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Proper 11 B

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“Many years ago a nobleman’s son was a student at a military academy, where he won many gold medals for his marksmanship. After he was awarded his diploma, the young officer rode home on his horse. Passing through a tiny village, he saw a hundred circles drawn on the side of a barn -- and in the center of each circle was a bullet hole.

“The officer was so amazed that he stopped his horse and yelled out, ‘Who is this expert shot? A hundred perfect bull’s-eyes! That’s incredible! Even I could not do that.

“A young boy walking by looked up at the officer on his tall horse and snickered, ‘Oh, that’s Nar, our town fool!’

“‘I don’t care what he is,’ interrupted the officer. ‘Whoever can shoot a hundred perfect bull’s-eyes must have won every gold medal in the world! I must meet him and shake his hand!’

“ ‘Oh no, no, no, you don’t understand,’ laughed the boy. ‘Nar does not draw the circle first and then shoot. He shoots first, and then draws the circle.’”

This story is a parable of the human life and not just today's life. Prophets come with one target in mind "*the high holy place*" but the human response seems always to be "*they kept turning back to their own ways.*" God's messenger is forever around us and pointing us but we are too busy choosing our own targets and our own direction. Everything is OK the society says. Our Church seems to be on that same path. It is a prickly way to live and it is not God's way for us. God's target is set. It is His aim that we love Him and love our neighbor. It is His aim that we find 'peace' in this life. Will we aim at it and keep attempting to '*choose life*' His way or will we continue to take what appeals at the moment and call that 'life'?

God has given us THE answer and His Name is Jesus. Paul says in Ephesians "*For he is our peace....*" The issue to which Paul addresses this word is just as difficult as any issue we face today. There was truly a "dividing wall" between Jews and Gentiles. Paul's word was direct and on target; Christ himself is the place to find peace. Christ is the One who can break down walls that exist in life. The New English Bible is even more direct in saying; "*He and he alone is our peace.*" 'Peace' in this context is more than a mere cessation of hostilities. Peace here means well-being, wholeness. In Christ two radically disparate groups become one. It is Christ to whom we are to turn.

Barclay says it is in a shared love of Jesus Christ that people can come to love each other. The focus here is on Jesus himself. The Interpreter's Bible puts it in unequivocal terms: "The bond of peace is not a doctrine or a philosophy or any kind of abstraction, but a person."

Our world is a scary place. Our divisions, hostility, and mistrust, not to mention wanton violence can find hope in one place, the Church. God knows this. Remember the target! Reconciliation is one of God's surest words to us. At the heart of our joy and thanksgiving as Christians is this message which is the content of all Christian teaching, the message that is called "the gospel of peace."

All of our goodwill and all of our initiative will not see the hope Paul speaks of this day. It is Jesus himself who offers us hope. It is the love of Christ carried in your heart and mine that can finally help us hit the target as it is intended. When you look at your neighbor you are to see one for whom Christ was willing to die.

In Christ and Christ alone strangers become friends, hostilities come to an end when his love permeates our relationships and we are a new creation. Our character hits the target and is new in its very quality. In Galatians 3:27-28 Paul writes: "*As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there*

is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” We are challenged in today’s reading to clothe ourselves in Jesus Christ, to find our peace in him, and then to become instruments of his peace. Only Jesus Christ can heal the divisions which lie among us in our world and in our Church. We cannot go a ‘new’ way and think that our experience alone is going to bring disparate groups together. It is only in Christ that reconciliation exists.

Do you know why Church feels so good here? It is because we experience a sense of being at home, of belonging not only to one another in a unified humanity as fellow citizens, but also to God himself as part of his household or family. Bullseye!!! What a beautiful image of reconciliation, this image of the Church where men and women can be at home, at home with sisters and brothers in Christ, and at home, at peace with God. Is this not the mission of the Church, to invite people in our broken, divided world to ‘Come home?’ Come home to a God of love, a God of forgiveness and healing. Come home to a God who makes all things new. And come home to a community of love. Come home to brothers and sisters who do not judge or condemn , but who nurture, encourage, and accept you as a member of the family, a fellow pilgrim on the journey to peace with God.

Jesus says in our Gospel today “*You give them something to eat*” and this is what we are to serve; the Peace of the Lord. So foolish are our divisions in God’s greater picture of humanity. We are capable of so much more. What is our target? Certainly it is not ‘Peace’. You and I are the bearers of God’s ‘Peace’ today. We teach it here at every service. We exchange “The Peace” at every service and that “Peace” is to go far beyond this place. “*Come unto me all you who travail and are heavy laden and I will give you peace.*” I miss that line in our Eucharist each Sunday. It is at the very heart of God’s message. His target is that we have His Peace and live it and preach it daily.

Leave this place today knowing that you bear the Peace of the Lord. As you meet people old and new give them something which the world says is of no value but God says is everything. Jesus already hit the target for us in His life, death and resurrection. The victory is secure. Now let us carry this message to the world and not miss the target!