

Immanuel (Augsburg) Lutheran Church
Shobnier, Illinois
Pentecost 4A
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Matt. 10:34-42

The Peace that Divides

[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 ESV)

Dearly Beloved in Christ:

It's vitally important to hear God's Word and take it to heart, no matter what it says. As the Holy Spirit has called and gathered us here today as God's dearly loved children, we hear our Lord Jesus speak difficult words, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." This is indeed troubling, isn't it? After all, we've heard over and over again that Jesus *had come* to bring peace. Isaiah calls Him the "Prince of Peace" (Isaiah 9:6). At Jesus' birth, the angels sang about "peace on earth" (Luke 2:14). Even Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you" (John 14:27). Yet, here in our text, from Jesus' own mouth, He declares that He "did not come to bring peace, but a sword." So how are we to understand this?

My dear friends, the answer lies in hearing our Lord's own words mentioned just a minute ago, "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you." Jesus also says, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Thus we see that neither His peace, nor His sword, nor His kingdom are of this world. For His sword is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). And His peace is "not as the world gives" for His kingdom is not of this world.

You see, the world and her false prophets preach peace by glossing over sin, calling what is evil good and what is good evil, agreeing to disagree concerning truth, if it even exists, and proclaiming peace when there is no peace. Then there are those who don't want peace at all but are set on destruction, bloodshed, mayhem, and anarchy at every opportunity. For some though, the cry of this age is, "Can't we all just get along?" But those who cry such things want peace only on their terms, if they want peace at all. And their terms are most often that you think like them, talk like them, and act like them in all things. They want you to approve and celebrate whatever it is they say or want to do. They don't want to be told, "No." They refuse to be told they're wrong. In fact, within all of us is the desire to be God, or at least to be like God. We all want to be in charge, having things our own way and in our own time. We think we know what's best in every situation. So we can't have peace unless someone else, indeed, everybody else, gives way to us. And since that's not going to happen in every instance, we will never have peace in this life.

But Jesus brings peace of a different kind, not merely the absence of conflict. It's a peace "not born of negotiations, compromise, and a desire to appease men." Rather, Christ brings a peace which causes contention and conflict between us sinners because the peace that Jesus gives is not between men, but between God and men. Jesus had come to make peace between sinners and the Holy God, for we are by nature God's enemies (Romans 5:10). Jesus had come to do battle against our enemy, the devil. He had come to lay down His life so that we might live. He had come to suffer hell and die in our place. And He fought that war for us - in our place and with us as the spoils - and won it by shedding His very blood on the cross. He thus redeemed us from the power of the devil. Then, by His resurrection, He freed us from the power of death. Thus, as St. Paul writes, "having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:1).

And this peace we have with God, this peace earned and won for us by the holy, precious blood of the Lamb of God, causes divisions between us and the devil; between us and death; between us and our sins. It also causes divisions between men on earth. This is because man, in his sinful pride, doesn't want to hear God's Word. He doesn't want to hear that there is such a thing as absolute truth. He doesn't want to hear God's Law which accuses and condemns him for his sins, especially his pet sins. He doesn't want to hear that he has transgressed God's perfect and holy commands. He also doesn't want to hear that he needs saving and that there is nothing he can do to save himself, not in the least little way. He doesn't want to hear that his works are worthless toward his salvation. He doesn't want to hear that Jesus has done absolutely everything for our salvation.

Then, to demonstrate the extent to which this saving Gospel causes division, Jesus tells us that it will cause division even within the family itself. "For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.' And 'a man's foes will be those of his own household.'" Does this mean that Jesus came to break up families? Of course not. Rather, He is simply telling it like it is. Not everyone receives Christ and the forgiveness and life He gives. And because they reject Jesus, they reject those who believe in Him. This rejection of Jesus leads to conflict in the family. For to reject Jesus is to reject His Word as well. There is often disagreement over what sin is. There are disagreements over what the Bible says, if it is given consideration at all. Then there is the temptation to simply put "family-first," (whatever is meant by family), to keep peace at all costs, even at the expense of the Truth.

Now, we dare not take this lightly. This is a delicate situation for many families and has been - perhaps will be - for years. Therefore, we take God's word to heart, "If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men" (Romans 12:18). But it's not always possible because living peaceably does not mean that we refuse to speak God's truth. We dare never avoid speaking God's Word when it is called for, but we will certainly try to do so with love and gentleness. Even then, and perhaps especially then, the family will be divided.

Now, of course, we would rather not hear such talk. We would rather keep peace in the family, for we know how difficult and heartbreaking it is to have division in the family. But Jesus tells us

why it is necessary for this division to exist, "He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it."

You see, Jesus is telling us that to put "family-first," is to put *it* over Jesus and His Word. And this is idolatry of which we need to repent. For we must keep Jesus and His Word first because He, and He alone, gives us the greater, indeed the greatest, peace - peace with God. Certainly we desire peace in our families and between all men. But we must not put such a desire for peace over God and His Word. To do so puts our salvation at risk. Indeed, having peace with God, through Jesus "blood and righteousness," is the greatest thing we can have.

So we pay attention to the sword Jesus brings, for it is the "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). Indeed, this heavenly sword, this Word of God, is "sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and it is able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). And having judged those thoughts and intentions, the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit, literally robs the soul of peace. No man who expects to live in his sin, to practice it, or even to deny it, will find peace in God's Word, but rather he will find there a sword and death. "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword."

Yet, God's Word does bring a message of peace to all who are crushed by their sin and brought to repentance. It is a message of peace with God. It is a message that God no longer holds your sins against you. It is a message that God's wrath has been turned away from you. It is a message that gives your soul the rest it so desperately craves. This is true and everlasting peace.

So do not be afraid of the world, when it wars against you, for the One who has overcome the world is your Savior. Do not fear the lack of peace on earth, for you have been given the ultimate peace which is life everlasting. Through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

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