

Peacemakers Required

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 21 November 2010

Preacher: David MacPherson

[0 : 00] A headline in the Evening Express this past week was not a very happy one. Nine hundred council jobs face the axe, read the headline. And it would seem, in fact, more than it would seem, it is the case that a lot of people will be job hunting in the coming months. I wonder what kind of jobs are likely to be on the market. Can you imagine in the Press and Journal an ad advertising vacancies for peacemakers? Is that a possibility that such a position would be advertised? Well, forget the Press and Journal. This morning I want to make that pitch right here in church, peacemakers required. And for those considering if they might fit the bill for a successful application, we will provide a profile of the kind of people required along the lines of the successful candidate will, and then the profile or description of those who could perform this task.

Now, before I do lay out the profile for you, just explain where the successful candidate will be working and why there is a need for this position to be filled. The workplace is the church at the level of this local congregation here in Bon Accord, but extending to the denomination that we form a part of, the Free Church of the Free Church of the Free Church of Scotland, and indeed the wider church of which we are all a part.

That's the where of the work that needs to be done. What about the why? Why the need for peacemakers? There is, is there not, an essential unity in the church of Jesus Christ? Is it not the case, as we have already mentioned in prayer, that there is but one church with one head, Jesus Christ? And all who form part of the church are objectively and organically bound with one another by reason of our union with Christ. If I am united with Christ, then I am bound with all who are equally so united. That is the fact of the matter.

That is objectively so. And nothing can change that or even dilute that truth in any manner or measure.

Why then, the need for peacemakers if there already is this essential unity in the church of Jesus Christ?

[3 : 05] The reality is that our essential unity is not always or sufficiently reflected in what we might call experiential or practical unity. We are, as a matter of observed fact, often disunited. Now, why is that?

Why is it that our experience is at variance with our objective reality? Well, we don't need to go far to find the answer to that question. We're sinners. We are all sinners. We're proud. Our pride divides.

We're foolish. We lack wisdom. We lack understanding. And these things in great measure explain why it is that our essential unity is not always reflected in practical or experiential unity. Given that reality, peacemakers are indeed required to bring the church in its experience and practice ever closer to its calling and calling and essential identity. And let us be very clear that this task to which we are called, this is a noble calling. This is a God-glorifying mission to be engaged in. To be peacemakers is to be those who warm the heart of God who warm the heart of God. Well, let us return to the job description. The successful candidate will. In order to finish that sentence, we need to read a passage in Scripture that will help us. We're going to read in Paul's letter to the Philippians in chapter 4. What we're going to do this morning is look at a case study.

I don't know if some of you have been involved in business studies or MBAs. They're very keen on case studies. Other areas of academic endeavor now, that's become very popular. Case studies. What we have here is a case study. We have an example, a real-life example of a peacemaker. And we want to learn from the example of this peacemaker. So let's read in Philippians chapter 4 and reading verses 1 to 3.

Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. I plead with you, Odea, and I plead with Syntyche to agree with

each other in the Lord. Yes, and I ask you, loyal yoke fellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. Until there.

[6 : 00] What is the problem here? This case study that we're going to consider and draw lessons from concerning the profile of a peacemaker in the church of Jesus Christ. What is the problem? Well, they are these two women, Uodea and Syntyche, and they have fallen out. We don't know the reasons.

We don't know the cause of their dispute, of their disagreement, but it would seem to be a very significant one that it would have required or merited that Paul, even in this letter that is addressed to the whole church in Philippi, that he would mention them by name, would suggest that it was a significant matter, a matter that had caused perhaps a deep division between these two women. These two women who had worked together with Paul, but now something has happened and there is this division. And Paul's concern, of course, is to make peace. He's a peacemaker. He wants peace to be restored. He wants fellowship to be restored because he knows that this is important not only for these two women, but it is important for the whole congregation of which they form a part.

We're not told if the letter, if the exhortations of Paul had the desired effect. We don't know. We're not given that information. I would suggest that the exhortation most certainly did. And I would hope that as we develop what we're going to develop concerning Paul as a peacemaker, that would confirm also in your mind that the words that he addressed to these women were indeed graciously received and achieve the objective desired. Very well then, in the light of this case study, what can we say concerning the successful candidate for peacemaker? What is the profile for such a position? The first thing, well, I'll mention five things I'm going to say, each one very briefly, so that you know how we're getting along and then think of them each in turn. The successful candidate for this position of peacemaker will love God's people, will love God's people, but also will glory in God's people, will humbly serve God's people, will work together with God's people, and finally be of one mind with God's people. First of all then, to be a peacemaker, you must love God's people. Notice there in verse 1 of chapter 4, Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends. Paul loves God's people. And I think we can identify three aspects of this love of Paul for God's people. First of all, it is grounded in his identity with God's people.

