

PEACE SUNDAY order of service

24 September 2006

--- Standing ---

1. INVITATION

Today we are celebrating the International Day of Peace 2006. Mennonite, Brethren in Christ and other Anabaptist churches within Mennonite World Conference are united in worship. **Follow Me!** It is Jesus' invitation to all of us who celebrate Peace Sunday this year. He who invites us all to follow him is the one whom the prophet Isaiah called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace." In his mercy and love, let us pass on peace to each other.

Congregational hymn: "O Prince of Peace" / *MWC International Songbook 1990: #18 / 1997: #13 / 2003: #72* (If this hymn or any other hymn suggested for this service is not available, substitute a different, appropriate hymn.)

2. GREETINGS

After greetings, the congregation responds by singing "Praise the Lord, Sing Hallelujah"

3. INTRODUCTION: Matthew 5:9

After the scripture reading, the congregation responds by singing "Amen" (threefold choral Amen, if it is familiar)

--- Congregation is seated ---

4. PRAISE

Congregational hymn: "O Day of Peace"

5. MEDITATION ON THE VOICES OF ANABAPTIST FORBEARERS

Conrad Grebel (1524): "The gospel and its adherents are not to be protected by the sword, nor are they thus to protect themselves Neither do they use a worldly sword or war, since all killing has ceased with them."

--- silent meditation while music plays in the background ---

Pilgrim Marpeck (1532): "I conclude before my God that worldly power ... is not needed in the kingdom of Christ."

--- silent meditation while music plays in the background ---

Menno Simons (1539): "The regenerated do not go to war nor engage in strife. They are the children of peace Since we are to be conformed to the image of Christ, how can we then fight our enemies with the sword?"

--- silent meditation while music plays in the background ---

6. LONGING FOR PEACE IN PRAYER

Congregational hymn: "We Are People of God's Peace" / *International Songbook 1990*: #35 or "Prayer of Saint Francis"
Prayer

7. Sharing the Word

- a. Scripture reading: Matthew 4 : 17-25
- b.** Sermon: "**Follow Me!**"
- c. Congregational hymn of response: "We Shall Walk Through the Valley"

8. INTERCESSIONS: (After each segment of intercession, the congregation sings one verse of "O Lord Hear My Prayer")

Intercession 1: Peace in families

Intercession 2: Peace in congregations

Intercession 3: Peace in the Middle East and in other situations of conflict in the world

9. OFFERING

- a. Colossians 3:17
- b. Prayer
- c. Offerings
- d. Congregational hymn: "What Gift Can We Bring"

10. PRAISE

Congregational hymn: "Lord of Light, Your Name Outshining"

--- Standing ---

11. BENEDICTION

Prayer

Congregational hymn: "Praise God from Whom" / *International Songbook 1990*: #86

Sermon background

FOLLOW ME Matthew 4 : 17 – 25

An invitation

An invitation usually brings us to things which are exciting, desirable. When a father invites his daughter to “follow me,” he may want to show a stuffed toy that he just bought for her. Similarly, when a son invites his mother to “follow me,” he may want to show a new toy he just assembled.

“Follow me” is an invitation that we usually offer to others in order to invite them to see things which are exciting and desirable. It is such an invitation that Jesus offers to Peter and Andrew (vs 18-19), to James and John (v 21), and to everybody whom he calls to become his disciples, including us. But is Jesus’ invitation intended to bring us things which are exciting and desirable?

Who is the Son of God?

Jesus’ invitation, “Follow me,” is well connected to *who* offers that invitation. Before Jesus gave this invitation, he was baptized by John the Baptist. That baptism is actually an *inauguration*. But, inaugurated to become *what/whom*? Matthew 3:17 gives the answer: inaugurated to become *the Son of God*. Jesus’ inauguration to become the Son of God is made clear by the story of Jesus’ temptation which resembles the inauguration ritual. In that story, the devil twice asks Jesus a question with an if clause: “If you are the Son of God.” Here the devil challenges the truth of the voice from heaven, that Jesus is the Son of God with whom God is well pleased (Matthew 3:17). The devil demands that Jesus prove that he *is* indeed the Son of God as the voice from heaven has claimed.

