yourself “Who do I want to come out on top in this, God or myself? Whose will do I ultimately want done, Gods or mine? Who is at the centre of this issue, God or me?” Resolve to glorify the God who has forgiven you and brought you peace from

Jesus in whatever you do and say. “How can I be a witness to Christ in this? How can I grow to be more like Christ through this? How can I honour God by trusting him, focusing on his on forgiveness and what he has done for all of us, and keep his command to love? How can I make things better and not worse and so glorify God?”

2. Get the log out of your own eye

Our natural tendency is to look at the other person’s fault. To find fault! Jesus said “**Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother’s eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?**” (Matthew 7:3). To be a peacemaker is to take responsibility for your own words and actions, see where you have gone wrong and admit it, and only then to help someone else see where they might have gone wrong too.

3. Gently restore

Galatians 6:1 says: “If someone is caught in a sin you who are spiritual should restore him gently, but watch yourself, or you also may be tempted”. Instead of running away from conflict or running around blabbing about it to others to get them on your side, either overlook petty things or if it is serious go to the person you have the problem with, in private, with the aim of restoring things with them, listening to and sharing with them, confessing to and forgiving them, not condemning them. It’s not just about reaching agreement, you may never agree on some things, but it is about restoring a relationship for the sake of Christ. Confess and offer to forgive for the sake of Christ. If you can’t do it on your own ask another Christian to come and help you, not to outnumber the other person but to show them you are serious and help keep yourself accountable in what you end up saying. You can’t force another person to meet you half way but you can offer it yourself.

4. Go and be reconciled.

Not go and get even, but go and be reconciled. Live as if you have been reconciled by God in Christ towards that other person. Find ways to express the fact that you have been forgiven by Christ and each other. Look for creative solutions, not easy compromise. You can’t always resolve issues quickly, but you can live as reconciled people. Sometimes in the church we can resolve issues but we don’t reconcile people. There is still something in the air between us. Christians don’t just want issues resolved we want people to be reconciled. To live as reconciled Christians means making 4 promises.

1. I will not dwell in this incident any more
2. I will not bring it up again against you
3. I will not talk about it to others
4. I will not allow the past to stand between us

Then we find steps together to resolve the issues themselves, and if we can’t do that on our own we find help to do it.

“Where two or three people are gathered there will be conflict.” That is true of any organization or family including churches. Our selfish inner tendencies make sure of that. Jesus said “**Where two or three come together in my name there I am with them**”. He makes all the difference, his presence in and with us. Peacemaking is not easy. In today’s Gospel (Mark 8:27-38) Jesus said he would have to suffer many things to bring peace between us and God. It would cost him his life. He also says as those who follow him something in us will have to die too if we are to live for him.

“Blessed are the peacemakers” May we each see ourselves as peacemakers, or rather as people who live in and live out the peace we enjoy and know in Jesus Christ who after all is our peace with God.