

The Need for Peacemakers

Psalm 34; Acts 19:21–41

In our Old Testament text this morning we hear King David giving advice to his spiritual sons and daughters: “Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. Who is the man who desires life, and loves many days, that he may see good? Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil and do good; *seek peace and pursue it.*” The word for “peace” is one of the best-known Hebrew words: שָׁלוֹם (*shalōm*). Our Old Testament text this morning teaches that God’s people are to be seekers and pursuers of *peace*. A peaceful society, where people, going about their own business, interact peacefully and constructively and positively with one another, is a great blessing. Psalm 144 describes a situation where there is “no outcry in our streets”—no public disturbance—and concludes: “Happy are the people who are in such a state; happy are the people whose God is the Lord!” Under Michigan law, a person who excites a disturbance in a place where citizens are peaceably and lawfully assembled can be arrested and charged with a misdemeanor.

Our New Testament text this morning records a major disturbance to civic peace in the city of Ephesus: “about that time there arose a great *commotion* about the Way.” The ESV has “there arose no little *disturbance* concerning the Way.” The noun translated “commotion” or “disturbance” is derived from the verb meaning *to stir up, disturb, unsettle, throw into confusion*. The apostle Paul had been building up the church with his daily teaching in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Through the blessing of God, he was so successful that the city’s silversmiths had experienced a noticeable drop in business. What this means is that as people were turning to Christ they were giving up their idols and worshiping the true God in Spirit and in truth. As in Thessalonica, the people of Ephesus were “[turning] to God from idols to serve the living and true God.”¹ This was a good thing!

Up until this time Ephesus was the center of the worship of the goddess Diana, the goddess of fertility. A note about the name. Her Greek name was Artemis. In Latin it was Diana. The King James/New King James tradition standardizes proper names using their Latin form. “Diana” is a *translation*; “Artemis” is a *transliteration*, writing the original Greek name with English characters.

Ephesus was the site of a large, ornate temple, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Easton’s Bible Dictionary describes it this way: “It was the work of 220 years; built of shining marble; 342 feet long by 164 feet broad; supported by a forest of columns, each 56 feet high; a sacred museum of masterpieces of sculpture and painting. At the center, hidden by curtains, within a gorgeous shrine, stood the very ancient image of the goddess, on wood or ebony reputed to have fallen from

¹ 1 Thess. 1:9

the sky. Behind the shrine was a treasury, where, as in ‘the safest bank in Asia,’ nations and kings stored their most precious things.”

As the goddess of fertility, the image of Diana was of a woman with an elaborate headdress and a chest full of eighteen full breasts. Legend had it that the image of Diana had fallen down from heaven. People from all over Asia Minor would travel to Ephesus to worship at the temple of Diana. Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen made silver replicas of the temple. People would purchase them as souvenirs and for home altars.² Make no mistake, the worship of Diana was big business, and reception of the Gospel had impacted that business.

The first and second commandments require us to worship the true God only and the true God truly. Humans must worship Yahweh, Creator of heaven and earth. We are not permitted to worship God by images, or any other way than what he himself has appointed. This is God’s moral law, and it is binding upon every man, woman and child on the face of the earth. God is dead serious about these commandments. He will in no wise wink at idolatry. We are forbidden to make idols in our heart. Our hearts are to be dedicated to him alone. In Revelation 21 we read that “... *idolaters*, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” In the last chapter of the Bible we read that “Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and *idolaters*, and whoever loves and practices a lie.” Idolators will be forever excluded from heaven.

So idolatry is no trivial matter, it is a major sin. The God of heaven made us for himself, to bring glory to him. We were made in the very image of God, for the purpose of having fellowship with God. And when we take our attention away from the true God and devote it to the worship of idols, God is justly offended. To stubbornly persist in idolatry without repentance is unforgivable. Now we may think that we moderns are too sophisticated to go into a heathen temple and bow down or offer a sacrifice to an idol of wood or metal. But the Bible speaks of idols of the *heart*, of failure to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to the God of heaven. Be honest now. What is most important to you? To what do you offer your time and treasure? Jesus said, “where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.” The sons and daughters of Adam are urged to “buy the truth, and sell it not.”³ If the knowledge of God and his salvation is of paramount importance to you, you will gladly support it with your tithes and offerings. If it is not important to you, then you will spend your money elsewhere.

² *Christ Centered Exposition Commentary* (Olive Tree Bible Software)

³ Prov. 23:23

In the city of Ephesus the worship of the false goddess Diana was big business, and due to the influence of Paul and other Christians, the business of Diana had fallen on hard times. So a silversmith named Demetrius called his fellow craftsmen together. Here were men who up to this time would have been in competition with each other but now were joining together in a common cause. Formerly they would have sought to attract business by trying to convince potential customers that their work was of superior quality than that of their competitors, but now they come together in a common cause. They met in a theater. Demetrius laid out his case: “Men, you know that we have our prosperity by this trade. Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands. So not only is this trade of ours in danger of falling into disrepute, but also the temple of the great goddess Diana may be despised and her magnificence destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worship.” This is a remarkable statement. Some elements are true and others are not true. These statements need to be evaluated by all of Scripture. It was true that the silversmiths made good money selling replicas of the temple of Diana. A good silversmith could make a prosperous income from his work.

