

The Things That Make for Peace

Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 1



Title: Recognizing the Things That Make for Peace

Texts: Luke 19:37–44, Ephesians 1:18

Goal for the session: Participants will compare and contrast cultural, political, and biblical definitions of peace.

What is important to know?

Jerusalem was the center of a culture marked by political oppression, military occupation, social domination, economic exploitation, and religious accommodation.

As Jesus entered the city, the disciples exclaimed, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!" But the disciples, the crowds, and the religious leaders all had different expectations and understandings of what it meant. For some, it was the fulfillment of prophecy, as in Zechariah 9:9, when a new king would arrive on a donkey. Some expected forceful overthrow of the Romans. Others saw it as a threat to their way of life.

But Jesus was the visitation from God, who in his life and ministry demonstrated and taught "I do not give [peace] to you as the world gives" (John 14:27). The peace and, indeed, the kingdom Jesus proclaimed were not like any other kind of peace that the world had known—or knows today.

Jesus challenged all of the political, military, economic, social, and religious forces of the world by his acceptance of outcasts, compassion and healing for those tormented by physical and mental illness, and his teachings, particularly the Beatitudes. He offered an alternative view of the world in all of these spheres, finally lamenting, "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." Jesus did not come as one who would overpower or overthrow the dominant powers of the culture by force. Instead, Jesus taught a different kind of peace than the world taught. It included loving our enemies, forgiveness, welcoming outcasts, healing disease and illnesses, feeding the hungry, and the power of love to transform our lives and our culture. These are some of the things that make for peace.

What does this mean for our lives?

The same forces that dominated the world of Jesus' time are still present in various degrees. We still often seek to overcome these forces with enmity and force. The closing prayer for this session is a benediction attributed to St. Francis. To pray to be blessed with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness may not at first seem like a blessing, much less a prayer for peacemakers. But recognizing the conditions and situations we are in and the alternative path to peace that Jesus teaches are the first step to welcoming the transforming peace of Christ.

What are we called to do?

Jesus lamented "If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes." Jesus calls us to open our eyes, minds, and hearts to a different vision of peace and to be peacemakers within our own lives, churches, communities, and world. This five week series will explore the various ways we are called to be peacemakers.

Small group quotes

- A. "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"
- B. "Peace in heaven, and glory in the highest heaven!"
- C. "Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, order your disciples to stop.'"
- D. "As (Jesus) came near and saw the city, he wept over it, saying, 'If you, even you, had only recognized on this day the things that make for peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes.'
- E. "The days will come upon you, when your enemies will set up ramparts around you and surround you, and hem you in on every side. They will crush you to the ground, you and your children within you, and they will not leave within you one stone upon another."

Small Group Questions

Political oppression

- What forces seek to dominate the political decisions of our time?
- Who is excluded from participating in important decisions in our country? Our world?

Military occupation

- What priorities have been pushed aside in the name of military strength and protection?

- How does excessive military spending take away from the things that make for peace?

Social domination

- Who in our time still faces oppression, inequality, or domination by others?
- What is the impact to the majority when a minority is excluded from basic rights?

Economic exploitation

- How do our personal investments change our perspectives about world conflicts?
- How do your investments reflect your values? World values? Jesus' values?

Religious accommodation

- What "things of peace" does the church give up to go along with our culture?
- How does the culture reward the church for not getting involved in politics, economics, and social issues?

Personal reflections

- How do our peace tactics and value differ from those Jesus taught?
- How would the values Jesus taught change our responses to political, military, economic, social, and religious conflicts?
- In what ways can the "eyes of my heart" be opened to the peace values of Jesus?

Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort
 At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
 So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
 At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
 So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears
 To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger, and war,
 So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them and
 To turn their pain into joy.
 And may God bless you with enough foolishness
 To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
 So that you can do what others claim cannot be done
 To bring justice and kindness to all our children and the poor.
 Amen

The Things That Make for Peace

Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 2



Title: Finding Peace—*“So that you may live deep within your heart”*

Texts: Luke 5:12–16 and John 14:27

How do we nurture a peace-full life? How do we deepen our personal spiritual practice as peacemakers? Using Luke 5: 12–16 and John 14:27, this session explores how Jesus sustained his journey and ways we can ground ourselves in the practice of peace.

