

5th Sunday after Pentecost
July 12, 2020
Lincoln Heights Lutheran Church
Jesus Brings Peace and a Sword

Dear Friends in Christ,

On the night Christ was born, the glory of the Lord shone around the angels and the shepherds heard this good news of great joy ring out across the night sky. “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests.” The Prince of Peace Isaiah prophesied had been born. In the Word of God for us to consider today, the Prince of Peace, Christ Jesus himself says, “I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

So which is it? Did Jesus come to bring peace to mankind or to bring a sword? Yes, Jesus brings peace and a sword. Christ brings peace between God and sinners. But when a sinner repents and trusts in Christ, that makes him or her an enemy of the sinful world. Peace and a sword are part of being a Christian.

Matthew 10:34–42 (NIV84)

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Peace with God

The peace that Jesus brought and bought is a very real peace. Sin separates people from the Holy God. Sin makes us enemies of the Almighty God. There was nothing any sinful human could do to reconcile us to God. So Christ reconciled us to God and made peace through the shedding of his holy, precious blood. He gave his life as full payment for sins. He removed the barrier of sin that kept us from our God and that made us enemies. Now there is peace. God is not our enemy. All who trust in Christ will not perish but have everlasting life. Christ brought us spiritual and eternal peace with God.

It is also clear from the Gospels that Christ did not come to start a physical rebellion or battle. When Peter defended Jesus in Gethsemane with a sword, cutting off a servant’s ear, Jesus told him to put his sword away. Jesus could have called on legions of angels to defend himself but he did not come to make war against sinful humans. He came to save us.

And Jesus did not come to bring peace among nations. He was not a diplomat who negotiated peace between rulers. He did not come to set up an earthly kingdom of Israel that he would rule in peace. When he fed the five thousand, some wanted to make him their bread king, to provide their daily needs. Christ did not come to provide food security or the peace of good health by healing everyone. Christ came and brought spiritual and eternal peace with God by his death and resurrection.

Separated from the Sinful World

When someone believes this and receives the peace of forgiveness through Christ, something changes. Instead of continuing to sin, that person has a new desire to fight against sin. Instead of indulging their sinful nature, the believer battles against sin and struggles to follow the Lord’s commands. Instead of living like the sinful world around them, the believer lives for Christ. This is when the sword appears for the believer. Jesus’ goal was not to bring trouble to the disciples’ lives and to our lives, but it is a consequence of being at peace with God. At peace with God means at war against sin. It means the sinful world is at war with you.

For I have come to turn “a man against his father; a daughter against her mother; a daughter-in-law against

her mother-in-law— ³⁶ *a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.*'

In the decades after Christ's resurrection, there would be many families in which one or two members of the family would hear the gospel and believe. If this was a Jewish family, the believers in Christ may be excluded from the synagogue and become enemies of the others in their own home. If it was a Gentile family, there would be great division. Think of a family going to the temple of some Greek or Roman god to offer sacrifices so that so called god would take care of the family. You have come to faith in Christ. You won't go to the temple of the false god. You won't eat the sacrificial meal with your parents or siblings. You have become a problem for the family and if something bad happens in the family, you will be blamed for refusing to offer sacrifices to their so called gods.

According to the Gallup organization, in 1976¹, 38% of Americans believed that the Bible is the actual Word of God to be taken literally while 13% of Americans believed that the Bible is "fables, history, moral precepts recorded by man." In 2017 for the first time in the history of this poll, those believing the Bible is fables outnumber those believing the Bible is the actual Word of God (26% vs 24%). Are we returning to a time similar to the early days of Christianity? Will it be that young people abandon the faith passed down to them and cause divisions in families? Might it be that soon, children in families who have no faith will be brought to faith through the gospel and their parents will reject them and exclude them from the family for believing fairy tales and fables?

We are blessed to live in a nation that promises certain freedoms through the Bill of Rights and government laws. But these are merely the guarantees of humans and could change. Might there be a time when certain teachings of Christ are considered against the good of the nation and are outlawed? Satan and the evil forces in this world will not sit idly by while Christians enjoy peace with God. The sword of the enemy will be brought against us to divide our families, to divide citizens of a nation, to make it as difficult as possible to trust in Christ. Jesus warns his disciples and us that this is the normal way it will happen. When someone comes to faith, the sword of trouble and persecution will not be far behind. Are you ready for it?

Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸ *and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* ³⁹ *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

Are you ready to give up family activities if they are leading you to neglect the Word of God? Are you prepared to spend less time around a family member who tends to lead you into sin or whose influence is leading your children away from Christ? Will you give up the closeness of a human relationship for the sake of peace with Jesus? And then are you prepared to take up your cross and follow Jesus? It is difficult enough to consider family relationships changing because of faith in Christ. This is a cross to bear in life. But there may be others. It may be that your Christian faith keeps you from making as much money or climbing as high as others in your career. Faith in Christ may mean that you are one of a very few in your class at school who won't use certain bad words or won't participate in certain discussions. That will make you strange and young people tend to pick on the person who stands out. That is a cross to bear. Crosses are not fun. Crosses are painful and cause us to suffer. But the cross will come to all believers in some way. Jesus says it is so.

But the good news is that Jesus took up his own cross, the actual cross of wood. He carried it until he could not

¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/210704/record-few-americans-believe-bible-literal-word-god.aspx>

go further. Then he was nailed to it and died upon it. On his cross, sin was paid. By his cross, forgiveness was achieved for all people. He has forgiven us for the times we loved family or career or life more than Christ. He has forgiven us when we have taken the easy way out by going along with the sinful world. By his cross, we are saved.

And that is why we follow Christ. His cross is why we are willing to face the enemies of Christ in this world. His cross is why we are willing to pick up any cross and follow him. While it can sometimes be very difficult, Jesus also points out to his disciples how simple it can also be to follow him. A disciple of Jesus welcomes those who proclaim his Word and looks to the needs of others.

He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.

Can you hear the little one calling out for a cup of water in the middle of the night? You can ignore it. You could grudgingly get up and grab the nearest cup (clean or not) and fill it by the nearest source of water to get the child to be quiet. Or you could get a clean cup with cool, clean water and take it to your child because God gave you this child to love and care for. Sure, it is a slight inconvenience to do this at 2 am but you are a follower of Christ and do this for your child out of love for Jesus and love for your child. And this is the amazing part – Jesus promises you a reward for doing what he has moved you to do by his love.

You thank Jesus and show that you follow him by simple acts in everyday life – how you treat the cashier at the store, how you talk to your parents, how you react when a coworker needs help, how you treat your spouse. Our Savior is pleased by the simple acts of love for others done out of love for him.

The sinful world will continue to attack and attempt to separate us from our God. But Jesus bought our peace with God through his blood shed on the cross. No enemy sword or threat can take away that peace. May the Lord give us strength to carry whatever cross comes our way and continue to serve him through the people in our lives.

Amen.