

Pentecost 5A (Proper 8)

July 2, 2023

Matthew 10:34-42

To find life in this world is to find a doomed life; to lose one's life in this world for the Christ's sake is to lose the doomed life and to find the one real life in him. What you hear in today's Gospel is the last part of Jesus instructing the apostles before sending them out on a challenging missionary journey to bring eternal peace to dying souls. For the first time in Matthew's gospel, Jesus uses the word cross and then finishes his instructions by highlighting the opposition and promises that the apostles do not go alone.

Jesus' words shock us as he speaks of what will happen because of him and his Word. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword".

Of course, Jesus did come to bring peace. In the Beatitudes he preached, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God". To shepherds, the angel announced peace on earth. Earlier in St. Matthew's gospel he told the disciples they were to bring his peace. What Jesus' says here in the Gospel is the same thing he meant when he said that he didn't give peace like the world gives.

The world's peace is fickle, futile, fleeting, and failing. It will not rush to your aid when you need it. Powerful leaders, politicians and popular opinions will not sacrifice themselves for you. Quite the opposite. Precisely when you need help the most, the world will turn its back on you.

But Jesus and his peace are different. With him, you have peace now in this world and you have peace forever in glory. His peace never falls short, never flees or fails. That is because of what Jesus has come to do. He has come to deliver peace to you by defeating your greatest enemies. He delivers you from the power of the Evil One. He has come to deliver you from the burden and punishment of your sins. He has come to deliver you from the sting of death. He has come to restore peace between God and you. And because of this, Satan rants and raves and rages. Satan will do everything in his power to keep you and everyone else from receiving Jesus' peace. Therefore, he goes in battle mode. He uses your sinful nature with its evil desires against you. He puts the world against you. He stirs up trouble and dissension in the church. He uses other people to attack those who preach and teach the saving peace of Jesus. All this whenever the Gospel is proclaimed.

Jesus is revealing that we should expect the world's wrath when his life, death and resurrection are proclaimed. Don't be surprised by it. In fact, expect it. Listen again to the words of our Lord, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 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".

Can you think of a congregation or family or other relationship that hasn't felt the pain of this sword. Since Cain and Abel, Joseph and his brothers, Naomi and Orpah, David and Absalom, it's always been this way. They learned it from our first parents when Adam blamed Eve after they both bit down on death. As you have felt the pressure and pain of this sword, be assured Jesus knows this. Be comforted that he himself experienced this. He came to his own, but his own would not receive him but rejected him. His own family tried to keep him from what he came to do. One of his disciples denied him. Another betrayed him. He was even forsaken by his own heavenly Father. Jesus knows the hurt, the burden, and the heartbreak. He bears it with you. He bears it for you. He breaks it for you.

Jesus also knows the very real temptations his followers regularly face. Like when we are tempted to keep our mouths shut in order to keep peace with a friend. Like when we are tempted to water down the truth of the Word so that we won't make waves with a family member. Like when we are tempted to love other people or other things more than we love God. Like the temptation to treasure the stuff of the world so much that we fail to use God's gifts to faithfully and generously support the work of the church. All these temptations are real and the

devil uses them effectively. Yet they are empty. They all bring disappointment. They don't give peace. They don't bring life. As Jesus said, "Whoever finds his life will lose it".

The life and peace that this world offers is pointless and powerless when it really matters. Everyone must face death. Everyone must stand before God. At those times of absolutely needing deliverance, the world's peace fails. In life and in death, peace with the world is the doomed life. Ultimately, the world will even forsake those who worship it.

Peace with God is different. The one true God invites his worshipers to receive him. For your sins of loving other people and things more than him, he forgives you. When the battle against the world and your flesh is exhausting, he strengthens you. When you feel the weight of the division of the sword, he comforts you. When you feel out of place in this world, he gives you a place of acceptance and family within the church. All this he gives you in his Word, in his Absolution, in his Baptism, in his Meal. This peace he gives you is no fickle or fleeting peace. He will not change his mind about his peace. He will not abandon you and take his peace from you. He knows that your life as a Christian is a battle. Since he knows this, he works repentance in you, he leads you to deny yourself and your selfish desires and you pick up your cross and follow him. He strengthens and instructs you so that you recognize that your flesh lies to you when it pines after the things of this world. When your life was found in Jesus, he delivers real life and happiness to you.

Consider now the great promises Jesus gives to those who go out to proclaim his peace. "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me". Jesus goes with his proclaimers. When they are welcomed because of the Lord, Jesus is received as well. When you welcome your pastor because he preaches Jesus' peace to you, you receive Jesus and the Father, too. Even today, even right now, as you hear Jesus' words through the mouth of your pastor, you are receiving Jesus and your heavenly Father.

The promise Jesus gives is why the church continues to proclaim Jesus' death as the only way for sinners to be saved. It is the only way to peace. We can't preach less. We can't preach anything else. The life and death of Jesus is the Good News that delivers Jesus, his Father and real peace.

Our Lord gives one more stunning promise in today's Gospel: "And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward". Think of the great encouragement this is to those like you who support the work of the church and her workers. You will not lose your reward. Perhaps no will notice it and announce what you've done. But the Lord who is your peace recognizes it and values it.

You who have been named and saved by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in Holy Baptism, who trust in Jesus alone for your salvation, who take up your cross and follow him: there will be swords, division, heartbreak, pain, and cross-bearing. But Jesus is with you, for you, and will never forsake you. It is hard. It is difficult. But Jesus goes with you! Amen.