Goal for the Session: Participants will explore ways to deepen their spiritual lives to help sustain them for the long haul of peacemaking

Once, when he was in one of the cities, there was a man covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he bowed with his face to the ground and begged him, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.” Then Jesus stretched out his hand, touched him, and said, “I do choose. Be made clean.” Immediately the leprosy left him. And he ordered him to tell no one. “Go,” he said, “and show yourself to the priest, and, as Moses commanded, make an offering for your cleansing, for a testimony to them.” But now more than ever the word about Jesus spread abroad; many crowds would gather to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. But he would withdraw to deserted places and pray. (Luke 5:12–16)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do give to you as the world gives. Do not let your heart be troubled, and do not let it be afraid.” (John 14:27)

What is important to know?

The work of peace and justice is both an inner and outer journey. Many gifted, passionate Christians devote themselves to work for peace and justice. They advocate for nonviolent solutions to world problems, care and sustainability for the earth, the rights of women and children, and many more important issues. They are committed to pursuing peaceful means to accomplish this work, which means they must employ more creativity than many justice-seekers. What we have discovered over the years is that without a commitment to regularly nurturing their own spiritual lives, they can become exhausted, disillusioned, and anxious, and ultimately must step back from this important journey in order to preserve themselves for the long haul. We know the demands of living and working are sufficient enough to

empty us at the end of the day if we are not intentional about pursuing our own spiritual well-being.

This study delves into what we know of Jesus’ spiritual practice and several ways to deepen participant’s inner journey as a peacemaker. Picking several biblical passages and tying them to a theme is, at best, an incomplete way to explore texts. The two text above are offered as a framework for each participant to explore her or his own spiritual life. Luke 5 reveals a pattern found in the synoptic gospels—namely, that Jesus would often withdraw to recover and refuel for his ministry. John 14:27 is taken from Jesus’ final words to his disciples, in which he gives them a “different” peace. We will conclude with exploring Philippians 4:4–7 as a model for a peace-full life.

A few assumptions:

1. Peacemaking is both an inner and outer journey. When we neglect the inner journey, we can become fragile, weary, and less effective in the work we do. If we neglect our outer journey, we can become myopic and out of touch with the realities of the work we do
2. No two spiritual lives are identical. The Scriptures can offer us insight, encouragement, and the example of Jesus, but each of us must ultimately turn to Jesus, in pursuit of a spiritual practice that will sustain them.
3. Every peacemaker needs an active spiritual life to stay healthy and effective.

Biblical context

Luke

When we look at the Gospel of Luke, we see a busy, compassionate, healing Christ. Just one chapter before the passage we are using (Luke 4:18–19) we see Jesus opening the scrolls and proclaiming, “the Spirit of the Lord is upon me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor . . .” The self-identification of Jesus as a prophet is quickly validated as Jesus heals Simon’s mother-in-law and a man with an unclean spirit, calls his disciples, and then returns again to his healing ministry.

All four Gospels record Jesus slipping away to pray at certain times in his ministry (Mark 1:35, 6:46; Matthew 14:23; Luke 9:18; John 6:18). These seem to come

between critical moments of his ministries of healing and casting out of demons. Such prayer was a pattern for Jesus, and we can guess that it was also an important part of his pattern of renewal.

John

The Gospel of John was compiled and canonized during the late first century. (See Bible Study #1 for discussion of military occupation, social domination, and economic exploitation.) There we find a higher Christology, with a focus on Christ's divine nature. The words of Jesus in John 13–16 were his departing words to his disciples before his betrayal and arrest. These are words of comfort and preparation.

We do not know exactly what Jesus meant when he said, "My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). In John's Gospel, though, the placement of this passage suggests Jesus is in some way preparing his followers for what is to come. Several verses earlier he says, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live" (John 14:18–19). Jesus speaks confusing and comforting words to his followers, reminding them that they will not be left alone.

