

# **COMMUNITY PRAYER SERVICE FOR PEACE** **IN SYRIA**

“Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” Matthew 5:9

We live in a world of violence, not peace. It’s all we’ve ever been familiar with. For almost as long as human beings have been around and have had to live together, our planet has been characterized by conflict, chaos, disharmony, and violence. It is important to understand that peace is more than just the absence of conflict. Peace comes from the truths that in Christ we’ve been fully reconciled with God; and in the midst of problems, we have His precious promises and His ever-abiding presence. When we are troubled and in fear, we should remember the peace that we have with God through Christ Jesus our Lord. (Philippians 4:7).

On Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> of December, 2013, a very special worship service was held at the Armenian Evangelical Bethel Church, Aleppo, dedicated for the peace of the Syrian Arab Republic. Among those present were the President of the Armenian Evangelical Community in Syria, the Rev. Haroutune Selimian, the Aleppo Governor, Mr. Muhammad Wahid Akkad, the Heads and the clergy of all Christian Churches in the city and a large number of believers.



During the service the Gospel was read by Archbishop Bedros Mrayati, based on Matthew 5:1-16.



The day's sermon was delivered by Rev. Haroutune Selimian. The sermon was based on Matthew 5:9. Rev. Selimian said in his sermon. "The word "peace" incorporates harmony, beauty, unity, virtue, safety, security, and justice". The human beings were created for peace, not conflict. And what is true on a global level where there are always "wars and rumours of wars" is true in our own lives as well. The peace we want and need is elusive. Our relationships with parents and friends are, at various points in our lives, characterized by mistrust, envy, defensiveness, antagonism, and selfishness. We have competing desires and expectations of each other, and these bump up against each other regularly. The divine purpose for humanity is peace and harmony, but this is disrupted by human rebellion against God's purpose, in wars and conflicts. Jesus said that

those who strive to achieve God's peaceful purposes for humanity are blessed, and God's children, acting in line with the divine will. Thus, we are called to be peacemakers. Fundamentally, choosing to be peacemakers is an act of trust.



As is the case in all the Beatitudes, the announcement that Jesus is making about the kind of people who are blessed, the kind of people who signal the kingdom of God, asks for a radical trust in God to usher in his kingdom in what seems to be counter-intuitive ways. It forces us to declare, by our actions as well as our words, that we believe that God really does stand over our individual stories and the larger stories in which we find ourselves; that he really does promise to deal justly with us and those we find ourselves in conflict with, that peace and love really are stronger than violence and hatred, no matter how things may appear in the present. If God isn't who he says he is, it makes no sense to be peacemakers in the present or to take the beatitudes as a kingdom-way-of being-in-the-world. Only if a God of peace stands at the beginning and the end of history does it make sense to be peacemakers in the time between.

At the end of his sermon, Rev. Selimian stressed the following idea. "Being a peacemaker involves so much ..... more than the absence of war, or being "against war." It means working for God's vision for his world. It means having a clear, biblically-formed vision of the future God has promised. It means pursuing justice, wholeness, and harmony in our relationships, seeking reconciliation and restoration both when we wrong others and when they wrong us. It means turning the other cheek, choosing to be wronged rather than be a source of enmity. It means doing the hard work of reconciling with our enemies without resorting to violence. It means getting positively involved politically and socially, promoting whatever peace can be achieved and always working for human development in whatever context we find ourselves. It means sacrificially pursuing the good of others, sometimes at our personal expense. Wherever we find ourselves there will be conflict, disharmony, fear, and

confusion. Our mission as God's children is to bear witness through our lives to the Prince of Peace because we believe that it is in living as Christ did that the world begins to be transformed into something beautiful and good and hopeful.

We are not charged with the task of bringing the kind of peace that only God can bring; but we are called to embody, as in all the beatitudes, a kingdom-way-of-being-in-the-world. We are called to be peacemakers because we are children of a God of peace. God's children do what God does, and there is no more God-like work for us to do in the world than peacemaking".



During the service, prayers were offered by pastors and the believers of the church for the peace of Syria and for the two kidnapped archbishops of Aleppo, His eminence Youhanna Ibrahim and Boulos Yazji as well the thirteen nuns of Maaloula. The service ended with the joint prayer of benediction said by the Heads of the Christian Churches leaders.

May God help us to be peacemakers this week, this year, and beyond.