IN MEMORIAM: HAROLD SANTMIRE

—A sermon by the Rev. Harold Paul Santmire
Lutheran Church of the Good Shepherd
Memorial Service: Harold Clinton Santmire
April 5, 1987

This is one of the beatitudes that the Church proclaims on the day of All Saints: "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Harold Santmire would have been profoundly uneasy were he to have known that he was to be numbered among the saints, by his son, on a day such as this. The thought of being a saint probably never crossed his mind.

He was one of those unassuming souls who rarely ponder their own status in this world, even less their status in the world to come. But of saintly stuff was his life constructed.

He was a peacemaker. Maybe that was his chief vocation in this world, uniquely his, without a doubt, within his family.

Harold Santmire planted trees. On any given Saturday, for as many as twenty years, you could drop by his Eggertsville, New York home, and find him out in the back forty, planting, cultivating, harvesting. When he tenderly set out a new peach tree and carefully wrapped its trunk, to protect it from the elements and the animals who might feed on it, it was as if time had stopped. For he was at peace.

He planted peace. He used to make little children feel at ease in the dental chair, which of course was one of this world's major miracles. But they trusted him. For he was at peace. He planted peace.

He cultivated peace. Whereas some, who had attained the social status and the professional affluence that he had attained, turned their backs on their commonplace roots and, as a result, fomented division and prejudice by associating only with "their own kind," his life was a quiet but powerful testimony to that peace which the Bible proclaims to us: which is not just the absence of conflict, but the presence of good will and self-sacrifice, and brotherly and sisterly affection for all. The peace of God as we know it in the Bible is an overflowing power for good. This peace has arms that reach out to embrace all kinds and conditions of people with love, not arms that are folded in embattled self-sufficiency and security.

So he reached out to touch the lives of forsaken children in the local Lutheran orphanage. So as a matter of course he shared his lunch hour and his friendship with the black cleaning woman who worked for him. So he did dental work for numerous welfare patients, although he knew that they could never pay their bills. Nor did he ever tolerate anyone speaking hurtfully of anyone

else, especially of any little one, in his presence. For he was at peace. He cultivated peace.

He harvested peace. He knew how to rest in the Lord. He found that rest often in the form of travel with his loved ones. He knew how to drink in the peace of the thundering tides along the rocky coasts of Maine or how to contemplate the calm beauty of ships at rest in an Aegean harbor. His, at such times, was a holy quietude. For he was at peace. He harvested peace.

But he knew. He knew that whatever peace he planted, whatever peace he cultivated, whatever peace he harvested, that peace was not of his own making. That's what made his life so saintly: as the hardworking, faithful son of a widowed mother; as the nearly adopted child of the family from which he was to choose, or to be chosen by, his dear wife of more than fifty years; as the dedicated the Sunday School teacher, Church Council member, and lay leader in Synodical affairs; as the devoted husband and father, grandfather and uncle, and relative of scores of souls, all of whom loved him dearly; as the gentle servant of all his friends and his patients; as a man of wisdom and stature in the eyes of so many.

He knew. He knew well that he was imperfect, as he was. He knew well that he had made his mistakes, as he had. He sometimes avoided those things that he ought to have confronted. He sometimes confronted those things that he out to have avoided. He was no saint in any pedestrian sense of the word. He knew.

That's surely why he was so reticent about his accomplishments, and why he seemed to feel so uneasy when people complimented him and thanked him, as they often did. He knew.

Perhaps that's why the memory of him I cherish most was walking with him to receive the cup of salvation, that fountain of forgiveness and renewal, and to feast on the bread of life with him, when I was a boy. Because that's where he found his peace. That's how he became a peacemaker. That's where he found his blessedness, through communion with Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now, finally, I'm beginning to do this quiet peacemaker his justice. Now, finally, I'm touching the point where, had he been here to listen, he would perhaps have begun to feel less uneasy about all this attention I've been lavishing on him.

This is the greatest gift my father gave to me. He took me with him to the altar. He introduced me to the peace of God, which passes all understanding, and which has kept my heart and mind forever in Christ Jesus. He was a peacemaker for me.

This is the greatest gift my father left with me and my family, a few weeks ago, as one last time those dearest to him gathered to receive the bread and the wine with him, in his

hospital room. In the midst of our tears, as we exchanged the peace with each other and as he touched us with peace for the last time, as we tasted the sharp pangs of death in the wine and found sweet joy in the bread of eternal life, we were at peace -- through Jesus Christ, our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

For this was his true peace, as it is yours, as it is mine: not any peace of our own making, but only the peace of Christ himself, who teaches us that peacemakers are blessed.

So I want to take you by the hand this afternoon, as he sometimes used to take me by the hand when I was a little boy. I want to lead you forward to participate in this Eucharist of peace.

For this is the way for you to find peace, too, even with tears in your eyes and anguish in your heart. Come forward to commune with the Lord, and with all his saints.

So you too can be at peace. You too can be made a peacemaker. You too can be blessed – through Jesus Christ our Lord, in the power of the Holy Spirit.

"Blessed are the peacemakers." Amen.