

July 2, 2023
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost
St. Timothy Lutheran Church – Huber Heights, OH
Pastor Joel Sutton

Matthew 10:34-42 (Romans 7:1-13)

A SWORD THAT BRINGS PEACE.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Summer is in full swing. You can tell by our attendance over the past several weeks that families and extended families are going on vacations and attending family reunions. The concept of family is extremely important in the Bible, both in a physical and theological sense. The family was introduced in the very beginning. On the sixth day of creation:

“... God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it...’” (Genesis 1:27–28)

God’s original plan for creation was for men and women to unite in physical one-flesh unions through marriage, (cf: Genesis 2:24) and Lord willing, have babies, and with their babies become families and households, which are the essential building blocks of human society. Families and households would support each other and look out for each other.

When sin entered the world, and the hearts of all mankind were corrupted. Martin Luther describes the sinful nature of man as: ***curved in on oneself***. (LW 25, 294) You and I call it narcissism and selfishness. Because of this corrupt and sinful nature, Adam blamed the woman for giving him the forbidden fruit from which he ate, likely sparking history’s first marital argument. (cf: Genesis 3:12) Because of corruption and sin, Cain rose up against his brother Abel and killed him, marking the first murder and dysfunctional family in human history. (cf: Genesis 4:8)

When mankind had begun to multiply on the face of the earth, so did the wickedness of man. (cf: Genesis 6:1–8) The Lord saw that every intention of the human heart was continually evil, so He decided to destroy the unbelieving world through a flood. Yet according to His great mercy, He preserved believing Noah and his family in the ark, which foreshadows Baptism, which now saves you and all who have been adopted into God’s family, the members of the holy ark of Christ’s Church. (cf: 1 Peter 3:20–21)

Family can be a source of joy, comfort, encouragement, and love. Yet, the family can also be a source of great hurt, pain, and division. If you do not believe me, talk about what God’s Word says about marriage, sex, gender, and life issues at your 4th of July cookout or next family reunion. Jesus gives you warning in our Gospel text this morning, saying:

”³⁴ “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” (Matthew 10:34–36)

Jesus' words sound shocking. After fall, He is the One of whom the prophet Isaiah said that His Name shall be called:

"... Prince of Peace." (Isaiah 9:6)

He is the One of whom the angels sang at His birth:

"... on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!" (Luke 2:14)

He is the One who taught:

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God." (Matthew 5:9)

If history has taught us anything, peace is not made with a sword – and if it does – it is only a temporary ceasefire. The world pretends to make peace by either destroying the enemy or beating them into submission by means of tearing their flesh and shedding their blood until they are prepared to negotiate and compromise. The Good News for you dear Christian is that just as Jesus' kingdom is not of this world, neither are His sword nor His peace of this world. Jesus' sword is not an earthly weapon but is:

"... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God." (Ephesians 6:17)

It is the sword which is:

"... living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." (Hebrews 4:12)

The sword of God's Word accomplishes the purpose for which it is sent. (cf: Isaiah 55:11) It is a holy sword to battle the unholy trinity of the devil, the world, and the sinful flesh. And when you consider Jesus' words of not bringing peace but a sword in light of His teaching on the night when He was betrayed, His words in our text are crystal clear. St John records Jesus words in the Upper Room on the eve of His crucifixion, saying:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid." (John 14:27)

Take heart dear Christian, for peace in Christ Jesus is unlike the world's peace and His sword is unlike the swords of the world. The world's peace is fickle and fleeting. The world's peace will not help you when the going gets rough but will always leave you vulnerable and wanting. Jesus' peace is not a Utopian peace on earth between man and man, but peace in heaven between God and man. To accomplish this heavenly peace all earthly peace must be sacrificed if necessary.

And to that end, Jesus wields the sword of His Word, discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, dividing the faithful believers and the unbelieving faithless within families, making enemies within their own households. (cf: Matthew 10:35–39) Jesus' death and resurrection atoned for your sin and the sin of the whole world. Yet, many reject the truth of Jesus' Word. They even reject their loved ones who confess His lifesaving Word and salvation. And it is most painful when it happens in the family.

The devil enjoys stirring up dissension and trouble. He especially enjoys dissension and trouble within the household of the Christian Church. He first tempts you to doubt what God's Word

says, and then he deceives you into an outright rejection and denial of God's authoritative, inspired, and inerrant Word.

