

## **Making Peace**

*Luke Bushman, November 12<sup>th</sup> 2023. Matthew 5:38-42, Micah 4:3-7.  
Quotes From Erin Blakemore*

Remembrance Day is always a complex day as a people dedicated to love and peace. Before we get into our reflection today, I just wanted to clarify a few things regarding the complexities of pacifism before we proceed.

First, while we are opponents of war, we are not opponents of those affected by war. Remembrance Day still works for us in the context of peacemaking, as we truly do mourn the lives lost in war. We mourn the soldiers and civilians who have lost their lives. Veterans who fought are heroes that deserve to be honored and supported. Soldiers are survivors of the atrocity of war, often victims of cruel authorities who use and manipulate their people to achieve their goals.

Second, pacifism is a privileged position. It would be wrong of me to not acknowledge what I have gained through the injustice of war. I am a part of a nation that has fought in wars, and I have benefitted from that fighting. In the same way, as someone who lives in a situation removed from the complexities of war, my commitment to pacifism carries no consequence to my well being. When I say I am dedicated to peace, the worst thing that is going to happen to me is that I will make someone angry

at soccer, and get hit, and not hit back. Even that is incredibly unlikely. For others a commitment to pacifism means losing homes, family and friends. It means having to stand by helplessly while violence is committed. Even in a country like Canada, I as a relatively large white man, living in a safe community am at extremely low risk to experience violence. All this to say is that while I may talk about some ideals of peace this morning, I have very little authority on the matter, as someone who does not deal with the complexities that come with violence. I hope everyone knows there is room for disagreement, and nuance, because my word or ideals are certainly not the be all and end all. That said, I think I still can have a voice when it comes to challenging the idea that peace can be achieved through violent means.

For me my deeper interest in peacemaking all goes back to one of my professors at Bible College. I had only had him as a teacher a handful of times before going into my final year of schooling, and I always got the impression that he was a bit apprehensive of me. I don't blame him, I came to Bible School as a bit of a know it all, and was very outgoing, which could easily be described as arrogant. Becca had several classes with him, and the two were close, and Becca always raved about how he was one of her favorite professors. I liked him as well, but I was never sure if the feeling

was mutual. In my fourth year I had a mandatory class with him, and he gave an extra 5% to any student who would sit down for coffee with him. I sat down for coffee with him for the 5%, but I was fairly nervous and scared. When I told him that I was engaged to Becca Potvin, he lit up and we started a great conversation. I knew he was very devoted to peace, which is quite the achievement to stand out as loving peace at a Mennonite College. I told him that I loved the idea of pacifism, but I was incredibly unsure about how it worked in the real world. I asked him how I could reply to someone when they brought up how war ended the Holocaust. He told me about how Denmark saved approximately 90 percent of their Jewish population, without going to war with Germany, and without major government intervention. These next quotes that help tell the story all come from a History.com article that has been bookmarked on my laptop for years- I read it from time to time when I need to feel inspired and hopeful.

“In April 1940, German forces invaded Denmark. They didn’t meet with much resistance. Rather than suffer an inevitable defeat by fighting back, the Danish government negotiated to insulate Denmark from the occupation. In return, the Nazis agreed to be lenient with the country, respecting its rule and neutrality. However by 1943, tensions had reached a breaking point.

Workers had begun to sabotage the war effort and the Danish resistance had ramped up efforts to fight the Nazis. In response, the Nazis told the Danish government to institute a harsh curfew, forbid

public assemblies, and punish saboteurs with death. The Danish government refused, so the Nazis dissolved the government and established martial law.”

“Then, in late September 1943, the Nazis got word from Berlin that it was time to rid Denmark of its Jews. As was typical for the Nazis, they planned the raid to coincide with a significant Jewish holiday—in this case, Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. Marcus Melchior, a rabbi, got word of the coming pogrom, and in Copenhagen’s main synagogue, he interrupted services.

“We have no time now to continue prayers, ” said Melchior. “We have news that this coming Friday night, the night between the first and second of October, the Gestapo will come and arrest all Danish Jews.” Melchior told the congregation that the Nazis had the names and addresses of every Jew in Denmark, and urged them to flee or hide.

As Denmark’s Jewish population sprang into panicked action, so did its Gentiles. Hundreds of people spontaneously began to tell Jews about the upcoming action and help them go into hiding. It was, in the words of historian Leni Yahil, “a living wall raised by the Danish people in the course of one night.”