But how does Jesus have to prove he is the Son of God? How else if not by the *show of force*? Isn’t that the common way known by humanity, almost the only way known by humanity? If we watch epic movies or read history books about ancient kingdoms, we see that one’s claim of kingship could only be legitimized after one proved that he had mighty power to conquer others. That was what had happened to Pompey, Julius Caesar, Augustus, Claudius, Nero, etc. All of them got public recognition after they succeeded in proving their might. But Jesus refuses this scheme. He does not choose to show his force as the devil has asked him to do. Jesus wants to make a new qualification for the title, “Son of God.” It is not the show of force that qualifies one to be called “Son of God” but something else. What is it?

Jesus as the new Moses

To answer the question, it is worth noting that there is a difference in the chronology of the story of Jesus’ temptation told in the gospel of Matthew from that of Luke. According to Matthew, the setting for Jesus’ temptation follows the path “desert → temple → mountain.” According to Luke, the setting follows the path “desert → mountain → temple.” How do we explain this difference?

Luke puts Jesus’ first public ministry in the synagogue where Jesus proclaimed himself as the one who has been anointed by God to bring the good news to the poor, healing to the brokenhearted, deliverance to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, and liberty to the bruised (Luke 4:18-19). Here Jesus is pictured as the one who stands in the prophetic tradition of striving for justice. Since the injustices have their origin in the temple, it is not surprising that Jesus starts his public ministry there. That is why, in telling the story of Jesus’

temptation, Luke follows the path “desert → mountain → temple” (Luke 4:1-13). The temple is put at the end because the proving of Jesus’ identity as well as his first public ministry starts in the temple.

According to Matthew, Jesus’ first public ministry does not take place in the temple but on the mountain (Matthew. 5-7). That is why Matthew follows the path “desert → temple → mountain” (Matthew 4:1-11) in telling the story of Jesus’ temptation. The mountain is put at the end since the proving of Jesus’ identity as well as his first public ministry starts on the mountain.

It is this setting that needs to be taken into account since it is here we find the key to answer the question: who is the Son of God? By putting Jesus’ first public ministry on the mountain, we are reminded of *Moses* in the story of the deliverance of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai that started the story of the Israelites as a people. Matthew wants to tell us that, just like Moses who delivered the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai in the beginning of the journey of the Israelites as a people of God, Jesus gave new commandments on the mountain to mark the establishment of a new people of God.

The invitation to become a new people of God with a new law

It is in this context that Jesus’ invitation to his disciples gets its meaning. Just as Moses gathered a people of God before he delivered the Ten Commandments, so does Jesus, who succeeds Moses, gather a *new* people of God before he gives the *new* law (Matthew 5-7). In other words, Jesus’ invitation, “Follow me,” is none other than an invitation to become a *new people of God* who will receive a *new law* (look at the way Matthew tells Jesus’ sermon on the mountain: “You have heard ... But I say to you: ...).

When we look further at the new law that Jesus has given, we will find that Jesus gives the right and true qualification to the title, “Son of God.” Jesus’ Sonship, and that of whoever commits her/himself to follow Jesus, is proven not by the *show of force*, but by the *show of attitude*: to be reconciled with our sisters and brothers who have something against us, even with our accusers (Matthew. 5:23-25); to let our word be yes and no (Matthew 5:37); not resist an evildoer (Matthew 5:39); to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us (Matthew 5:44); to give alms with humility (Matthew 6:3-4); to store for ourselves treasures in heaven, not on earth (Matthew 6:19-20); not to judge others (Matthew 7:1), etc.

Thus, one’s Sonship of God, in the final analysis, is not determined by the might one has, but by one’s right attitudes (orthopraxis). Faith is not related to physical or structural might, but to the right way of life with God, the way of life that brings peace. Jesus’ invitation, “Follow me,” is not a mere invitation to become his disciples. This is an invitation to become the new people of God, who are called to carry out God’s new law, because “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (Mathew. 7:21).