

Sunday: Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

Date: June 28, 2020

Text: Matthew 10 34-42

Title: "...but a sword"

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Please pray with me.

[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" (Matthew 10:34).

At the birth of Jesus, the angels announced to shepherds tending their flocks by night the Good News that "a Savior, who is Christ the Lord" was born in Bethlehem. That great good news, the fulfillment of the promise of the Messiah, is for all men. All people are covered by the grace of God in Christ Jesus.

At the conclusion of this grand announcement, a multitude of the heavenly host suddenly appeared praising God and saying:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those whom he is pleased. (Luke 2:14).

Christmas cards and Nativity of our Lord greetings often contain "Peace" language. The entire purpose of Jesus taking on human flesh was to restore fallen mankind to a right relationship with God the Father. He is the peacemaker between man and God.

Throughout his earthly ministry he called people to repent and receive the forgiveness of sins. He brought peace to lives marred by infirmity, demonic strife, and suffering. Jesus brought a message of hope and peace as he brought the kingdom of heaven into the lives of ordinary people.

In an age of soundbite theology, many verses are pulled from scripture to present a picture of Jesus as a first century Gandhi. Jesus was a passive man of peace. His love for everyone twisted into a form of tolerance for any and all behaviors. There is no need to modify your lifestyle or limit your greed, Jesus loves you just the way you are. No changes needed. Just love Jesus, your co-pilot. He's got your back no matter what you say, who you hurt or what you do. That Jesus becomes a yes-man for whatever a person wants to do. Following Jesus

comes to mean Jesus is the guy who follows me and cleans up my messes, so I don't have to take responsibility for the evil things I do.

That Jesus is not the true Jesus. To truly get a handle on who Jesus really is there are three rules of interpreting Scripture that must be rigorously adhered to. These three rules, when followed, present a clear picture of Jesus, his mission, and his ministry. The three rules are:

Context

Context

Context

Pulling of scripture out of context leads to distortions of God's Word and lends itself to interpretations that deviate from God's will for all of creation. When we bring our biases to a text and manipulate it by ignoring the context, we disregard true exegesis, that is letting the text speak for itself. In place of exegesis we perform what is identified as eisegesis, which is interpreting the scripture in our own voice instead of the sovereign voice of God. This can go so far as what is referred to as "Narcigesis," a narcissistic interpretation of God's Word, twisting it to support the personal desires of the individual.

In the 90's we had the "What Would Jesus Do?" craze. People wearing bracelets and necklaces adorned with the letters WWJD. This fad was intended to remind people to be nice to other people and not judge them. Yet that distorts the Scriptures. If Christ were here today, he would remind us, "driving people out with a whip and flipping over tables, are within the realm of possibility."

In the words of Jesus from the Gospel today, we could easily paint a picture of Jesus as the mighty king who has come to establish his kingdom on earth by restoring the Davidic throne in Jerusalem. This is something that many people thought would happen when the Messiah would come. They expected the overthrow of the Roman occupiers by force. Even the disciples harbored these thoughts. Luke reminds us of these ideas in Acts 1:6 when the disciples ask Jesus at the ascension, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?"

To understand Matthew 10:34, we need to delve into the context of the verse both in relation to the discourse of Jesus at the time and in the broader context of God's plan of salvation.

This week we conclude three weeks of Jesus speaking to the disciples about the challenges they will face as they proclaim the Gospel to Israel and beyond. Jesus has spoken of persecution and encouraged them to have no fear, “for nothing is hidden that will not be known.” As he continues, he says, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword” (Matthew 10:34).

Jesus is not talking about beginning a war to overtake the world. As he continues his discourse, we see that he is speaking of the results of his presence in the world.

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 (Matthew 35-36).

Without swinging a sword, Jesus brings conflict to families. The very blessing of God for his creation, the family, becomes a source of pain and conflict in this world. What is it that does this? What makes families fall apart? What could possibly drive a wedge between parents and children? The short answer is sin.

The sin that came into being in the Garden of Eden, clings to all humans still today. The original sin of wanting to be equal with God, or to be God, pulls us to place ourselves above others. It leads us to distort God’s Word to suit ourselves and twist it to support our desires. The lure of Satan, “Did God really say?” keeps swirling around in our hearts and minds. The old Adam wants to embrace the question and answer it in a way that makes us feel good.

How do we reconcile Jesus’ statement that he did not come to bring peace to the earth, with the announcement of the angels at his birth and with his announcement of peace to the disciples in the upper room on Easter Evening? What will help us make sense of the goal of God’s plan of salvation restoring us to a right relationship with Him, and the divisions that rob us of peace?

As sinful people, broken in heart and spirit, we are born in opposition to God. We want what we want and fight when someone seeks to take it from us. We want to be the lord of our life. We want to have our desires met. We want to do as we please with out limits or restrictions. This is our natural state in opposition to the Law of God.

God's Law, His will for all people points us to see the self-centeredness of our natural state. God calls us to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is not natural for us. We want to be loved, but we do not want to be inconvenienced by having to put others ahead of ourselves. Doesn't that sound like the problem that led to the fall in Eden. We appear to have come full circle.

The problem of the broken self is the thing that causes the saving message of Jesus to become a sword that pierces the soul. The sword that Jesus wields, the sword that disrupts peace, is the Word of God. It is the message that we are sinful and in need of salvation. It is the message that we cannot redeem ourselves. It is the message that we are broken and need help from outside of ourselves for healing. It is the message that we are lost without the Good News of the Messiah. The message of Jesus, of his peace for all people through His sacrifice on the cross is the sword that causes division within families, communities, and nations.

The author of the letter to the Hebrews articulates a key to unlocking our text today.

“<sup>12</sup>For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart. <sup>13</sup>And no creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account” (Hebrews 4:12-13).

Jesus, the author and perfecter of peace and unity with God the Father, for you and for me, is the sword that divides. Jesus calls all people to him offering them peace with God. This peace comes to us as a free gift. Grace is freely offered to all mankind. But when grace is rejected, division ensues. Satan uses our sin and our desire to continue sinning to erect barriers to the Gospel. Our selfish desires drive us away from family and friends. The idol of the individual sets itself against the one true God and rebels against the truth. It leads people to oppose Christ and all the people who believe and trust in Christ our Lord. This division is man's own making. Jesus does not create the division; he merely calls attention to it.

The peace Jesus brings is the sword which causes division. The sacrifice of Christ for you, is the weapon of destruction that sets a man against his father. The rejection of grace, Christ's unmerited gift for fallen creation, leads a daughter to stand against her mother.

Yet all is not lost. The message of salvation in Christ brings true peace to believers. In the waters of Holy Baptism, the message of hope, forgiveness and peace with God, places us firmly in the kingdom of God. In Baptism we are adopted into the family of God and are made one with our Father. As our fallen nature is healed, we grow in love for our brother Jesus and His Father, our Father.

The sword Jesus brings, is also the source of hope for us all. It is peace with God. The “Word of God ... living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart” is the sword that protects us and keeps us safe in faith to life everlasting.

As we live in the light of Christ’s love, peace, and atoning sacrifice, we are called to embrace the active and living Word of God, sharper than a two-edged sword, that keeps us safe as children of the Heavenly Father. Living in the peace of the Gospel. The peace that causes division in this world.]

In Jesus Name.

Amen