

Blessed are the peacemakers

What does it mean to be a peacemaker?

I've been round the houses this week with this Beatitude.

I was going to talk quite a bit about the difference between pacifism and peacemaking. I can't find it in myself, however much I might like to, to be a pacifist – because sometimes we do have to resist evil forcibly, if we want real peace.

Then I thought quite a bit about the difference between *peacemaking* and being a peaceable, gentle sort of person. You could be as gentle as anything without that actually helping to *make* peace.

It also strikes me that if we are going to try to be 'peacemakers' that can be an enormously complicated and brave thing. It asks for a lot of wisdom and discernment and foresight, if we hope to be able to judge between what will make for real peace and what is actually just an attempt to smooth things over, not ruffle feathers, or make us feel better about ourselves. And to be a *peacemaker* also requires us to get involved and commit to action in volatile circumstances, knowing we may have misjudged and be misjudged.

It's also often going to be very difficult to know whether we are really making peace, or whether we are actually making more trouble.

So I've ended up again realising just how deceptively simple this Beatitude is, along with all the other Beatitudes, and I end up coming back once more to thinking that this Beatitude again is about another great mystery of God, and about God working in mysterious ways, and is the first word, the first step, not the last.

A story it particularly makes me think about is Cyrus in the Old Testament. In the prophecies of Isaiah, there is one person who is particularly named as God's anointed one in a historical context, a person who God had chosen to do his will – and that was the last person you would expect, Cyrus, the Persian ruler. What Cyrus did was issue an edict that allowed the Jews to return from exile. Cyrus wasn't doing this out of any particular affinity for the Jewish God – we know that historically this kind of thing was in line with his general policy for dealing with subject nations. But the result was peace and restoration for the Jews. Cyrus would certainly rank as a peacemaker.

And there are going to be many, many situations in which the people who turn out to be the peacemakers aren't the ones you expect. God works in his own ways. He uses people unexpectedly. We don't know yet who

will emerge as the peacemakers of this era – but it may well surprise us. (Discuss over coffee!)

So I have to end up concluding that if we take this Beatitude in the order it appears, as being about actively trying to make ourselves into peacemakers, we cannot guarantee getting anywhere near what we are aiming at.

What this Beatitude does do, however, is make it absolutely clear that God *is* a God of peace. History shows very clearly that this is not an automatic assumption. The Old Testament also often implies something else. And our experiences of life may also make us feel that the same. But Jesus' teaching is unequivocal: God is a God of peace. His children understand that and try to follow his lead.

When we talk about following God's lead, as Christians we know that is also about following Jesus' lead. The Benedictus, which is the prayer of Zechariah at the birth of John the Baptist, ends with the line 'to guide our feet into the way of peace', as it tries to explain who Jesus is and why he has come. Jesus of course is often described as the Prince of Peace.

As I said, if we start by thinking about this Beatitude as being about trying to make ourselves into peacemakers, we'll probably get into a mess. The starting point has to be somewhere else: it has to be with *following* the one

who leads us on the path of peace. All the wisdom, discernment, foresight and so on that we would need to be effective peacemakers on our own is far, far beyond our paygrade; and God, as we have seen, in any case often uses very unlikely and unexpected means for making peace, so what we after deep deliberation decide is the right path for peacemaking may be anything but. We are on much firmer ground if we focus on *following* the Prince of Peace, really listening to what he teaches, seeing what example he gives us, and putting ourselves and our resources and abilities into Jesus' hands to use.

This doesn't mean it all suddenly becomes simple or easy. It's still going to be complicated and challenging. But at least it gives us a chance to find what the path of peace looks like in the particular life God has called us to. And then we can hopefully get beyond the analysing stage and actually start to be what we are called to be and do what we are called to do.