[8 : 52] They are, as he describes them there in that verse, his brothers. They are his brothers. They share the same heavenly father. They share the same elder brother. There is a filial love that is an expression of their membership of one family, the family of God. And this is true of us. This is true of us here in Bonacord. It is true of us as the free church of Scotland. We are one family. We are part of one family. And his love for God's people, Paul's love for God's people, is grounded in his identity with God's people. But this love that he has is also expressed. It's expressed in tenderness and in action. The very language that he uses there in verse 1, Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love.

He doesn't say, oh, well, they know that I love them. I don't need to say so. We all know that we love each other. That's just a given. No, he is willing and able and desirous of expressing it. He said to them, Philippians, I love you. This is the apostle Paul, this heavyweight theologian to whom we owe so much in God's providence and providing him for us. And yet here is he. He says to the Philippians, I love you. I love you. I long for you. He expresses the love that he has. It's not just a theological nicety. He says, well, yes, I'm part of the family of God. They're the part of the family of God. So, I suppose we love each other. No, he really does. This is heartfelt. He expresses his love. He feels it in his heart and he voices it with his mouth. He goes on to describe them. There in that same verse in chapter 4 in verse 1, he describes them as his dear friends. His dear friends. Literally there, the expression used is, my beloved. My beloved. And to just illustrate a sense of what is being said here by Paul, it is the very same language used by the Father in addressing Jesus. This is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased. This is the language God used, God the Father in addressing Jesus, my beloved son. And Paul uses that same language and says to the Philippians, you are my dear friends. You are my beloved. His love for God people, grounded in his identity with them, expressed in tender love and action. But also an important, particularly important in this matter of peacemaking, his love for God's people is foundational to his task as a peacemaker. In two senses. In the first sense, it provides him with the motivation for being a peacemaker. It's

because he loves them so much that he is concerned that peace be made. You see, if he didn't care for them, if he was, if his love for them was a weak love, he would say, well, they've fallen apart, they've fallen out. Well, that's their problem.

It's not my problem. But because he loves them, he is not prepared to simply let it go. He must do something. He must try and make peace between these people because he loves them. So, this love for God's people is foundational to his task as a peacemaker. But the other aspect of this is that it provides him his authority for the task of peacemaker. And what I mean by that, what I mean by that is that Euodia and Syntyche knew full well how much Paul loved them. And so, when he may be a source of great embarrassment and shame for them that in this letter they should be publicly named, rather than being offended, rather than saying, well, who does he think he is? How does, who does he think he is telling us what we should do? No, he says, they, what do they say? What do they think? They think, well, this man loves us.

This man loves us. That's why he's doing this. That's why he's speaking to us in this manner. It's because he loves us. We know that he loves us because we've worked alongside him. And so, that grants him authority. His love for God's people grants him authority to say the difficult things, to challenge, to exhort, to correct those who are amiss in their behavior. To be a peacemaker in the church of Jesus Christ, the successful candidate will love God's people. Do you tick the box? Do we tick that box if we are to be peacemakers? But not only will the successful candidate love God's people, but we can also say that the successful candidate to be a peacemaker must also glory in God's people. Again, notice in verse 1 the language that Paul uses, therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown. My joy and crown. These squabbling women in Philippi, they're his joy and crown. They're not an embarrassment to him. They're not these embarrassing relatives you'd rather not speak about that let the side down. No, they are his joy and crown. He glories in God's people. It is beautiful language that

Paul uses, my joy and crown, my glory, that which I delight in, my life work, that which is most important and precious to me. The apostle glories in God's people. And this has a present and a future aspect. In the present, Paul considers the believers in this way. If someone had asked Paul, what is your greatest delight? What is your life's work? He would point to the church of Jesus Christ, and he would say, this is it. This is my joy and crown. This is my glory.

[14:57] And because it is his joy and crown, so he will fight for its unity and for its prosperity. He cannot lightly allow that which is his joy and crown to splinter and to divide and to squabble. Some of you will have noticed recently in the news how Pope Benedict recently consecrated Gaudi's masterpiece there in Barcelona, La Sagrada Familia, the Holy Family Cathedral there in Barcelona. Now, Gaudi, when he began work on that cathedral in the final years of his life, it became his single-minded obsession. He worked on nothing else.

