

Pastor Joe Polzin
Matthew 10:34-42
“Peace”

Year A – Fourth Sunday after Pentecost
July 2, 2017

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

“[Jesus said:] Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

I’m a guy who likes things in their proper seasons, and I’ve certainly never been one of those “Christmas in July” kind of people. At the same time, Christmas wasn’t *that* long ago that we can’t remember the good news that, to us, the Christ was born, that our God came to us and became a human being for our sake, and that the angels proclaimed to the shepherds on Christmas night, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace* among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:14) Jesus’ arrival as the Prince of Peace was supposed to bring a peace that this world had otherwise never known.

Yet, here we are, towards the middle of Matthew’s Gospel, and Jesus himself says, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth...” What are we to do? How are we to understand this?

The first thing we need to realize is the context in which Jesus is saying this. And it’s the same context we’ve heard the past couple weeks – since the ending of chapter 9, and through chapter 10, Jesus has gathered his twelve disciples and has been preparing them to go out in his name proclaiming the good news throughout the land of Israel. And as he’s been doing that, he’s also been preparing them for their whole lives, really, and the life of any Christian who would follow him, including us today.

Last week, we heard Jesus prepare his disciples for rejection, opposition, persecution, and even, potentially, death, all because of him, and yet, he also encouraged them that they need not have any fear, since he would soon overcome all those things. And this discourse with his disciples concludes this week with our Gospel reading today, where Jesus prepares them for the reality of what he himself, and also his followers, will face in a fallen world: a lack of peace.

And again, this sounds so odd to our ears, living with Jesus means a lack of peace. But we need to distinguish what it is Jesus is communicating. A distinction is being made. Did Jesus come to bring peace between us sinful human beings and God? Yes, of course. Jesus is God’s love incarnate, and has come to reconcile you and me to our Father in heaven, something that couldn’t be done by any human effort, so that now, not only do we live currently in peace with God, but we also have the assurance through Jesus that we will live eternally in peace with Him.

So, if there’s peace between us and God, what is Jesus saying? Well, he makes it clear in the verses that follow his statement about peace (vv. 35-36): “For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own household.”

We know that those who hear Christ’s call to faith and discipleship will repent and believe by God’s grace, and they will have true peace with their God. But many will hear that same call, and because of their own sin and sinful stubbornness, they will reject the Christ who offers them salvation. And this ends up splitting households, creating a lack of peace between

human beings. There will not be peace, but rather a sword among them. This is as true in the 1st century, the days of the early Church, as it is true today.

And we wonder, does it have to be this way? Shouldn't Christians be an example of love, and be trying to get along with everyone? It's true Christians should be known by their love, as Jesus expresses his disciples should do (John 13:35). And it's also true that we should love even our enemies, making the love of God known to all. But we also speak the truth in love (Eph. 4:15), not compromising on God's standards for our lives. And even with a perfect effort at love, it is not loving to simply permit or allow all things.

It would be as if you were in a large group with some of your closest family and friends, coming down a treacherous mountain, trying to find the safe pathway down. And *you* knew which path the group needed to go, and you could help keep everyone safe. But there might be some who insist, and even argue, that the way that they were going is the best way, even though you knew it led to dangerous trails and even steep cliffs. Would it be the loving thing to keep a false sense of peace, and go along with what they thought was right? Of course not. You would risk the division out of love and truth.

Of course, the consequences are even greater when we begin to talk about the pathway to eternal salvation, and the reality of Jesus. We can't attempt to keep a false sense of peace just for the sake of avoiding division. *Of course* we speak the truth in love, and are patient and understanding, especially with our family and friends. But we also can't relax the truth of where God calls us as Christians. After all, Jesus came, proclaiming the love of God and testifying to the truth, and look how he was treated, eventually rejected by his own people and put to death. The sword of this world was first felt in his own life. And as for us? As Jesus said, "A disciple is not above his teacher" (Matt. 10:24).

The problem is, this world is consumed with pursuing false peace. Our society makes every effort to be as accommodating as possible to as much as possible so as to avoid conflict. The only thing that isn't accommodated is to believe that someone else's sinful choices are just that: sinful.

And if you haven't experienced that before, just try sharing what you believe. Begin to make known God's truth that every life, from conception to natural death, is sacred. Start sharing with others that intimacy in a relationship is a gift from God to be exclusively enjoyed in the context of marriage, between a man and a woman committed to each other for life. Go out and proclaim in public that there is an absolute right and wrong, based on our God and the Law He's written on our hearts. Say these things... and watch the sparks start flying. You will know the feeling of the sword Jesus speaks of. The world in its sin is comfortable with lies, because it likes to be comfortable.

The reality is, though, we can be tempted to compromise God's truth, because we like to be comfortable, as well. Which is why at times, we begin to do the things we know we shouldn't be doing, saying things we shouldn't be saying, compromising with the world, just to keep the peace albeit a false one, within our circles, within our households. But peace with this world should never be our expectation, not until Jesus fully restores it when he comes again.

And when we find ourselves compromising, and pursuing a peace that is false by compromising what God has given us, we repent, and are forgiven by God. Because thanks be to God, He loved us too much to settle for a false peace between Him and us. Instead, He knew, from even before He created all things, that the life of His Son would be needed to restore the peace that we chose to forsake with our sin. That He would be willing to send Jesus Christ, who took on the nails, the spear, the death of the cross, even being forsaken by his own Father

because the sins of the world were hung upon him, so that he could achieve true peace between us and God.

God chose not to make Himself comfortable with sin. But He also provided a way for us have peace with Him despite our sin. And that's Jesus. And though, for a time, following Jesus does put us at odds with a world that rejects God, we *are* given glimpses of the peace that can be had between people, peace in our own lives, the peace made possible by God Himself. We are also given the opportunity to participate in helping as many in this world know about this peace God has given us.

Now, the thing that we should not do, and I want to be really clear on this, what we should not do as Christians is to go out into the world, then, and feel it's our job to tell everyone how bad and wrong they are. As if it's our job to bring the sword to them. No, Jesus brings the sword. We need to be concerned with the logs in our own eye, before we approach the speck of dust in another's (Matthew 7:3). We're called to follow Jesus faithfully, and by living this way in a world like ours, the sword will naturally come to us. We do not need to seek it out.

Jesus was preparing his disciples for what they would face, preparing them for their task to go out and spread the good news. Which is a hard job. Jesus does the same for us. He prepares us for our Christian lives, which is a hard calling, to be sure. We do not settle for a false peace with the world. But instead, we trust in the one who has accomplished true peace between us and God. And we look forward to the day when he returns, when we all will experience eternal peace, finally and fully. In Jesus' name. Amen.

And now may the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.