

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