

Matthew 10:34-42  
"Not Peace, But a Sword"  
Pentecost 5 (Proper 8A)

July 2, 2023  
Prince of Peace Lutheran Church, West Salem, Wisc.  
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Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God the Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

Wait. Does my greeting sound right? Well, maybe not with today's Gospel lesson. Not with this text. Not with this Jesus, who 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).

How about this instead: "In the name of Jesus Christ the Lord who says that He did not come to bring peace. Amen. Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:"

As Christians, these words shock us, since we look to Jesus to provide the peace that the world cannot give. But here, Jesus says to us, "***I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.***"

What happened to peace on earth? What happened to the Prince of Peace? This congregation is named Prince of Peace Lutheran Church. Is it time to change our name to Sword Lutheran Church? Well, let's not jump to a name change too quickly.

Jesus did come to bring peace. Peace is what was proclaimed by the heavenly host to the shepherds on the day of Christ's birth: "***Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased***" (Luke 2:14).

The Prince of Peace was born to bring us peace. What joy! What a relief!

To be sure, Christ did bring "peace on earth" and He did send His Twelve apostles with His "peace" on the houses and individuals who received their words. So, the purpose of His coming was to bring peace. But then why is Jesus saying today, "***Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword***"?

Well, Jesus isn't contradicting Himself on why He has come. He has come with the purpose of peace, but so often people do not want His peace, they think, "Why do I need a Savior? I'm good just the way that I am. Don't tell me how to live." So, even when He comes with the purpose of peace, a sword may end up being the result.

Christ's "peace" may result in a son going against his father, a daughter going against her mother, a daughter-in-law going against her mother-in-law, and a son-in-law going against his father-in-law. Christ's "peace" may result in your greatest enemy being those in your own household.

Christ's "peace" often results with a sword. This sword cuts us, and it's more common than you may think. In divided families, the Christian may sooner or later face this challenge from unbelieving loved ones: "Choose *me* and *my* ways rather than Jesus and His ways."

We hear things like, "If you don't agree with me, you must hate me." Or "If you don't like me for who I am, you must hate me." God's truth hurts. It really hurts. Just try it: Say that every life is precious and sacred, from conception to natural death. Say that human sexuality is a gift of God to be enjoyed in the context of marriage between a biological man and a biological woman. Say that there are only two sexes. Proclaim any sense that there is an absolute right and wrong and that some actions bring life and joy, and that others bring death and destruction. Oh, just watch the sparks fly.

We feel the pressures from our non-Christian loved ones who demand allegiance and conformity in ways that a Christian simply must not agree. We are constantly pressured to stray from Christ. Pressures like denying Christ in order to receive a good grade or even to remain employed or to get employed.

So often, instead of speaking God's truth, we seek temporal peace. Who doesn't desire peace? We desire this kind of peace because it is comfortable. After all, who likes to come home to a house where everyone is constantly arguing? Who likes to see classmates or coworkers constantly arguing? In situations such as these, it forces you to be constantly on edge. It gets rather exhausting. So, we chase after peace, even if it means ignoring – or rather pushing under the rug – the things that we shouldn't. So, instead of speaking about Christ and coming to church with our loved ones, we don't.

Temporal peace is also about safety. When things change, change unsettles us. As people, we don't like change, even if change would be for the better. This is what keeps a woman trapped in an abusive relationship. Deep down, she knows that it's wrong and broken and unhealthy, but the abusive relationship is also familiar and safe in its own way. I have heard things like, "I love him. Yes, he lies to me. He cheats on me. He insults me. But I can't leave him. I love him. He can be so loving. And, he buys me such nice things." Positive change can be frightening. And so, we refuse to change, even knowing that what exists is destroying us.

But that isn't real peace. We can avoid talking about it, but by avoidance, we aren't really figuring anything out. Have you ever had one of those meals when two of the people at the table have this relationship that is broken, and they are dealing with it by not actually dealing with it? It's miserable! You can cut the tension with a knife. Even if we tiptoe around the topic, it's plain and simple that this isn't what real peace is supposed to be.

It's no use in pretending. When you do that, you live in fear. Things covered under the rug will eventually become uncovered. It looks like peace, but it's fake peace.

Fake peace comes with a cost. Think about this. How many of us have that one relationship where we know things aren't how they should be, but we don't know how to change it? How many of us have a family member or friend with whom we've just agreed to disagree about those subjects that everyone knows not to bring up?

And, so what do you do? We compromise. We "live and let live" in the name of fake peace. But again, fake peace is just a lie. As long as our friendships are about getting along instead of a loving discussion, they are mere shadows of what they are intended to be. As long as our relationship with God is primarily about concealing our sin from Him, from others, and from ourselves, we can't find real peace.

Jesus came to give real peace. So, think of Jesus' words this way, "*Do not think that I came **only** so as to bring peace upon the earth. I came **not only** so as to bring peace, but even more, a sword.*"

Christ came as the Prince of Peace. He came to restore the relationship between God and man, and between man and man. But where Christ comes, there will be two hostile camps locked in battle – those who hear Christ's call and repent and live, and those who reject His call due to their own ingrained sin and stubbornness. This division and warfare will go on without truce or armistice until Christ returns.

This fierce struggle has been ongoing since the Fall of Adam and Eve. This is an unceasing warfare between the followers of God and the followers of Satan. This old conflict became even more pronounced and fierce when Christ became Man and accomplished salvation for all mankind.

This fallen world is comfortable with its lie of fake peace, but for real peace to take root, the lies must first be challenged and revealed for what they are.

And, that conflict, that sword, brings true peace. When we confront the lies, we know that, ultimately, things aren't how they are supposed to be in our relationship with God.

We all know that we have done things that we shouldn't have, and said things that we know we shouldn't have. We know that we should have spoken up in times that we remained silent.

There is so much fake peace in this fallen world. And we, too, have fallen into this trap of fake peace. We wonder, why is there no peace? Well, without Christ as the Shepherd, there can be no real peace. Everyone serves a master. We are either slaves of righteousness or slaves of sin.

But the problem is, we can't make peace with God. We can try, and try, and try. But we always fall short. The problem is that some of us settle for the false peace where we ignore the whole thing. But underneath it all, we know that isn't peace at all.

So, instead of us making peace with Him, He makes peace with us. God the Father sent His only begotten Son into this world not just to bring a sword and cut through the false peace this world seeks, but to establish real peace with us. Jesus, fell on the sword, took the nails, the spear, the death of the cross to take on Himself all of our sins that separated us from God in order to give us real peace.

In Christ alone, we have received reconciliation. Yet, each time we confess our sins to God, we should feel demoralized. We should receive our just reward, which is eternal punishment in hell. But, through repentance and faith in Christ, we don't get what we deserve. Instead, we receive peace. Christ's death and resurrection gives us peace between God and man.

Now, this peace isn't worldly peace, but spiritual peace. We will still face trouble as we live in this fallen world, but the good news is that everyone who endures will be saved. And God gives us what we need to endure in this fallen world. He gives us His Means of Grace, His Word and Sacraments, so that we are given the nourishment to endure. There may not be worldly peace now, but one day, when Christ returns, there will be peace. There will be joy and contentment for all who trust in Him. Amen.

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

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