Sunday, April 13, 1980
BLESSED ARE THE PEACEMAKERS
Matthew 5:9,13-16

Harvard Magazine recently asked seven of its most distinguished faculty members to identify the most important problem facing the nation and the world today. Here are their answers in brief.

Robert Coles, professor of psychiatry said that the world's food shortage should be at the top of the international agenda.

E.O. Wilson, professor of science, focused on the extinction of various species on earth. He estimates that one thousand of the five million living species of animals, insects, plants, and mosses on earth will die out this year.

George Rupp, Dean of the Divinity School is convinced that the enormously uneven distribution of resources and wealth of the world is the number one problem. He believes that there must be a reduced consumption and a downward adjustment in the standard of living for those people who now enjoy the larger part of the pie.

Stephen A. Marlin, professor of economics is concerned with the kind of economic planning that will predominate.

Robert Nozick, professor of philosophy identifies intrusion and interference by government as the number one problem facing the nation and the world today.

Peter Rogers, professor of environmental engineering believes that mass poverty is the most serious problem facing the nation and the world. The next decade, he believes, will be crucial in determining whether or not the 21st century will be worth leaving to our children.

David Reisman, professor of social sciences believes that the central and essential problem facing the nation and the world today is world peace, and it has been the most crucial problem ever since the dropping of the world's first nuclear explosive on Hiroshima. He is convinced that world peace and indeed world survival depends on whether or not we human beings can control nuclear weapons.

On a deeper level, all seven of these distinguished thinkers are dealing with the issue of peace on earth. Peace is always threatened when there are human beings starving and dying of malnutrition. Or if too many of the living species in our world die out, the overall environment and its L balance is threatened. Uneven use and distribution of the world's resources have often been the cause of war. And if our economic systems fail us, then too, peace among peoples and nations is disrupted. Too much government interference can threaten peace, and so can mass poverty. And for the first time in the history of the world, we human beings have the power to destroy the civilized world with our nuclear weapons. The year 1979, was the first year in human history when spending for destructive purposes ex-ceeded $1 billion dollars per day. As long as the world's resources are squandered in this manner, we need peacemakers to be at work.

So, Jesus' statement, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God," needs more to be heard today than ever.

To understand Jesus' statement a little better, let's look at this word "peace." In the Old and New Testaments of the Bible, the word "peace" is used many times; in fact, it is found three-hundred ninety-three times. So, when Jesus used the word peacemaker, he was backed up by a long and rich heritage.

In Hebrew, the word peace is "shalom," and it means a lot more than the cessation of war, or the absence of trouble or conflict. It's a positive word meaning, wholeness, completeness, health among living things. It means everything which makes for a person's highest good. Peace or shalom means harmony among persons and harmony with all the creation.

Thus, to be a peacemaker means more than trying to do anything and everything to keep the waters untroubled or to avoid all conflict or to try to cover up dissension or injustice.

That's why Jesus did not say, "Blessed are the peace-lovers," but "blessed are the peace-makers." It takes people who are willing to work, struggle and even suffer in order to achieve peace among human beings. It means dealing with whatever conflicts arise and never walking around the hard part of a difficult situation.

Jesus Christ knew the difficulties of peacemaking. Even though the angels sang "peace on earth" at his birth, not long after it meant death to every male child in the region of Bethlehem under two years of age. Even though Jesus worked at bringing peace, he was crucified because those in power saw him as a troublemaker and not a peacemaker.

In our own time, just look at the struggles and suffering that many went through and are still going through as we work for peace among peoples of different races and ethnic backgrounds. Peace among nations is even more difficult. That's because there can be no real peace without justice.

Some people used to say and still say — "There was peace between the blacks and whites in this country until the agitators began their work. But that's just not true. On the surface the situation looked peaceful, but underneath there was no peace. Oppression was simply being covered up in many instances. It is not peace, according to the Bible's definition, when one group of people discriminates against another, no matter how politely or legally that discrimination is carried out. The Bible warns us to beware of those who cry, "Peace, peace, when there is no peace."

Peacemaking begins with you and me. Christ said that we begin to become peacemakers when we invite the peace of God into our own lives and then we in turn reach out to others. Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called children of God. As Christians we are to be the peacemakers of the world. Amen.