

Rev. Dr. Yugo Suzuki's Sermon

1/30/2011 **The Peace of Rome vs. the Peace of Jesus Matt. 5:1-12**

Jesus spoke to his followers in the Sermon on the Mount, "Blessed are poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, and the peacemakers." What does his saying mean to us?

The first century Palestine was under the imperial reign of Caesar and his puppet Jewish king, Herod. Caesar and Herod used their military and political powers to impose forced obedience on the people.

In short, the peace of Rome was accomplished by violence. It was peace by invasion, victory, and oppression. The peace of Rome was peace of forced order. It will crumble someday.

The peace of Jesus was diametrically opposite to the peace of Rome.

He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." The poor in spirit referred to the poor and oppressed who were trying to get through a day without the minimum means of survival.

Then why were they blessed? Because Jesus was bearing their burden with and for them. It was in this context that Jesus spoke the well-known words, "Come to me all who labor and are heavy laden. I will give you rest."

Jesus said, "Blessed are those who mourn." Those who mourn referred to persons who grieved over injustice, violence, and oppression, those who yearned for a world where they beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks.

Why were they blessed? Because their yearning was Jesus' yearning. Their yearning was the same as God's yearning.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the meek." The meek referred to those who endured injustice, discrimination, and violence without becoming bitter and hate filled.

Why were they blessed? Because they did not lose faith in God in the midst of darkness. Because they never lost patience for the justice of God.

Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." The peacemakers referred to those who endured under Caesar and Herod without falling into despair.

Why were they blessed? Because they renounced retribution and refused to demonize the oppressors. Because they wanted what Jesus wanted: reconciliation and unity among people.

Jesus rejected the peace of Rome. He revealed the peace of God. It is the peace symbolized by Jesus' open table to which everyone is invited to break bread with him.

It symbolizes the truth that the dividing walls of hostility between the oppressor and the oppressed, male and female, Jews and gentiles, slave and free are torn down, and equality, fairness, and compassion pervade every walk of human life.

To yearn for such a world and to dream that dream with Jesus is difficult, because we are living in the world of Caesar and Herod.

But it is not impossible, because Caesar and Herod are not our ultimate rulers. The ultimate ruler is the gracious and loving God whom Jesus revealed.

To be convinced of this and find in that faith the source of joy, hope and courage – that is the peace of God Jesus has brought us.

Thanks be to God.