Jesus says to them, "I will not leave you orphaned." Later he says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (John 14:27b). Jesus is concerned about them, perhaps knowing the difficulties that lie ahead. So he reminds them that he will still be with them. No doubt the disciples were both confused and comforted.

The Biblical concept of Peace or Shalom

The word *peace* is used in English Bibles to translate the Hebrew word *shalom*. In the Hebrew context, *shalom* implies more than an absence of war. It means wholeness, well-being, peacefulness and completeness. "Peace be with you" is the most common greeting in the Middle East and is still spoken today in Israel and Palestine by Muslims, Christians, and Jews. It is a blessing and a wish for happiness and good health.

God's peace, then, is also more than an external condition. It implies an internal sense of all being well with our souls. When we pass the peace of Christ to someone in worship, we are praying a blessing on that person, asking that all parts of his or her life be in right order. The pursuit of peace reminds us that following Jesus into a life of peace involves our relationships with God, each other, and the earth, our physical health and mental well-being. This is *shalom*.¹

What does this mean for our lives?

Jesus regularly "went away" to pray. We can imagine that he prayed something like the Lord's Prayer, but we do not

know for certain. We do know that he seemed to leave to pray at critical points in his ministry, after healings and the casting out of demons, and when overwhelmed by the crowds. For the peacemaker, who is certainly about the work of healing, this is a reminder to make time to allow God to renew our spirits for the calling we have been given.

In John, we find Jesus leaving his peace with his disciples, as a lifeline for the difficult times to come. He reminds them that his peace is not a superficial peace that comes and goes but a deeper sense of well-being and wholeness in life (God's *shalom*). Jesus says, "Do not let your hearts be troubled" and reminds them that God's peace is there for them. These are words that remind us to be patient, to keep working for God's peace and justice not only for ourselves but for our world.

What are we called to do?

Christ calls us to a relationship with God, ourselves, and the world that pursues the well-being of all people. We are invited to cultivate a spiritual life that can sustain us through our years of following Christ, so we may be beneficiaries and agents of peace.

Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger,
and war.
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
and
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and
the poor.
Amen.

Endnotes)

1. Timothy Beal, Florence Harkness Professor of Religion, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland OH

The Things That Make for Peace

Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 3

A Season of *Peace* 

Title: Practicing Peace—"So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace."

Texts: Matthew 5:38–42

Goal for the Session: Participants will explore Matthew 5:38–42 as a basis for active nonviolence and consider their response to it

What does it mean to "turn the other cheek?" What is the difference between being a doormat and choosing nonviolence? Based on the scholarship of Walter Wink, this study will explore Matthew 5:38–46 as a foundation for active nonviolence.

"So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace."

"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you."

What is important to know?

We will be looking at Matthew 5:38–42 through the scholarship of the late Walter Wink, who taught biblical interpretation at Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City for more than 30 years. Among his many publications is the book *The Powers That Be: Theology for a New Millennium*, published in 1998. His scholarship is still contributing to theological discussion about peace and war. In a world where the myth of redemptive violence is perpetuated at every turn, it is important for Christians to consider more than the traditional pacifist and just war theories. Through the example of Jesus, we are invited into the words of Jesus in a potentially life-changing third way, that of active nonviolent resistance.

Most Christians agree that Jesus was not a warrior. Nor was he a doormat. Although he took humility to a heartbreaking level—willingly submitting to crucifixion—we also observe him challenging the political and religious powers through his gracious and empowering treatment of women, prostitutes, tax collectors, the poor, and lepers, to name just a few. He also aligned himself with the prophet Isaiah, proclaiming,

*"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the
poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the
blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the
Lord's favor." (Luke 4:18–19)*

This is hardly a call to "give in to evil." So the question persists: What did Jesus mean when he said, "Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other also"? Is it a call to be passive in the face of injustice, abuse, and marginalization?

This study looks at these words within the context of the first century to see if there is another approach to the passage. Enter into it with an open mind, and see if you encounter Jesus a little differently.