But it is interesting to see the influence of the Gospel during the time of Paul’s residence in the city—an influence which Demetrius himself recognized. In his words, “Moreover you see and hear that not only at Ephesus, but throughout almost all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are not gods which are made with hands.” Clearly, “they are not gods which are made with hands” was an accurate representation of Paul’s message. The people of Ephesus clearly had a God-shaped vacuum in their hearts. God has put that into every human heart. We were made for the purpose of having fellowship with our Creator. Nothing else in this life can fit into that vacuum. We may try to fill that vacuum with pleasures, relationships, substances or sex. They may give us momentary pleasure but they will never satisfy. Only God can truly and adequately fill the vacuum—the void—in the human heart. God requires us to turn to him from idols and serve him with all our heart. How tragic that Demetrius knew the truth but rejected it! His skill—silversmithing, something good and honorable in its own right—had been prostituted to the making of gods which are not gods. As the Psalmist observed, “All the gods of the nations are idols: but the LORD made the heavens. . . . Confounded be all they that serve graven images, that boast themselves of idols: worship *him*, all ye gods.”⁴

My dear friend, I warn you: turn from your idols and become a worshiper of the true and living God—the only God who can give salvation to his people. Dedicate

⁴ Ps. 96:5, 97:7

yourself to assembling with his people week by week to hear him speak through the preaching of his word and to respond to him in heartfelt prayer and praise. “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name: bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness” (1 Chron. 16:29).

Demetrius clearly understood Paul’s message. And he understood that it was being received all throughout Asia Minor. But rather than acknowledge, *what a fool I am, dedicating myself to an idol that is no God, rejecting the God of heaven, rejecting the gift of eternal life by faith in Christ the Son*, Demetrius doubled down on his idolatry, revealing that his true god was money. How sad that he never understood that the God of heaven promises his children, “I will never leave thee nor forsake thee,” that he says, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread,” that he promises to supply all our needs according to his riches in glory. Had Demetrius given his heart to the Lord, he would have enabled him to build an honest and profitable silversmithing business dedicated to the glory of God. An investor in silver recently wrote that “Of the 92 naturally occurring elements, silver is the most reflective and the most conductive of both heat and electricity. Those things make it a high-tech metal; there are new uses discovered for it almost every day.”⁵ Since the US government began debasing our coins, the value of a quarter has gone way down. Today’s quarters are “clad”—coated. The inner core is copper and the outer covering is copper mixed with nickel. There is no silver in the quarter anymore. What can you buy with a quarter? Not much. A pre-1965 silver quarter is worth about \$4, however, because the silver itself is valuable. The God who made the elements invites us to put our trust in him. It is he who gives us power to gain wealth. But Demetrius wanted to continue in his wicked business.

The reason the silversmiths’ trade was profitable was because there was a demand. There were lots of people who were followers of the goddess Diana. They thought that by worshiping her, they would obtain fertility and prosperity. They were wrong—*eternally* wrong!—but they persisted anyway.

The reason vice prospers is because of demand. If demand were to dry up, vice would cease. The reason pornography or prostitution are big business is because of demand. Why the demand? Because men are idolators at heart and are not content with God. For the unregenerate person, God alone does not satisfy. How much better it would be if every man’s heart were satisfied with God alone!

As the story progresses we read of the riot that ensued. The silversmiths started chanting, over and over, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” Soon, other people joined them and picked up the chant. Gaius and Aristarchus, Paul’s traveling companions, were seized. It was a volatile situation. Paul wanted to go into the

⁵ <https://www.lewrockwell.com/2022/10/doug-casey/silvers-many-uses-and-what-it-means-for-its-future/> accessed 10-28-2022

theater, but the disciples would not let him. The mob continued to chant, “Great is Diana of the Ephesians!” The chant itself indicated that they were concerned not merely for the reputation of Diana but for the reputation of their city. There was an element of patriotism in their cry. To be against Diana was to be against Ephesus. It was to be unpatriotic. It is amazing that this riot, this disturbance of the peace, continued for about two hours. During that time many joined who did not understand why they had come together. The riot had taken on a life of its own.

The fact that a public official could quiet a raging crowd is nothing short of a miracle. Though the people in Ephesus could not have known it, God mercifully intervened to spare his church. “Behold, I am with thee, and will *keep* thee in all places whither thou goest.”⁶ It is he who works quietly behind the scenes, working out all things for his own glory. The man he would use for the task was the town clerk. His name is lost to history. He himself was an idolater just like the rest, but he had the good sense to recognize that a riot was not a good thing for the public order. Tearing down the public order—even with the intention to “build back better”—is not a good thing. God put just the right man in office at just the right time. Somehow, he quieted the crowd. Many of them would likely wake up the next day hoarse, and unable to speak.

