

Matthew 10:34-42
“Peace and Division”
Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2020
First Lutheran Church, Glencoe, Minn.
Pastor Peter Adelsen

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen!

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

[Intro]

This morning’s Gospel lesson, *like last week’s Gospel lesson*, is a tough one. Today’s Gospel lesson a hard pill to swallow for all of us, since Jesus who unites the human race – *through His incarnation, when God became man* – also divides many, *including those we love*, though Christ’s words and teachings.

Jesus says to us: **“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).

When Robert Short, the author of *The Gospel According to Peanuts* and *Parables of Peanuts*, spoke at Concordia University in Seward, Nebraska, some years ago, he disclosed that as a high school student, he became an agnostic, although he had been raised in a Methodist home.

He remembered sitting across the table from his mother as she spoke to him. Tears were running down her cheeks as she said, *“I thought we raised you right. I never thought it would come to this: our son an agnostic.”*¹

Many of us have been there. Your son or daughter, cousin, other family member or friend denying Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

[Household Divided]

In today’s Gospel lesson, Jesus 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).

¹ *Encyclopedia of Sermon Illustrations* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1988), 168.

Whatever happened to “Peace on earth and goodwill to all”? Well, that is still here, but wherever Christ and His gospel of forgiveness have been brought to humanity, conflict, or a sword, has resulted.

You see, Jesus cuts us down to the core. We have to all decide – *and I know as Lutherans* – making a decision when it comes to faith is a hard pill to swallow. For we don’t decide, we receive. Yes, we receive the ability to believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior through the power of the Holy Spirit. This is what happens at our baptism! But, as we grow in the faith, we do come to a decision: Are we with Christ or not?

Jesus Himself will cause division between people. And, this division is so severe that Jesus uses the brutal image of a sword.

Some will hear Christ’s call to faith and discipleship, and by God’s gracious action through the Gospel they hear, and they will repent and believe. Others will hear the same call, but due to their own ingrained sin and stubbornness, they will reject the Christ who summons them to salvation.

Back when Jesus preached the Gospel in the First Century, the chief priests and Pharisees sought to kill Him. Why did they want Jesus dead?

They wanted Jesus dead not from a political point of view. Instead, they wanted Jesus dead because He told the truth. In fact, Jesus is the Truth, as He says in John 14:6, ***“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through Me.”***

The chief priests and Pharisees of yesteryear are still with us today, since sin is still with us.

Yes, Jesus is the Prince of Peace. But in this sinful world that we live in, the culture doesn’t like being told – *even by the one true God* – on how to live peaceably with all. Our sinful nature desires to be in control. Our sinful nature desires to be a god.

Jesus tells us, ***“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 10:35-36).

This cuts us right to the core. How many of us have seen this division? It's more common than what you may think.

In these divided families, the believer will sooner or later face this challenge from unbelieving loved ones: "Choose *me* and *my* ways rather than Jesus and His ways."

Just look around today. You may hear: "If you don't agree with me, you must hate me." "If you don't like me for who I am, you hate me."

God's truth hurts. It really hurts. Each time you confess your sins to God the Father, we should all feel demoralized. We should all feel awful. We have all sinned against God in thought, word and deed, and we all deserve eternal punishment for doing so.

But, for those who are outside the one true Christian faith – *the nones (N.O.N.E.S.)*, otherwise known as *unbelievers* – they want us to choose them and *their ways* rather than Jesus Christ, who is **the Way** (John 14:6).

To be sure, Christians will be more loving, more patient, more accepting of non-Christian family members and friends than the unbeliever would be, since the love a Christian receives is from Christ. This love enables the Christian to display Christlike love to all.

Other times, however, the non-believing spouse or parents or children will demand allegiance and conformity in ways that a Christian simply must *not* agree. At this time, the Christian must love Jesus more than father or mother or son or daughter.

