

Sixth Sunday after Pentecost July 20, 2014
Good Shepherd Ev. Lutheran Church

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Matthew 10:34-42 (NIV)

"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35) 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.'

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

40) "Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes 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."

Friends in Christ Jesus:

One of the hopes and dreams of the people who lived at the time of Jesus was that God would send a Messiah who would establish peace for their nation. Jesus was the Messiah promised by God – but his purpose was not to bring peace to earth. His purpose was to restore peace between God and man. Our text begins with the words, **“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth.”** The sinful world continues to oppose God and his will. And the sad and tragic result can be seen by the lack of peace in this world as evidenced by a map pinpointing wars around our world.

The Prophet Isaiah reminds us that there is no lasting peace for those who continue to rebel against the Lord. Isaiah 48:22 (NIV) **"There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked."** Sinful people reject the peace that God provides because they are unwilling to acknowledge their own guilt. In order to quiet an accusing conscience people try to redefine what is right and what is wrong. Societies standards of morality stand in stark contrast to Scriptures standards of morality. Denial of the consequences of sin is another unsuccessful method of trying to cope with guilt. In our OT lesson for today the false Prophet Hananiah proclaimed Peace – because he was in denial regarding the sins of his people and the consequences of those sins. His message while popular was in conflict with God’s message.

Jesus wants those who follow him to know that those who are faithful to his teachings will frequently find themselves being opposed by those who do not want the peace that God provides. The enmity that exists between Satan’s kingdom and God’s people will be an ongoing source of sadness and struggle for those who follow the Lord Jesus.

The Lord’s disciples should expect to see division rather than harmony, hatred instead of friendship just as Jesus saw in his life. Today we are encouraged

Theme: Take up your cross and follow Jesus

1. Renounce worldly peace
2. Receive eternal rewards

Because you and I might also fall into the trap of expecting Jesus to make everything OK right now in our own little corner of the world it is good for us to hear Jesus speak to us about taking up a cross to follow him. Jesus' words were echoed by the Apostle Paul who reminds us that we must go through many hardships to enter into the kingdom of God. (Cf. Acts 14:22)

Jesus speaks of those hardships in this text and calls upon us to set aside or renounce peace in this world with an eye to enjoying eternal rewards. It's important for us to consider this thought of renouncing peace in the context of Scripture. It is God's will for us to **"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy."** Hebrews 12:14 (NIV) To that end we will gladly speak of the peace that we have through faith in Christ Jesus who took the sins of the world with him to the cross where he died in our place so that we might have peace with God and live with him in his eternal kingdom.

Sadly what we regard as wonderful news is rejected by many. That's what Jesus had in mind when he spoke of coming into this world with a Sword. He came with his Word – which is described in the Scriptures as the Sword of the Spirit. (cf. Ephesians 6:17) That word separates those on the side of truth from those who oppose the truth. Sadly even members of the same family may be divided because of Christ. Jesus explains it this way: **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 such situations we might face the temptation to compromise the truths of Scripture to live at peace with each other. This is the temptation that our text urges us to resist with its call to renounce worldly peace. Don't be tempted to turn away from Christ to appease a family member. Don't seek peace at the cost of compromising the truths of God's Word. Don't allow someone or something else to take God's rightful place in your life.

God is the one who is worthy of our complete love because he alone is the one who both made us and redeemed us. Therefore Jesus reminds us that we are to **"love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind."** (Matthew 22:37 NIV) To turn away from him is to reject the life and salvation which is ours in Christ.

"Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. 38) Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Of course Christians will love the members of their own families. They will provide for them, they will pray for them, they will encourage them to trust in the Lord Jesus and his righteousness for their own salvation. They will lovingly encourage them to remain faithful to the Lord and to set aside sin from their lives. Sometimes however even those we have loved in this way may try to turn us against the Lord and his will. That is when we will recognize that we may have to make a choice between being accepted by family and friends or rejecting Christ. That would be an example of the kind of cross that Jesus is mentions in our text. He's not talking about sufferings and trouble in general. He's talking about suffering that we are asked to bear because of our relationship with him and because of our faith in him. Our Savior promises that he will give us the strength to carry such crosses so that they will not overwhelm us but will draw us closer to him.

Again Jesus point us away from the affairs of this world to eternal affairs when he says, **"Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it."** Those who concentrate on life and the temporal things of this world may very well be putting their eternal salvation in jeopardy. Jesus parable of the rich fool provides an excellent commentary on his words in this text.

Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." 16 And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' 18 "Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' ' 20 "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 21 "This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God." (Luke 12:15-21 NIV)

The rich man thought he had found his life but in the end he lost everything including his soul because he was more concerned about earthly things than heavenly things. On the other hand Jesus promises that those who lose their life for him will find it. To lose one's life for Jesus sake is to offer ourselves as living sacrifices in view of his sacrifice for us. (Cf. Romans 12:1) Or to put it another way: **whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.** (1Corinthians 10:31 NIV)

At times it can seem as if our life as the Lord's disciples will be nothing but gloom in this world. That's not the case of course but Jesus does want us to understand the "down-side" of following him if you will so that if we encounter difficulties we will not give up hope. Jesus also speaks of the "up-side" of following him in our text for today to encourage us as we follow him.

"Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me, and anyone who welcomes me welcomes 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."

Those who follow Jesus and who gladly testify of him will be a blessing to others. Those who welcome them with their message of forgiveness of sins and life in Jesus' name are showing their respect for the Lord Jesus and his heavenly Father. Both the hearer and the messenger will enjoy eternal rewards.

God's rewards to those who serve him and follow him are not given because they are earned or deserved. They are given because of the grace and generosity of our Savior. These blessings or rewards include peace with God, patience in time of tribulation, the privilege and confidence to bring our troubles and concerns to the Lord in prayer and the joy on knowing that our prayers will be answered for Jesus sake. These are the rewards or blessings given to those who by God's grace he calls his children.

Among the greatest of God's blessings or rewards would be the wonderful gift of salvation – again we must stress that this is a reward of God's grace – salvation is not of works but it is the gift of God promised by him to those who follow Christ.

Take up your cross and follow Jesus

1. Renounce worldly peace
2. Receive eternal rewards

Amen.