The town clerk’s speech revealed his idolatrous presuppositions: “Men of Ephesus, what man is there who does not know that the city of the Ephesians is temple guardian of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Zeus? Therefore, since these things cannot be denied, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.” But it also contained elements of truth: “You have brought these men here who are neither robbers of temples nor blasphemers of your goddess. Therefore, if Demetrius and his fellow craftsmen have a case against anyone, the courts are open and there are proconsuls. Let them bring charges against one another. But if you have any other inquiry to make, it shall be determined in the lawful assembly.” The clerk chastised the crowd for taking part in a “disorderly gathering.” When he finished his speech, “he dismissed the assembly.” Chastened, the crowd went home. The city clerk that day was a peacemaker. He was not taught by the Holy Spirit of God, he didn’t have a biblically-informed understanding of human nature. But God used him. The crowd was out for blood. The apostle Paul could well have been publicly lynched had he ventured into the theater. Better that public order be maintained than loss of life.

Demetrius did not act out of love for his neighbor but out of self-serving self-interest. He didn’t want anybody receiving the gospel; it was bad for business. Though he did not know it, Demetrius was serving Satan, who wants to take as many people with him to the lake of fire as he can. Even though idolatry makes no

⁶ Gen. 28:15

sense—worshiping something crafted by man and calling it a god—idolaters, unless born again by the Holy Spirit, are unwilling to consider the truth. Man by nature is spiritually blind. Demetrius is a man who had heard the gospel, whether from Paul directly or secondhand. What Paul had proclaimed was the truth, but rather than repent and bring his life into conformity with the truth, he wanted others to join him in his rejection of the truth. The ensuing riot, fomented by Demetrius’s inflammatory words, was a dangerous, volatile situation. There was an urgent need for a peacemaker. The city clerk fulfilled that role on that day, but he has died and gone to hell. The need for a peacemaker remains, and God has provided him in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, the only mediator between God and man. And the good news is that Jesus “is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). He himself is “our peace, who hath made both one” (Eph. 2:14). And we who follow him are called likewise to be peacemakers.⁷

Psalm 120 ends with these words: “My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.” Here, the Psalmist laments the confrontation, conflict, hostility and discord that are so evident in our fallen world. He is a man of peace, but those with whom he interacts are for war. If you look closely in the King James or New King James you will observe that the words “am” and “are” in verse 7 are italicized. Both halves of the verse are nominal clauses; the verb must be supplied—a common occurrence in the original Hebrew, as well as New Testament Greek. But interestingly, the word “for” in the first half of the verse is also in italics; it is lacking in the original Hebrew; translators supply it; since it is explicit in the second clause, the addition is appropriate. Reading it this way, you understand that the Psalmist is lamenting the fact that he deals with so many hostile people. But there is another way to read this verse, taking out the added “for.” In this way it reads, “*I am peace*” (אָנִי שְׁלוֹמִים *ani shalom*); this is perfectly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom it is said “he is our *peace*” (Eph. 2:14). He who stilled the violent storm on the waters of the Galilee is able, by his Spirit subduing the hearts of men, to effect peace both with God and with our fellow-man. Christ is peace personified. He says, “*I am peace: but when I speak, they are for war.*” Rebels reject his rule and wage war against his kingdom, but his Spirit subdues his elect in this life, and at the final day all men will bow before him, bringing true peace that will prevail throughout eternity. And we who are subdued by his Spirit are called to be peacemakers—“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.”

The world in which we live is so often bellicose and confrontational and hate-filled. There is so much mutual hatred and suspicion. People talk past each other

⁷ Matt. 5:9

and don't really listen to one other. Think of the hatred that erupts in some peoples' hearts when they think of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* back in June. The court found that under the supreme law of our land, the U.S. Constitution, the *Roe* court had erred; there was never a constitutional right to abortion; the Constitution of the United States does not confer a right to abortion. The *Dobbs* opinion was leaked. There was anger and vitriol. There were even death threats against Supreme Court justices. And even now, when pro-abortion candidates debate pro-lifers, there is studious avoidance of mentioning the personhood of the fetus, the biological fact that the child in the womb is a unique human person with its own heartbeat and DNA, separate and distinct from its mother. Performing an abortion is not the same as the removal of a diseased organ, part of the patient's body. In an abortion a tiny human being—endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights, most importantly the right to life—is cruelly murdered and ripped from its mother's womb.

God intended that humans love one another, help one another and cooperate with one another. But that ideal has never been achieved because of sin. So, just as in Paul's day, the world stands in need of peacemakers. We, his people, are called to peace.⁸ We, his born-again and adopted children, are called to bear the family likeness of the Savior, who himself is our peace, who by his atoning work gave us peace with God. Will we take up the challenge? Will we, like our Lord, respond lovingly, even to people who are hostile? By his grace we can be peacemakers.

⁸ 1 Cor. 7:15