Here was a man who had worked on many projects, but this, for Gaudi, was his joy and crown. This was the most important thing. And he would dedicate time to nothing other than this cathedral. And maybe that, perhaps very poorly, can illustrate for us that for Paul, God's people are his spiritual cathedral. He glories in them. There is nothing more important than securing the peace of God's people, nothing more important than cultivating the unity of God's people. They are his joy and crown.

There is in this also a future aspect. The language that Paul uses here in the letter to the Philippians is language that we find echoed elsewhere in 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 19 particularly. He's writing to the Thessalonians also in Macedonia. We know their near neighbors, Thessalonica and Philippi.

And what does he say there in that letter in 1 Thessalonians 2 and verse 19? For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ when he comes?

[17:11] What is it? Looking forward to the coming of Jesus Christ, in what will Paul glory? Is it not you? Is it not you? Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

In his own present experience, Paul glories in the people of God. But as he looks forward to that great and dreadful day when Jesus will return, he looks forward to there also glorying in his joy and crown.

And so, I ask myself and I ask you, Christian friend, do you glory in God's people? Are God's people with all their sins and foibles and contradictions and inconsistencies? Are they the people that you glory in? Are they your joy and crown? For if they are, you will be an effective peacemaker.

Do you tick the box for this position that is vacant? Peacemakers in the church of Jesus Christ. The peacemaker must love God's people. He must glory in God's people. But also, he must humbly serve God's people. Again, as we think of Paul here, just to remember, to remind ourselves, who is it that is writing these words to Euodia and Syntyche? It is the apostle Paul, the one called and commended by Jesus Christ to exercise authority in his church. And Paul, as an apostle, has all the authority to instruct, to exhort, yes, even to command Euodia and Syntyche, to get their act together, to set aside their difference, too, in the language that we have here, to agree with each other. He has that authority.

But does he exercise that authority? Well, he does exercise it, but notice the manner in which he exercises his apostolic authority. Verse 2, I plead with Euodia and Syntyche. He doesn't say, I command Euodia and Syntyche. He doesn't say, I order them, these squabbling women, to get their act together. No, I plead with them, I beg with them that they would agree with each other.

[19:27] If you could think of this spatially, not as in outer space, but in terms of location. Paul here is not in the pulpit, six feet above contradiction, giving orders, like I am this morning. That's not where he is.

He is on his knees, looking up into the hardened and pained faces of Euodia and Syntyche, begging them to be of one mind, pleading with them to agree with one another, begging them to lay aside their differences and to restore peace. This is the apostle, and he pleads with these women. Here is a humble servant of God's people. He describes himself, indeed, even in this letter to the Philippians, in chapter 1 and verse 1, Paul and Timothy, servants of Jesus Christ. That is a humble title.

But a much more humble title is also true of him. He is a servant of Euodia and Syntyche. It's one thing to be a servant of Jesus Christ. We might all say, well, yes, okay, it's a servant, but of Jesus Christ.

But Paul is a servant of these squabbling women, and squabbling men as well, just to avoid any offense being given. Plenty squabbling men as well. He is a servant of them. These men are not, these women are not beneath them. They are those who have served alongside him, as he himself describes, at my side. To be a peacemaker, you need to be humble. There is nothing more fractious than pride, nothing more grating than arrogance, nothing more divisive than pomposity. But I'll tell you something, it's difficult to dismiss the pleading of a man on his knees. Difficult to dismiss the exhortation of an apostle on his knees, pleading with you. And so, I ask myself and I ask you, Christian friend, do you humbly serve God's people? Do you tick that box? This is the profile for a peacemaker.

The peacemaker must love God's people. He must glory in God's people. He must humbly serve God's people. But also, he or she must work together with God's people. Again, we turn to the case study we have here in Philippians. There are two elements that I just want to touch on. Paul himself, in the words that he addresses here, identifies the common cause in the historical background to this situation.

[22:17] There in verse 3, he says, Yes, and I ask you, loyal yoke fellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel. These are women who he had worked with. These are women who had worked alongside him in the cause of the gospel. He is not speaking to women that he has only heard about, that others have told him about. He's not received some report that there's a problem in Philippi, and so as apostle, he sends instructions. No, these are women that he knows. These are women that he has worked with.

