

Sterling Sermon Guide
Finding Peace in Remembrance
Moses Falco, November 11, 2018



Finding Peace

How to use this guide

- The main purpose of this guide is to encourage groups and individuals to dig deeper into the topic of a sermon. This guide summarizes the sermon and provides discussion questions and suggestions of how to continue the conversation in order to apply the topic to real life.
- Listen to the sermon online (sterlingmennonite.ca) if you were not in church that Sunday or if you want to hear it again. If this sermon is not on the website, please contact our office.
- Re-read the scripture text and recommended reading.
- Select a leader in your group to guide your conversation and to lead you through this study.
- Use what is helpful for your group, but do not be bound by this guide. Let the Spirit lead you. You may be surprised where you end up.

Finding Peace in Remembrance
Part 1 of a 3-part series

Scripture Text: Psalm 106: 6-15, 47-48

Recommended Reading: Psalm 106

Prepare Your Heart: Psalm 106:1-3

Sermon Nugget: Mennonites are often conflicted when it comes to Remembrance Day. We want to remember and respect those who gave their lives, but at the same time we don't want to glorify or condone war. But the act of remembrance gives us a profound opportunity to speak for peace. In remembering the past, we learn from it when we do so from a place of prayer and lament. It allows us to sit with the atrocities of war and the damage violence bring. In our own personal lives as well as the communities, remembering the past shapes the way we look at the future. It is an important act of the church.

Asking the Hard Questions

Whenever we come to the topic of peace, violence and war, we need to be ready to answer some really hard questions. There are never simple answers and here are some reasons why.

- 1) For many of us, this conversation is theoretical. We may never be in a situation where we would be asked or forced to use violence. Most of us have never been to war and we don't live in places where that seems likely. But at the same time, this is a very real issue for many around the world and throughout time.
- 2) Our histories are mixed. Especially in Canada, we have people from all countries and cultures, even those places that may currently be at war or who carry those histories with them. We may have family members who fought against each other in war, making the topic of peace more dynamically complex.
- 3) It's difficult for us *not* to compare situations of violence. It seems petty to compare a fight we may have with a co-worker, or the rage we might experience while driving, with someone who's involved in genocide. It seems unimportant to talk about our own struggles with peace and violence when someone, somewhere, is always going through something worse.

As difficult as this topic might be, it's critically important, especially for the church. And as we begin to discuss violence and peace, we do well to start with some questions.

Discussion Questions

- 1) How would you describe peace? Where have you seen it in action? When have you not?
- 2) Are you a pacifist? Do you believe that Christians should be?
- 3) What are the questions/concerns that come to mind when discussing violence and peace?

Violence in Our World

We see violence in our world every day. On the news we hear the stories of wars, gangs, attacks, shootings, etc. It's our natural reaction to, at our best, protect ourselves, and at our worst, seek revenge and vengeance when confronted with conflict. There are different philosophies about war that we have gravitated towards in our histories as countries.

Holy War is the belief that God is on our side of the conflict and that we have the right to use force and violence against our enemies. *Just War Theory* claims that Christians should always aim for peace unless there is no other option. After making sure the conflict can't be solved using non-violent means, we are morally justified in fighting and also killing because there's no other way to protect ourselves and/or our interests. *Pacifism* believes violence and force are never a justified option in conflict. Instead, it seeks to find non-violent strategies to bring about peace. Pacifism accepts the danger and risk associated with this stance.

These philosophies make their way into our personal beliefs as well. We may believe that we too are justified in using force and violence in certain situations, or maybe that it's never okay. What do we do when we are confronted with aggressive behaviour or conflict? How do we respond, physically or verbally to those we disagree with, with those we deem to be a threat?

Discussion Questions

- 4) Do you believe we are ever justified in using violence? If so, in what situations might it be okay for Christians to use force, and even to kill. Does it make a difference if we are talking about our personal actions as compared to the actions of a country?

A Case for Peace

There's no doubt that we see violence and war in the Bible. Especially in the Old Testament, we see what might be described as Holy War in the way Israel was called by God to fight battles. One of the interpretation challenges for us is what to do with these passages because when we come to Jesus, we see a clear call to live for peace. Here are a few examples:

- **Matthew 5:9, 38-48** are Jesus' direct teachings about violence.
- **Matthew 26:47-56** is an example of how Jesus responded to the use of violence.
- **1 Peter 3:9, Romans 12:17-21, and Hebrews 12:14** are how some authors of the epistles continued the teachings of peace.

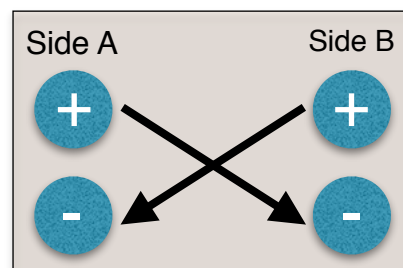
Discussion Questions

- 6) Have you had to reconcile the image of God in the Old Testament when it comes to war and violence as compared to Jesus? How have you done this?
- 7) How do you make sense of Jesus' call for peace? Does this mean that Christians should not work in occupations that use violence or support war?

Working for Peace Today

The theoretical dialogue for peace, especially on the national scale, is endless. Many Christians believe that force and violence are necessary for a just society and world, while others see their role as finding non-violent means to solve conflicts, even when it costs. But almost all Christians believe that peace is ideal and should be pursued. And if we want to be people of peace, we need to start with ourselves - our own attitudes, assumptions, judgements, and actions.

One way to begin this work is to confront the dynamics that allow for violence and war as a justifiable response to conflict. One of the most noticeable issues is polarization. This happens when two sides disagree with each other and only acknowledge the positive of their position and the negative of the other group's position. We might believe that there is nothing redeemable on the other side, which quite easily leads us to dismiss the people as well.



When we view people as unredeemable, we de-humanize them, making them less than us. Once someone is less than human, it's much easier to justify violence and hate against them. It's easier to harm a savage than it is a neighbour. The first step, then, in making peace, is to see people as Jesus did. He never discounted anyone and never saw anyone as too far away from His grace. If we want to work for peace, we need to see each other as human beings created in the image of God, even those with whom we disagree.

Discussion Questions

- 8) Who is on the other side of your hot button issues? Is it hard to respect them, listen to them, find something redeemable in them? How can you resist the temptation to polarize and instead see every human being as a beloved person of God?
- 9) How might the Holy Spirit be nudging you to work for peace today?

Resources for Further Study (available for loan from Sterling)

We have over 25 books on violence, war and peace for you to peruse and borrow.