Cultural Context First Century Palestine

- The Roman Empire, which spread all the way into Africa, controlled Palestine in the first century. The government allowed Jewish life and governance to continue—under Rome's watchful eye—as long as revenues were collected and the people remained compliant with their Roman occupiers.
- Palestinians were heavily taxed, creating a situation where poverty was a severe problem. The Roman court system was flooded with people taking advantage of every economic class. According to some sources, the wealthy were taxed 25 percent and more to fund wars, and many households were driven into debt while trying to retain the rights to their land.¹ The poor were often left with little more than the clothing on their backs.

"Turn the other [the left cheek] also." (v. 39)

- In Jewish culture, the left hand was only used for "unclean tasks". In the Qumran Jewish culture, the left hand was only used for "unclean" tasks. In the Qumran community (at the time of Jesus), gesturing with the left hand meant exclusion from the

community for 100 days.

- It was shameful to “backhand” someone unless the person was of a lower class than the perpetrator. It was used to humiliate or insult.

“Give your cloak as well.” (v. 40)

- Deuteronomy 24:10–13 allowed a creditor to take a person’s outer robe as collateral for repayment of a loan.
- Clothing was simple for common people. Peasants wore an outer coat and an under cloak (their undergarments).
- Middle Eastern culture of the day was shame-based. Nakedness was particularly shameful, more so for the one observing the nakedness than for the one without clothing.

“Go the second mile.” (v. 41)

Roman officers regularly enlisted people to carry their packs so they did not have to. At any time, people could be recruited to do work for the Romans. Some officers had mules to carry their packs, but many defaulted to people.

- It was a common practice for a soldier to recruit someone for one mile before allowing them to return and continue with their day.

Biblical context

- This passage comes in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, the most extensive teaching of Jesus found in the Bible. Through much of it, he offers an alternative reading of living as a faithful Jew. He looks at the law and reorients his listeners to the heart and intent behind the law.
- The Greek word translated “resist” in 5:39 is *antistennai*, literally “to stand against.” It was also used in the Hebrew Scriptures as a word for warfare. In Ephesians 6:13, which discusses the “whole armor of God,” the same word is used, there translated, “to withstand evil.”

What does this mean for our lives?

When we read Scripture, it is important that we ask questions when something doesn’t seem consistent with other portions of Scripture. It is also important that when we accept a particular interpretation, we remain open to other interpretations of the same texts. Scripture itself rarely gives us the cultural context, so referring to scholars is important for a full knowledge of scriptural interpretation.

What are we called to do?

We are called to be peacemakers by pursuing active nonviolence in the way of Christ. As peacemakers, we are neither conflict avoiders nor called to “force” justice. Jesus gives the ultimate model for nonviolent resistance, loving change, and self-giving humility. We are called to follow this Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Personal Reflection

Benediction of St. Francis

May God bless you with discomfort
At easy answers, half-truths, and superficial relationships,
So that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
At injustice, oppression, and exploitation of people,
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace.

May God bless you with tears
To shed for those who suffer from pain, rejection, hunger,
and war.
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
and
To turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
To believe that you can make a difference in the world,
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done

To bring justice and kindness to all our children and
the poor.
Amen.

Endnotes

1. Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be* (New York: Doubleday, 1998) p.98-111

The Things That Make for Peace

Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 4



Title: Extending Peace—"So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them"

Texts: Hebrews 13:1–3, Romans 12:13–21

Goal for the Session: Participants will study the biblical understanding of hospitality and its place in peacemaking. They will consider how we are to welcome and live with neighbors who are different.

What is important to know?

Hospitality plays an important role in the biblical concept of shalom, the things that make for peace. Hospitality means more than making family and guests welcome in our homes; it is about providing for the needs of any person we encounter, particularly the stranger. In biblical times, this was often widows, orphans, the poor, and sojourners from other lands—people who lacked status in a family or the community. Hospitality meant graciously welcoming such people in one's land, home, or community and providing directly for their needs of food, water, shelter, clothing, and respect. Hospitality and justice are inseparable, for if any person lacks these necessities, justice is not fully present in society, and peace cannot happen without justice.