- Many of us may become pressured from within our own families and close friends to stray from Christ due to social pressures.
- Many of us may be pressured by your teacher or professor to stray from Christ's teachings in order to receive a good grade.
- Many of us may be pressured by your employer to stray from Christ's teachings in order to remain employed or to even get employed.

What are you going to do? Who are you going to choose?

Again, it is not you or me who are hated. It is actually Jesus Christ.

In short, where Christ comes, there two hostile camps will be locked in battle. And the division and the warfare must go on without truce or armistice until Judgment Day. So Christ wills it, in order that not all may be lost, but many may be rescued to eternal peace in His presence.

[Christ's Words are a Sword]

As Jesus told His disciples what His words meant – *peace and division* – His disciples knew what they were in for.

The apostles had to know, as we must know, that such a hostile division would cut through all of the society around them and even through the units of society closest to them, their families.

Christ tells us: ***“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me”*** (Matthew 10:37-38).

The apostles knew that they represented Jesus. Therefore all who received them were receiving Jesus. Jesus, in turn, represented the Father. The Father had sent and commissioned Jesus, even as Jesus was commissioning them.

So, to receive the message of Jesus means that you receive the Father in heaven. This means that by receiving, those people receive eternal life.

For as Christ says: ***“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”*** (Matthew 10:39).

So, as Christians, we must be prepared to lose our lives. Now, this may be a shock to us. But, Jesus never said we are living our best life now. No, He promises eternal life! He promises everlasting peace!

So, we must be prepared to take up our cross and follow Him! In the ancient world, crucifixion was considered the most-vile death. So, being nailed to the cross was the epitome of suffering and shame.

This may seem so radical to us here, but this is actually taking place in the Middle East, in Africa and in Asia. They take up the cross of Jesus and follow Him even to a cruel death.

For us, in all honesty, we often fail to put Jesus first in our lives. Instead, we let the culture around us lead our lives instead of Jesus.

Instead of proclaiming Christ in the gentlest way to our family and friends, we just keep quiet – as to not offend them. We don't see the urgent task of evangelism and mission to the lost to those who do not have faith in Christ. We don't see the urgency of sending workers into the harvest field. And, we ***do need*** more pastors who will preach God's Word in season and out of season!

Yes, it is tough reaching out to the unbeliever. For by their nature, they do not want the salvation accomplished on their behalf through Christ's death and resurrection. This salvation that pastors, missionaries, and the whole church offer in the stead of Christ. But, remember, it's not about you and me. It's all about Jesus. So, if you are hated, you are not hated for your own sake. You are hated solely on the account of Christ.

[There is Good News!]

Today's gospel reading is tough. It cuts us all to the core: believer and unbeliever.

As Jesus began today saying, ***“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), we may have thought this is really the “un-Gospel” rather than Gospel. This is bad news, rather than Good News. Yes, Christians will often experience the sword, rather than peace. But, that is the now. We have so much to look forward to.

So, our commitment to the one true Christian faith will cause divisions in our own families. Like Jesus, we may find ourselves bearing the cross.

Thanks be to God that what we fail to do, Jesus did for us – you and me! He took up His cross and paid the penalty for the sins of the world. So, that through His suffering, death and resurrection, all who trust in Him by grace through faith in Him alone have peace!

The Gospel is here! There is Good News! Jesus tells us, ***“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”*** (Matthew 10:39).

By thus losing our life, we find it. Eternal life with God in heaven is far better than any temporary suffering on earth. Inner peace here on earth far surpasses its material blessings.

So, remember our author Robert Short who became an agnostic? Well, he didn't remain an agnostic forever.

During his college years, through contacts with a campus pastor, he came to a new relationship with Jesus Christ and he eventually became a pastor. When he converted to Christianity again, he told his mother. Again, tears rolled down her cheeks as she said, *"I never thought it would come to this: my son a religious fanatic."*

To God be all the glory! Amen.

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.

✠ SOLI DEO GLORIA ✠