

The Butter Way

By Guest Preacher Lindsey Jacobs - Lindsey Jacobs is the Manager of Legacy Planning for Chapman University and the daughter of two Disciples ministers.

*Matthew 5:9*

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

*Romans 12:18*

If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

*Romans 14:19*

Let us then pursue what makes for peace and for mutual edification.

There is a favorite story that my parents like to tell about Lindsey, the Peacemaker. At age 2, I had just learned about problem solving at my Montessori school and on a drive to Phoenix from Tucson I decided to put those skills to use. My parents were having what my family lovingly refers to as a “compromise” and I figured they could use some help. From the backseat came a tiny voice saying, “Mom, you talk and Dad you listen. Then Dad you talk and Mom you listen. Okay, Mom, talk.” According to my mom she looked at my dad and said, “I am NOT taking marriage counseling from my 2-year-old.”

I suppose it is safe to say that I blossomed early as a Peacemaker. This must be why *The Butter Battle Book* always spoke to me. My godmother gave me this book so long ago I couldn't tell you how old I was. I remember thinking how silly a butter difference was. Butter side up, butter side, down, who cares as long as there's butter?

Couldn't those adults see that they were disagreeing over nothing? To this day, I identify with the child in the book, looking on helplessly as adults, the people who are supposed to know better, who are supposed to watch over me, seek out war.

I think about this book that I cherished as a child and, as an adult, I long for that more innocent time in my life when I thought nothing that silly could ever happen. People would never argue over something as simple as an opinion on butter, right? I now know that Dr. Suess wrote this book as a commentary on the Cold War and the nuclear arms race. How sad he would be to see how little we have changed.

As obnoxious as I can imagine I must have been, being now that I have a wise-beyond-her-years goddaughter, I still feel like my parents could have considered the wisdom of the 2-year-old in the back seat. All I asked was that they talk and listen in turns, a common suggestion from anyone with any communication skills. How are we, as peacemakers, communicating? Are we yelling over those with whom we disagree? Are we listening for common ground? Are we so focused on achieving peace that we forget the journey it takes to get there? Are we so weary of the journey that we have lost sight of what peace could look like?

I have watched children argue and, shocking, I know, had arguments as a child myself, and what I see in our youth is a desire to live in peace. Arguments have a purpose, and once they have fixed the problem, they go back to playing in the sandbox or hop-scotching, or whatever it is that kids do

these days. I have seen some of the most loving, peacemaking behavior from children and youth, behavior that I am ashamed to say shows up somewhat rarely in adults. The kid who gives another child their toy to cheer them up, or who goes to a parent with a big hug because something appears to be wrong. The 8th grade youth I saw at church camp who asked the 6th grade boy who was having trouble fitting in to come sit by him. These are children creating peace by simply being open to the idea that others, beyond themselves, matter. That winning is not everything.

In his book *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Parker Palmer talks about learning to hold tension creatively. By breaking our hearts open, rather than apart, we create the space inside ourselves to find a deeper way to be in community. If our hearts are broken open, they can hold love, consideration, kindness, and respect. They are ready for new information, ideas, ready to capture others' stories. A heart broken apart is in pieces and, like a broken vase, can no longer hold anything beautiful. According to Palmer, "The heart has the capacity to turn tension towards constructive ends, but there is nothing automatic about it. The powers we need will be released only if the heart has been made supple by practice so that it breaks open instead of apart under stress" (p. 72).

Tension itself is neither good nor bad; it just is. When we avoid tension or seek it out, that is when we have given up on being peacemakers and it becomes a battle. We have all learned the phrase, "agree to disagree," or, as my parents say, "You may be right dear." It is considered the polite way to be on opposite sides of a "compromise." I would challenge us to find another way. When I agree to disagree I know that what I really mean is that I am right and you are wrong, but I'll let you believe whatever stupid idea you have in order to stop arguing.

So what else is there? Well, if we could hold the tension in a conversation, listen with hearts broken open, perhaps we could find the common ground and build on that. Rather than bringing someone to "our own side" with forceful words or actions, shouldn't we seek to alter others and allow ourselves to be changed during my every interaction? It is engaging in this way that peacemakers create a new path towards peace. If we could find our inner children and remember to keep ourselves open to the idea that others, even and especially those with whom we vehemently disagree, matter, then perhaps we can see them as children of God.

So, what is that common ground? Where do we exist as God's children, together, regardless of the wars around us? Well, my godmother, who as you'll remember gave her peacemaker goddaughter this book, had a solution. When she first read *The Butter Battle Book* she felt that there had to be a "butter way" to end it (see, I managed to work in the sermon title). She, Nancy Brink (who you may know as the Director of Church Relations at Chapman University), decided to not only write an alternate ending, she sent it to Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss) himself...and he wrote back to express how much he loved it. Nancy wrote a story where the Zooks and the Yooks found common ground. Here is her alternate ending (which I would love to take credit for):

Now that's the whole story as some folks would say—  
The Zooks, you can't trust 'em, just blow 'em away.  
But I've heard the ending that settled the matter:  
Both Yook-folk and Zook-folk now butter their batter!

They say a young Zookling came to this conclusion  
And talked to a Yookling, "Let's end this confusion."

These two hit their kitchens and started to putter  
With yeast and with flour and with rich melted butter.

Their bread was prespread—downside up, upside down.  
The news spread like magic through village and town.  
On the top of the wall they munched bread and all signed  
A covenant putting their war games behind.

They broke up their weapons: their Snick—Berry Switch,  
Their Triple Sling Jigger, Eight-Nozzled Boom Blitz.  
And the very last thing that the new friends did do  
Was to bury the Bitsy Big—Boy Boomeroo.

And some say that day that the wall got its crack  
And started to fall——no one put the stones back.  
But through the stone doorway the kids run in bunches.  
With laughter they 're sharing their pre—buttered lunches.

Remember this story when some folks would say  
That bigger or better just must win the day.  
The bread that's pre-buttered made all warfare cease.  
There's always a way when the people want peace.

There's ALWAYS a way when the people want peace. Amen.