Paul is no stranger to them. He has been in the trenches with them. He has fought in the front side, alongside them. They are united by a common cause and a shared purpose, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And that has been tried and tested in the heat of battle. This is a man who can make peace between them. They know him. They trust him. They will listen to him. I am sure that others could have addressed to Euodia and Syntyche exactly the same words, word for word, that we have here. Another could have said exactly the same words. The words would have been correct, nothing that you could have quibbled with, but they would have had no impact. But when Paul addresses these words, it's different, because they know that here is a man who loves them. Here is a man who has served with them. And so they have the desired impact, I am sure. So, the peacemaker must work together with God's people. But there's another element here that we wouldn't want to miss out on identifying. In addition to Paul recognizing his common cause with these women who are in dispute,

he also, in the very matter of this difficulty of this dispute, he seeks to secure the help of others. Such as is concerned to secure the peace, that he recognizes that he needs help. Paul, despite his many attributes for the job of peacemaker, he needs help. So, he looks to others to help him. There we see it very explicitly in verse 3. I ask you, loyal yoke fellow, help these women. Paul says, you know, I'm far away. I'm in prison here, and I can't actually come alongside them much as I would love to. I need help. I need help to secure the peace. I can't do it alone.

I must work together with others. Peacemaking is a team effort. And if we may, as we must, speak of the church that we are part of and that we love, we desire peace in our church.

But if we are to have peace, and I believe we have a great measure of peace, but if we are to cultivate that peace and develop that peace, it is a team effort. It's a team effort. We all have to participate.

[25 : 11] Paul alone could not have secured the peace between these women. He needed help. He secures the help of others. Help me in this matter. And so I say to you, Christian friend, let's together do this work. The position vacant isn't one position. It is work for all of us. Peacemaking is a team effort. Do you, or rather, do we tick the box? Finally, to be a peacemaker is necessary to love God's people, to glory in God's people, to humbly serve God's people, to work together with God's people, but finally, also to be of one mind with God's people. What does this mean? What do I mean by saying that?

Where in the passage do we find this presented as a requirement or as a model for peacemakers? Well, this is the exhortation that is actually directed to Euodia and Syntyche. I plead with Euodia, and I plead with Syntyche, to agree with each other in the Lord. Now, literally, what Paul is asking of them, demanding of them, is that they would be of one mind. That is what is literally said. It is translated legitimately in the Bible that we are using as to agree with each other, but that language does rather lose the original intent or the precision of the original, where what they are being asked to do is to be of one mind with one another. Now, that's important, and we'll notice in a moment why that's important. If there is to be peace, there must be, between these women, one mind. Now, how is that going to happen? It's easier said than done. But Paul has actually already given the answer to that question we read in chapter 2 of this letter and verses 1 to 5. In those verses, Paul has already addressed this matter of being of one mind. In addressing all the Christians, in verse 2, he says, make my joy complete by being like-minded. It's exactly the same language Paul is using there.

He is saying to all the Christians, be of one mind. He then applies it particularly to Euodia and Syntyche and says that they should be of one mind. But he has already addressed all the believers and said, you must be of one mind. But not only has he told them to be of one mind, he has told them how they can be of one mind. In verse 5, your attitude, but again, the literal translation is much more helpful, your mind is what Paul says in verse 5 of chapter 2. Your mind should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. Or in the language of the older version that maybe some are familiar with, this mind should be among you, which was also in Christ Jesus. You see, there is a theme here.

Paul is addressing all the Christians and saying, you must be of one mind. And they say, well, how do we do that? And he says, well, there's a way. Have the mind of Jesus Christ. Have the mind of Jesus Christ.

[28 : 12] And if you have the mind of Jesus Christ, you will have one mind among each other. What is Paul saying to Euodia and Syntyche then in the light of what he has already said in chapter 2?

He's saying to them, you are divided. You are squabbling. You are in disagreement. You must agree with each other. And how are we to do that? They could cry. And Paul says, not primarily by horizontally coming together, though that no doubt is an aspect of it, but more importantly, they will come together when they vertically each approach Jesus and become like Jesus and have the mind of Jesus. Again, if we can visualize it, here's Euodia and here's a Syntyche.

And Paul is saying, not simply, well, you must come together. Though, yes, that is what he wants. He's saying, Jesus is above. And as you approach Jesus, as you approach the mind of Jesus, you will find that you are of one mind with another. And that is true for us. As we all approach the mind of Jesus, as we would all have the mind of Jesus, then we will find that we are of one mind with another.

This was necessary for Euodia and Syntyche, but of course, it's necessary for all believers. If we are to be united, if we are to be peacemakers and be effective in that role, we must together more

and more have the mind of Christ. Do you? Do I? Do we tick the box?
So, five characteristics of the peacemaker required in Bonacourt, required in the Free Church of the Church of Jesus Christ, in this city and land. Love God's people. Glory in God's people. Humbly serve God's people. Work together with God's people. And crucially, be of mind with God's people as together we approach and display the mind of Christ in our own lives. Peacemakers required. Will the positions be left unfilled due to a lack of suitable candidates? Let us pray.