Although the word hospitality is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures, God reminds the people that because they have been loved and cared for as strangers, they are to act in the same way toward the strangers who come among them: "You shall not wrong or oppress a resident alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry" (Exodus 22:21–23; see also Deuteronomy 26:1–11 and Leviticus 19:9–10, 22–34).

In addition to commands to practice hospitality, the Hebrew Scriptures also include examples of hospitality. Abraham greeted three strangers and then shared water, rest, and food with them (Genesis 18:2–8). Abraham didn't extend hospitality in order to gain the favor of the strangers, and yet they were the messengers who shared God's plans for Sarah. Ruth, an ancestor of Jesus, provided hospitality to Naomi and received hospitality from Boaz (Ruth 2:1–17). These two acts of hospitality not only met basic human needs but formed new relationships across national, ethnic, and religious lines. Job, in confessing the

sins of his past, included a petition for forgiveness for any times he had not practiced hospitality (Job 31:16–32).

In the New Testament, the Greek word for "hospitality" is *philoxenia*, which literally means "love of strangers." Jesus both taught hospitality and modeled it in his actions of welcoming strangers, eating with tax collectors and sinners, meeting a foreign gentile woman at the well, and healing without regard to nationality or religion. Jesus appeared as a stranger when he joined two followers on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:28–35). Only when they invited the resurrected Jesus to share the table and bread were their eyes opened to his presence. When we welcome others to our tables and homes, strangers who are guests can become divine hosts.

Many of Jesus' parables addressed hospitality. In response to the question "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus told the parable of the Samaritan who was the only one who extended hospitality to a traveler in need (Luke 10:25–37). The story affirms the meaninglessness of human borders, boundaries, and qualifications of worthiness in choosing loving and just actions.

Jesus addressed the attitudes and actions of the religious in the parable of the two sons (Luke 15:11–32). The father shows hospitality to his sons, both of whom have become as strangers: one by running away and wasting his inheritance on riotous living, the other by becoming absorbed with anger and resentment.

Finally, Jesus contrasted God's values and the world's values in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matthew 25:31–46). Our call to do what is loving and just is based neither on the worthiness of the recipient nor on the reward we might receive.

The writer of Hebrews connects the ethical teachings of Jesus on hospitality with the ancient story of Abraham and Sarah, saying, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it" (Hebrews 13:2).

What does this mean for our lives?

God expects us both individually and as a faith community to treat people (even strangers and enemies) without partiality. Scripture teaches that hospitality is a moral obligation and an expression of our gratitude for

God's love. Furthermore, we must be open to the ways that God may reveal divine purpose or calling through strangers or others we might not expect. Practicing hospitality is how we are to live as God's people.

The strangers in need in our time are not just widows, orphans, and sojourners. People looking for work and worth have lost homes and lost hope and been abandoned by friends and family. The stranger among us may be someone we have known all our lives but whom we come to find we don't know at all. The stranger may also be someone we will never meet but whose life intersects with ours in hidden and mysterious ways. How are we to hear God's word to us if we turn aside from the very people who may be the messengers of that word?

Practicing hospitality doesn't have to mean that our homes or church buildings become lodging or dining establishments or health care clinics or social service agencies. We can practice hospitality in many places and settings and with other groups. But practicing hospitality cannot be done by simply supporting those other organizations without meeting, being engaged with, and relating to the stranger.

What are we called to do?

Hospitality begins with hearts, minds, and lives that are open to God's transforming presence. Just as in times of old, God may come among us in surprising ways through surprising people. When we place conditions on the worthiness or merit of those we will welcome, we limit our own openness to the Spirit's power and presence. When our focus is more on rules and rituals than on relationships and righteousness, we may miss a message from God. When we move from hostility toward hospitality, our actions bring healing and peace both to those we touch and to our own community as well. We are called to be open to the needs that present themselves to us and to seek out those needs that are not made apparent.

In many cases, the stranger may be close at hand but hidden from sight out of fear or shame. Undocumented workers and people escaping abusive situations are just two such groups that may need the ministry of welcome but are not easily seen. The ministry of hospitality may require us to move out of the comfort zones of our church buildings and homes and into places where we will encounter and relate with the strangers of our time and culture.