“Danish culture has been seafaring since Viking times, so there were plenty of fishing boats and other vessels to spirit Jews toward Sweden. But Danish fishermen feared losing their livelihoods and being punished by the Nazis if they were caught. Instead, the resistance groups that swiftly formed to help the Jews managed to negotiate standard fees for Jewish passengers, then recruit volunteers to raise the money for passage. The average price of passage to Sweden cost up to a third of a worker’s annual salary.” (Blakemore)

This miraculous story was not a fairytale, and like all things nothing went perfectly. Some fishermen took advantage of the situation for personal gain, while others refused to accept any personal gain. The boat

ride over to neutral Sweden was dangerous, with boats overflowing with people. In one fishing town there was a betrayal that led to the capture of 500 Jews who were sent to the Theresienstadt ghetto. Antisemitism existed before the Holocaust, as well as after. And yet ordinary people performed an extraordinary feat to save their neighbors. 7 200 Danish Jews were ferried to Sweden, and of the 500 captured only 51 were killed.

This was the most effective action in terms of saving the Jewish population from the evils of the Nazis. Without any military involvement. The issue is still complex, and we could still ask “Well what if the allied forces had not stopped Germany? Would they have taken over neutral Sweden and eventually killed those same people?” Peace is a complex issue, but I think stories of non-violent resistance should be talked about more and more. In remembering and honoring the lives lost by soldiers and civilians, we do not need to exclude stories that challenge the idea that war is the only way to achieve peace. If we as a species can progress and foster creativity in how we strive for peace, perhaps we can avoid more and more conflicts in the future. If we can compel our leaders to think outside the box, and partner with peacemaking organizations first maybe the world will be better.

In war there is a term often used “pre-emptive war” or “pre-emptive strike”. It is when you attack a perceived threat in the hopes of ending that threat before it can happen. There is an organization involved in peacemaking called Pre-emptive Love, and the work they do is really interesting, but that organization name is thought provoking alone. What if we pre-emptively could end war and violence by assisting places in need? One of the main things Pre-emptive Love does is provide for people’s needs in different places. Desperation and violence often go hand in hand, so creating abundance can eliminate one the main motivators for violence. I am sure MCC and other organizations have similar programs, I just really thought that name was interesting- pre-emptive love.

The two scriptures selected for this morning are a prophetic message of a peaceful future, and Jesus’ instruction to turn the other cheek. Jesus as usual tries to get right down to the issue of people’s hearts. Addressing on the micro level, how we can make the world a more peaceful place. There is a lot we cannot control, and making a more peaceful world often seems impossible, and overwhelming. Jesus’ words remind us that it is a good start to avoid violence and anger in our own individual lives. We can try to affect change by not just creating “inner peace” but bringing peace with us wherever we go. This is a start and only gets us so far.

We need help from world leaders, and global organizations if we want to create a peaceful future like the one described in Micah chapter 4.

Where weapons are no longer needed, so they are turned into agricultural tools. Weapons that destroy, become tools to help things grow. People no longer learn war, outsiders are welcomed in, and people can sit in their gardens without being afraid. That world sounds pretty wonderful to me, and I hope with the help of Jesus we can create something like that.

Throughout history, we have been gifted examples of fighting for peace without violence. The Danish citizens that we talked about this morning started with a simple, idealistic goal: Save our neighbors. They did things first on the individual level- warning their friends and temporarily hiding Jews in their home. They then extended this to the communal level, raising funds, making a plan, and smuggling Jewish folks into Sweden. Maybe we can do the same in our world. Starting with small acts of providing for one another, before moving to larger scale projects to bring about peace.

As we reflect on Remembrance Day and Peace Sunday, I hope that we feel challenged to work for peace. I hope that we recognize that there is room for discussion. That while we may disagree with violence and war, many people are in fight or flight mode to survive. People are faced with choices beyond comprehension, and in order to create peace, we have to

find ways of preventing people from being in desperate situations. I hope we can think creatively about peace in our individual lives, and also on a much larger scale. I hope that even though it is difficult, we as disciples are able to have hope in a better future. A future where we will no longer study war.

Blakemore, Erin. "Why 90 Percent of Danish Jews Survived the Holocaust." *History.Com*, A&E Television Networks, 7 Jan. 2019, [www.history.com/news/wwii-danish-jews-survival-holocaust](http://www.history.com/news/wwii-danish-jews-survival-holocaust).