

thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

*Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.*

*Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.*

*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matt. 5:1-9).*

**Afghanistan vows revenge if US strikes: The ruling Taliban threatened revenge Friday if the United States attacks Afghanistan for shielding suspected terrorist mastermind Osama bin Laden.**

*While Jesus was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; with him was a large crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests and the elders of the people. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, “The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him.” At once he came up to Jesus and said, “Greetings, Rabbi!” and kissed him. Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you are here to do.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and arrested him. Suddenly, one of those with Jesus put his hand on his sword, drew it, and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place; for all who take the sword will perish by the sword” (Matt. 26:47-52).*

**A letter to Brethren youth**

*Jeff Bach, a minister and a member of Nettle Creek Church of the Brethren, Hagerstown, Ind., teaches at Bethany Theological Seminary. The following letter is written, he says, “with the wish that the church could send a message to all its youth and young adults to encourage them to come to faith in Jesus Christ, if they haven’t already, and to stay faithful to his way of peace in this time of war.”*

Dear sisters and brothers,

You have been in my thoughts and prayers very much alongside the victims of the attacks on Sept. 11, and the rescue workers who died with

them. The shock and grief of such massive suffering will not go away soon. We will all be different after this, even as healing begins.

I am sorry that the church is not in better condition as you face these times. We older adults have left you with the impression that church should entertain you and that being a Christian is fun. We have not taught you very well that faith is total life commitment to Jesus Christ that includes joy *and* sacrifice. Sometimes Christians must follow a different path than the one our neighbors and government try to pressure us to take. Faith in Jesus Christ sometimes requires us to suffer opposition from well-meaning people.

We have left you with a church that gives the impression that you should pick and choose what parts of Christian faith are comfortable to you, and disregard the rest. Faith is the church’s collective witness to Jesus Christ, not a matter of preferences. Sometimes we talk about peace as though its only purpose is to secure international political stability. We have not spoken clearly enough that disciples of Jesus trust in and work for his peace, regardless of the condition of international politics.

For these and other weaknesses in the church, I am sorry, especially for ways I might have unintentionally supported them. I pray for God’s forgiveness, and God’s power to make our church more faithful to Christ and to the New Testament.

Now Christians face the most outrageous scandal of our religion, namely Jesus’ teaching and example to love enemies. How can we even suggest such a thing in light of the intense suffering of those grieving the deaths of thousands of people? Shouldn’t US citizens answer their government’s call to support and participate in retaliatory actions to redress this attack?

Baptism by faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ brings believers into God’s design to bring about forgiveness and reconciliation with God, and the possibility of reconciliation with others. At the cross

of Jesus, God met sin, hate, and violence with the offer of forgiveness, not retaliation. Through faith and baptism, Christians receive the gift of Christ’s forgiveness. It enlists us to serve our Commander in Chief, Jesus Christ, in reconciling, not in killing.

Some will say that the way of peace amounts to failure to defend our country, and is a cowardly way to avoid the dangers of war. Remember that in terrorist war, all civilians are military targets who share constantly the danger of death. Christians are willing to live and to die for their faith, but not to kill for it, nor for a political institution. Some will say that peace is idealistic and impossible. Remember that the lofty goal of eradicating all evil or terrorism is itself idealistic. Violent force will not end violence. Massive retaliation will feed hatred, not reconcile it. Some will say that peace is passive. Remember that at the hour of his arrest, Jesus healed one of his would-be attackers, after Peter struck him with the sword. Disciples of Jesus can be just as active in healing, for those who have lost loved ones, and hopefully for the many innocent civilians in harm’s way by the threat of international military force.

Now, of all times, God’s love is needed in action, for those whose lives were lost, for those who survive them, for ourselves and our neighbors, and yes—as impossible as it sounds—even for those who intend more violence. Such love cost Jesus his life, and through that cost, God extends reconciling love abundantly. The time is urgent to repent, to confess Jesus Christ, and trust in God’s love. I pray that all of us will count the measure of God’s gift through Jesus, and count the cost of taking up his cross by putting down all weapons.



—Jeff Bach