Closing Prayer

May God bless you with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness.

So that you may live deep within your heart;

So that you may work for justice, freedom and peace;

So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;

So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Personal Reflections

How would a stranger react to a visit to your congregation?

How may God be speaking a word to you in the presence of a stranger or visitor?

The Things That Make for Peace

Participant Resource: Bible Study Session 5



Title: Living Peace—"So that you can do what others claim cannot be done."

Texts: 2 Chronicles 6:13–40, Matthew 5:23–24, and 2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Goal for the Session: Peace within, peace with God, and peace with others all require forgiveness and a life that seeks to restore broken relationships.

What is important to know?

We cannot have peace without justice, and justice requires mercy, even when mercy seems hard. Both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament teach that we cannot fully worship God or be in community while our hearts are harboring resentment. Exodus 22 highlights restitution as a requirement of the law. When Jesus read from and then interpreted Isaiah 61 in a sermon in Nazareth, he spoke not just of a time when violence would end but of a time of restoration and rejoicing, because peace and justice as Jesus envisions include reconciliation and restoration of right relationships.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said, "So when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23–24).

Joseph's brothers, who sold him into slavery in Egypt, begged for forgiveness, which he granted (Genesis 50:15–21). In Matthew 18:21–35, Jesus teaches Peter that forgiving our brothers and sisters is central to restoring our relationship to our heavenly Father. Forgiveness leads us not only to peace within but also to reconciliation and peace with those who have harmed us or whom we have harmed. When we forgive, we let go of anger, bitterness, resentment, retribution, or vengeance and reach for hearts of compassion, healing, and mercy. At the end of such a pathway lies true reconciliation.

The 2 Chronicles 6:13–40 passage tells of the dedication of the Temple by King Solomon. In the midst of all of the pageantry of that event, we are reminded of the main purpose of the Temple, which was the worship of God. The ministry of forgiveness and reconciliation is a central

focus of the dedication address; it was indeed the central focus of the Temple itself. Solomon recalls God's steadfast love and grace in the past and calls for confession of individual and corporate sin and for forgiveness, reconciliation, and restored relationship.

The Jewish Day of Atonement falls within A Season of Peace and offers a model of the spirit of cleansing and of healing from the pain we have inflicted on others and the pain we hold within ourselves (Leviticus 16:30).

The apostle Paul summarized the central place of reconciliation in our faith and lives in 2 Corinthians 5:16–21. God reconciled us to himself and gave us a ministry of reconciliation to live out with families and friends, neighbors, and enemies.

Such reconciliation doesn't deny or forget harmful actions but always holds people accountable for them, not to punish, but for the purpose of teaching, changing behavior, and encouraging steps toward restitution or reparation for damages. These proactive attempts to set things right often induce offended parties to give up claims to retribution and let go of resentment at being wronged, the final hurdles to the full restoration of relationship.

What does this mean for our lives?

Forgiveness and reconciliation are central to peacemaking, for such practices turn resentment into restored relationship. We can set the environment for forgiveness by doing good to those who offend us, by offering reconciliation to those who have offended us just as God has offered it to us. We are to do this not for our own sake alone but to model and make known the love God has for us and for all creation. We sometimes think that the offender must repent, but forgiveness and reconciliation come when we repent of our resentment and release our claims against the offender.

What are we called to do?

In many churches we begin our worship confessing the brokenness of our relationship with God and with others, hearing again the good news of forgiveness, and passing the peace with one another. This formula is not just for our worship gatherings but is the pattern for living in peace in our community and world.

As a community of faith, we cannot ignore or forget the wrongs that have been committed against us or others. Neither can we allow resentment to draw us into deeper conflict with brothers and sisters, for such separation from them separates us from God.

Unison Prayer

May God bless you with discomfort, anger, tears, and foolishness,
So that you may live deep within your heart;
So that you may work for justice, freedom, and peace;
So that you may reach out your hand to comfort them;
So that you can do what others claim cannot be done.
Amen.

Personal Reflections

Have you had a split or conflict within your family, congregation, or community? What can you do to bring people together in a spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation?