

Bible Study 4: Peace and Reconciliation

Introduction

At the very heart of God's Mission is the fact that through Christ, God is reconciling humanity to Himself, humans among themselves and between humanity and the rest of creation.

The Bible contains many examples of communities in conflict and also expresses people's longing for peace. In our world today, churches and other faith communities are well placed to help prevent conflict and to promote peace and reconciliation. Jesus said: Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God (Matthew 5:9). These Bible studies from the New Testament reflect on our calling from God to the work of peace building.

This Bible study is for use by small groups or individuals, and can be adapted to your own context.

You may wish to open in prayer. Read the Bible passage *twice*, if possible using different translations. If time allows, you may also discuss the second Bible passage, which offers other insights.

Ephesians 2: 13-22: In Jesus, divided peoples are reconciled

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us. He has abolished the law with its commandments and ordinances, so that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross, thus putting to death that hostility through it.

So he came and proclaimed peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near; for through him both of us have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

Discussion

You may begin by identifying some key words that stand out from the Bible passage and discuss why they are important to you, and then discuss the questions below.

In biblical times:

- *What is this passage about? Please re-tell it in your own words.*
- *In the early years of the Church, both Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews) became Christians. What does this passage say about how these divided groups were reconciled?*
- *How did Jesus create peace?*
- *What enabled people to move from being strangers to joint-members of God's household?*

In our time:

- *What groups are in conflict today in our context?*
- *What divides them?*
- *What could enable them to be reconciled?*
- *How can we follow Christ's example in bringing reconciliation?*
- *What practical actions are we to take as individuals and as a community to foster peace building and reconciliation?*

2 Corinthians 5: 17-20 ~ God has given us the ministry of reconciliation

So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.

In biblical times:

- *What is this passage about? Please re-tell it in your own words*
- *How did Jesus bring peace between people?*
- *What changes in people and their behaviour (especially aggressive and violent behaviour) when they are created anew in Christ?*
- *How do "ambassadors" help prevent conflict and build peace? What does it mean to be an ambassador for Christ?*

In our time:

- *What situations of past and present conflict in our families and communities need reconciliation? What are the causes of this conflict and what are the God-given solutions?*
- *How can Christ's example help people to be reconciled to God and to their enemies?*
- *God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. How can we respond to this special calling?*
- *What practical actions are we to take as individuals and as a community to avoid conflict and build peace in our communities and nations?*

How could we be changed by these Bible studies?**By knowing:**

- *that peace and reconciliation are possible because God's will is for harmonious relationships*
- *that there are endless examples where hostile strangers have become peaceable neighbours and peace-makers*

By feeling:

- *that the whole humanity has the potential for redemption, to be created anew in Christ*
- *that each of us is called by God to this special ministry of reconciliation*

By acting:

- *to identify the causes of conflict and prevent conflict starting in our own communities*
- *to build peace and reconciliation in past and present situations of conflict*

Prayer

Loving Father,

You have called us to be your ambassadors of peace. You have called us to prevent conflict and to overcome hostility through building peace and reconciliation, strengthen us for this calling. Give us wisdom, courage, imagination and protection. Forgive us where we have spread conflict and discord not peace and love. Help us to turn strangers into neighbours, loving and understanding those different from ourselves and building your holy household of peace in the world.

In Jesus' holy name we pray. Amen.

Further passages for reading

Genesis 4: 1-11: The story of the conflict between brothers Cain and Abel; its causes and consequences.

Galatians 3:27-29: There is no difference between different kinds of people, for we are all one in Christ.

Matthew 5:9: Blessed are the peacemakers for they will be called children of God.

Luke 15: 11-32: The prodigal son and the forgiving Father.

References and other Bible studies

Bible text cited from NRSV 1989

http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Roots/English/Peace-building/Peace_Esection2.pdf