Nobody likes dissension and division. To avoid conflict, you will be tempted to soften God's commands or completely avoid God's Word – all for the sake of peace and harmony. You and I want peace in the world, and in our families, and in our congregation. But you and I want the kind of peace that comes by means of negotiation and compromise – trying to make peace on your own terms and agenda. You want to be God but there is only one God, and you are not Him.

Earlier I said that the world pretends to make peace by tearing the flesh and shedding the blood of the enemy. That peace is always temporary – yet – oddly, heavenly peace also comes with the tearing of the flesh and shedding the blood. Once sin entered creation, strife and conflict have always been part of this fallen world. In Old Testament days it was between God's rebellious people and His prophets. In Jesus' day it was between the religious parties: one in the name of power and violence, the Other in the name of peace and service. The Jewish leaders were losing their position of influence among the people. They concluded that there would be no negotiation or compromise. Jesus must be put to death.

Interestingly, that is the way Jesus saw it too. He would not negotiate or compromise. He set His face toward Jerusalem to hand Himself over to death on a cross. (cf: Luke 18:31–33) Even as they tore at His flesh and nailed His bloody body to the cross, Jesus never negotiated or compromised. He never complained. At the peak of His suffering, Jesus did not pray for justice and retribution, but prayed for forgiveness for those who hate Him and put Him to death. (cf: Luke 23:34)

True peace comes at an enormous price: the shed blood of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world making peace between God and mankind. Peace on earth is temporary. Peace in heaven is eternal. It is the peace that the sword of God's Word declares, and it is the peace that the sword of God's Word achieves.

It is one thing to die with peace and reconciliation with your doubting and unbelieving family members. It is quite another to die with peace and reconciliation in Christ Jesus. Those who find peace and life in the things of this world never have real peace but are doomed to die having accumulated many things of the world and losing everything upon death. But to take up your cross and lose your life in the world for the sake of Christ is to find true peace, peace that the world does not give. (cf: Matthew 10:38) It is peace secured through Christ Jesus' death and resurrection. It is the peace of being reconciled with God the Father. It is the peace of assurance that one day you will recline at the Lord's table in His kingdom eternally and forever.

When a relative dies, by right of your family name, you might inherit earthly treasure. In Baptism, God adopted you into His family, named you Christian, and made you an heir of all the gifts that Christ won on the cross on your behalf: forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation. By right of being God's own child, all those eternal treasures that are yours right now will be fully realized on the Last Day when our Lord returns. Jesus has purchased you away from sin,

death, and the devil. So, dear child of God – take up your cross and follow Him. In the day that St Matthew wrote his Gospel:

“The cross represented death... [so it was no question...] Jesus expected His followers to be willing to die, if necessary, rather than to give up their commitment to Him.” (The Lutheran Study Bible. 1601)

It is a daunting task – and – you cannot do it on your own. And that, brothers and sisters in Christ, is why God sent His only begotten Son into the world. For the joy of your salvation, Jesus gladly took up His cross, placing Himself under the weight God’s righteous Law, and suffered His righteous wrath against your sin and the sin of the world. Your sin of dissension and division. Your sin of softening God’s commands and avoiding the truth of God’s Word. Your sin of negotiating earthly peace on your own terms and agenda.

Jesus refused to negotiate or compromise with the world but endured the cross, despising the shame so that sinners might live before God. (cf: Hebrews 12:2) The only way for sinners to live before a holy God is to die with Christ and be clothed in His righteousness. So, Jesus took up His cross so that you might die with Him. His death comes first and then your death in Baptismal waters for it was at the font that you were united with Christ, being Baptized into His death. (cf: Romans 6:3-9) As St. Paul writes in our Epistle text, in Baptism:

“... you... died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead, in order that [you] may bear fruit for God.” (Romans 7:4)

God has declared you dead to sin, dead to the Law. And now you belong to Another. You belong to Christ who brings you to the Father who pours out His Spirit on you who enables you to take up your cross and follow Jesus, bearing fruits of righteousness as His disciple, putting off the sins of the flesh and boldly sharing the mystery of the Gospel among your neighbors and in your own household, serving and loving others as God in Christ served and loves you. You cannot do it perfectly, so Jesus has already done so on your behalf so that others might see Him in your works and deeds.

Only in Christ can there be peace in the family, peace in the world, and peace in your hearts and minds. He did not come to bring the peace that the world gives. He came in order that the world might be saved through him. (cf: John 3:17)

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understand, guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,
Amen.