

Matthew 10:34-42  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost  
June 28, 2020—Shepherd of the Mountains, Pinetop, AZ

INI

My sisters and brothers in Christ, hear the words of Jesus again. “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

There’s a reason we don’t pick that verse for our confirmands. We don’t choose it for the sermon theme at our weddings either. We don’t write it in our Christmas cards. We don’t have it on our bumper stickers. And we don’t approach a dear friend who is hurting in some way, and say to them while giving them a hug “Jesus did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” We don’t because Jesus does not intend them as words of comfort for His disciples. Instead He’s trying to prepare them for what lies ahead.

To understand these harsh words, we need to look at it in light of what He has been talking about with His disciples. Over the past couple Sundays, we have heard these words. Jesus has been commissioning His disciples. He chose twelve of them and He’s sending them out. It’s not the great commission yet. Right now, He’s sending them only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And Jesus is giving them fair warning.

Behold I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves...you will be flogged and dragged and persecuted...you will be hated. The lost sheep are stubborn. They are scattered among wolves. Some of the sheep have even become so corrupted that they themselves have become wolves. If you are going to follow Me, you shouldn’t expect to be treated any differently than Me. The world rejects Me. You should expect the same. Do not expect peace. My word divides people. My word divides families.

There is at least a little comfort for us in the fact that Jesus’ words are *descriptive* rather than *prescriptive*. He’s not saying that your faith is measured by the amount of conflict and division around you. He is not saying that if you don’t have conflict in your family you aren’t a true follower. He’s not saying you must hate or be hated by your mother or your father or your in-laws in order to be a disciple. What He is saying is that you should not be surprised if these things occur. Some will reject His gift. That is on them, not on you.

But there *is* also a prescriptive part. It is heavy. And it isn’t just for the twelve; it is for everyone. “**Whoever,**” Jesus says. “**Whoever does not take up His cross and follow me, is not worthy of me.**” It’s the first time the word “cross” is mentioned in Matthew’s account. Here, Jesus is not talking about His own cross but still the disciples would have been familiar with its significance. It was the worst kind of death in those days. And it wasn’t just the whole dying part of it that was a drag. If you were a criminal who was crucified, it meant that you had no one to defend you. You were alone, isolated, abandoned.

It is a bitter prescription for us. If and when there are divisions you must be prepared to be abandoned by your friends and even your own family. After all, the law still stands. “**Hear, o Israel, the Lord is One.**” and “**You shall love the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.**” If and when following Christ leads you to conflict with your friends or family, who will you love most? Will you be willing to state with both your words and your actions, “**as for me and my house we will serve the Lord**”? Will you accept the fact that your friends and family may distance themselves from you as you strive to live a Godly, sanctified life? Or will you drop that cross when it becomes increasingly heavy?

What may have begun for some of the disciples as a happy distraction from a mundane day of fishing suddenly took on a new direction. This was no longer a spectator religion. This was a religion of action. And it was a religion of consequences. In this world, there would be conflict that resulted from their calling rather than the kind of prosperity and worldly peace that many had

previously associated with the Messiah.

On the bulletin cover for this week there is a version of a saying that has been used on bumper stickers and t-shirts. What it's saying is that if you don't have Jesus, you don't have peace. And that if you know Jesus, you will know peace. While that is true, Jesus is the authority. And He says that if you know Him, if you follow Him, there is a pretty good chance that you will also know division. Many of you have already seen this reality as you watched friends and family members drift away as you strive to live according to God's word. You may have struggled to find peace after that.

The Hebrew word for peace, שָׁלוֹם (shalom), can be used as a greeting, wishing someone happiness, expressing the lack of animosity toward someone, or as a wish for someone to find no conflict in their dealings with others. שָׁלוֹם also means completion, fulfillment, or payment in full for a debt. And שָׁלוֹם is used specifically with reference to Jesus. Isaiah prophesied in chapter 9 about the coming of the Savior and calls Him שַׁרְשָׁלוֹם, (sar-shalom) the Prince of Peace.

The reality is that Christ, our Prince of Peace, did come to bring peace, but His words this morning also hold true. In John 14:27 Jesus says, **"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you."**

The peace that Jesus brought was not a worldly peace. It is a heavenly peace. It is the peace He has with the Father because of His perfection, His righteousness. *That* peace was given to you when the Holy Spirit brought you to faith. It is a peace that surpasses all understanding. It is a peace that is everlasting.

But that peace changes our outlook on life. And the result of that heavenly peace is sometimes a worldly sword. We are set apart from the rest of the world and the wolves out there snarl at us because we are different. They try to bring us down. They try to convince us that we would have peace if we would only drop that heavy cross. But theirs is a fleeting peace. In the Lutheran Study Bible there is a note that goes along with this passage. It reads:

The radical nature of following Jesus may result in conflict and divisions within families. Jesus wants His disciples to strive for eternal life, even if this means sacrificing earthly benefits. In all honesty, we must confess that we often fail to put Jesus first in our lives, that we do not take up His cross and follow Him. What we fail to do, Jesus did for us. He took up His cross and paid the penalty for the sins of the world. In Him, we have peace.

Christ's peace is a peace that gives you and me as Christians a stillness in our soul even at times when the present world doesn't seem so peaceful. It is a peace that gives us hope when no other hope can be seen. It is a peace that we cling to when family and friends slip away. And when all the noise and burdens of this life weigh you and me down, it is a peace that gives us hope and lifts us up because we know that our ultimate peace is with God.

That same peace is extended to you today. In a few minutes, those words of peace come to you again today. It is Christ's offering of peace. As you come forward to receive Christ's body and blood given and shed on the cross which He carried for you and me, or as you receive a blessing in remembrance of your baptism, Jesus Christ, our Prince of Peace offers that peace to you.

His peace. Shalom. No ill will. All debts are paid. Eternal heavenly peace is yours because your sins are forgiven. [You] have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

May the Lord of peace Himself give you His peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all. Amen.