

**PEACEMAKING – THE SLIPPERY SLOPE OF
CONFLICT.**

TEXT: Matt 16:13-20.

(from New International Version)

THEME: Conflict provides opportunity, so that at the end of the day we should be at peace with each other.

Grace, peace and mercy, from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

During the latter half of the previous week, a lot of you congregational members may be aware that Pastor's Conference and Synod was on; and you may also be aware that the theme for those days was simply 'Sharing the Faith'. I was very interested in hearing our new Mission Director Steen Olsen preach his sermon last Sunday, which was also quite inspirational to hear.

At Pastor's Conference [which is always an inspiring time], one of the Lecturers's who delivered his paper and speech on the topic of "Pure Joy"; took my thoughts to another level of reflection and excitement, because it was so uplifting to hear that all his material was Bible based.

Even though there is joy in the ministry [which anyone in the ministry will tell you], there are the occasions when there will be the difficult times when pastors can struggle. This evidence is obvious because you may know of someone who left because of depression or were simply burnt out. This, of course, comes with the territory, but the wider view of things [the big picture] is that both times of joy and frustration; levels itself out in the Word and Sacrament ministry.

For your benefit, let me share some of that 'pure joy' that I've experienced over the time I've been here in the role of the second pastor. They are when I've greeted you at the door and someone would comment on how the

sermon had touched and spoken to them in some way. And I'm also grateful of how God has used me to bring His Word to all with whom I come into contact with.

I also feel the joy when I see the smiles of recognition that greets me when I visit members, in the hospital, elderly homes or home visits or when I am out and about just walking the streets or something. This only further affirms in me; that God's ministry is joyful, rewarding and reassuring. And it also affirms in me, that I have been called into His ministry and that what I do is not in vain and of my own personal accord and volition. I have been privileged to be in his employ to do his work and not mine.

So now, let me now put that same question to you as followers of our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "Do you still enjoy 'pure joy' in your daily walk with Christ?" I know we will all come across confrontation at

one time or another: and if you take it in the proper light, it ain't so bad. Silly statement; not really?

If we took a Biblical view of confrontation and conflict we would learn that God has explained why conflicts occur and how we should deal with them. Because the more we understand and obey what he teaches, the more effective we will be in resolving disagreements with other people. The Bible tells us that there are four basic responses to conflict. The first is that they arise because of misunderstanding, which results from poor communication [Joshua 22: 10-34 [*The Altar by the Jordan*]].

The second arise because of differences in values, goals, gifts, callings, priorities, expectation, interests, or opinions [Acts 15:39; 1 Cor. 12:12-31]. Thirdly, competition over limited resources, such as time or money, is a frequent source of disputes in the family, churches and businesses [Gen. 13:1-12]. And fourthly,

many conflicts are caused or aggravated by sinful attitudes and habits that lead to sinful words and actions [James 4:1-2]. A word of encouragement though; conflict is not necessarily bad because the Bible also teaches that some differences are natural and beneficial. Since God has created us as unique individual human beings who have different opinions and how we all have different perspective on things in general, we are also encouraged to express ourselves in what we feel.

In today's gospel text and lesson; we see the personal realization of how Peter declared Jesus, the Christ and Son of the living God. He expressed himself in what confronted him; more or less a conflict within himself.

What's more, Jesus affirmed Peter that this realization comes from no where else but from God. In fact, the apostle Peter, as you may be aware, was the impetuous one of the Twelve Disciples. He was the one who mostly used his tongue first and his brain last, which always got

him into hot water with Jesus, but this time it was different. He was in Jesus' harmony and favour.

And if you reflect on that; how do we keep in harmony and favour with all in whom we come into contact with? How do we keep good, friendly relationships with all those around us? I ask this question, mainly because conflict will inevitably come to all in one form or another. But the more important issue is how we deal with it and save face from both sides of the same story or issues.

When this occurs, most Christians want to run away and do the best they can to avoid this situation, but that is not the solution, and sometimes facing problems and overcoming them with solutions that honour God, is the best outcome for all concerned.

When we look at the Slippery Slope of conflict, there are three basic ways that people respond. People can either

escape, attack, or begin peacemaking responses. Let's just look at what is involved with each of these responses individually. When we look at the escape response, which most people are likely to do, simply because they are more interested in avoiding conflict rather than face it?

If we do use the escape response, we can go into denial, which means that we pretend that no conflict exists. Otherwise we refuse to do anything to resolve the conflict properly. Another way to avoid conflict is to take flight, which may include running away, moving house, ending a friendship, leaving a job, file for divorce, and change churches. These only postpone a solution to a problem.

The worst scenario for flight is attempted suicide and actual suicide, because people believe that all hope of solving a conflict is gone and that there is no way out. Suicide is never the right way to solve a conflict; and

tragically, if you look at our society today, many have taken this way out.

And if people use the other response of attack; which includes assault, litigation and murder, we come across another extreme. So, when people can no longer ignore, cover up or run away from their problems, these are the extremes that people use to solve their conflicts.

But if people seek the middle road and use the peacemaking responses then peace and harmony can be established in their lives again. There are three peacemaking responses that are referred to in the Peacemaking book and process.

They are, *overlook an offense*, which can be done personally and privately, where people seek 'God's wisdom to give you patience' [Prov. 19:11]. This is a form of forgiveness and involves a deliberate decision not to talk, dwell, grow into a pent up bitterness or anger.

The second is to seek *reconciliation*; if the offence is too serious to overlook because it has damaged a relationship. Matthew 5:23-24, tells us that if your brother has something against you, that you go and be reconciled.

Then thirdly, there is *negotiation*. This is where people work through the proper channels that people's rights should be respected. We all have the right to be respected regardless of what others may think of us!

We've just briefly looked at the 'Slippery Slope of conflict' in a nutshell, which I hope you've got a rough understanding of. So, as long as you have an idea of where this theme is taking us, or this may be 'old knowledge' that you went through when your life had struck crisis point, I hope you gain something out of this short series of which will be four instalments.

I will now summarize and draw this to a close. When we looked at the extreme responses to conflict, they resulted in greater losses: either suicide or murder. This is so because every response to conflict, *costs you something*, you must give up something to gain another. And personal peacemaking is the best result, which is worth all the time, effort and energy put into it, especially if you reach and attain agreement from a spiritual standpoint.

Some other interesting contrasts between the different responses of flight or fight are that when we resort to flight and escape: we are generally focussing on 'me'. I am looking for what is easy, convenient and non-threatening. Then when I focus on 'you' or blaming you, I am expecting you to give in and solve the solution.

Finally, there is a difference in the end result to these responses. When a person definitely seeks a peacemaking response to conflict, there is every chance

that they will succeed in that resolve, and he or she will see reconciliation with the other injured party. All this though, has to be done in a way that honours God, and we are truly free to love him and each other with purity.
Amen

**The peace of God which passes all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.**