**Matthew 10:34-42** July 12, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Pentecost 6

*Matthew 10:34 [Jesus said,] “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—36a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ 37Anyone 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; 38and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

*40“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 41Anyone 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. 42And 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.”*

**Relationships Redefined**

I don’t think Jesus could have been an American. “Whoa! Whoa! Whoa!” you say. “Pastor, I thought you were going to keep politics out of the pulpit.” Hey! You are jumping to conclusions! This has nothing to do with politics, or protests, or our nation’s history, and nothing to do with a virus that begins with the letter “C.” Not at all. In fact, did you know that the politics and protests of Jesus’ day were far more contentious and volatile than our own. And you know what? Jesus never let that upheaval cloud his mission. We do well to take that to heart in our tumultuous times!

But back to the question, “Why couldn’t Jesus have been an American?” He couldn’t have been an American because we are a very plainspoken people. We take people’s words at face value. We don’t speak with nuance. When people do, we say, “So, to be clear, what you are saying is…” We don’t like people who speak in riddles. If they do, we say, “Stop beating around the bush. Come out and say it!” After we say something very blunt, we add, “Well, there it is. You can take it or leave it!” Americans say it like it is. That’s why Jesus couldn’t have been an American. (Opinion only!)

On the other hand, when Jesus spoke, we are often left scratching our heads. Books and Bible studies are entitled, *“The Hard Sayings of Jesus.”* This morning’s reading is one of those. Jesus often spoke less directly than we straightforward Americans prefer. That does not mean he was unclear. When we apply depth of thought, Jesus’ words become very clear.

But back to our reading, to Jesus’ words: ***“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”*** When you first heard those words this morning, maybe you said to yourself, “Are you sure *Jesus* said that?” Maybe you said to yourself, “But I thought that the Bible calls Jesus Prince of Peace.” You remembered how the angels sang at Jesus’ birth, *“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests”* (Lk 2:14). Maybe you remembered Jesus’ words, *“Blessed are the peacemakers”* (Mt 5:9). Then how could he say, ***“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth… but a sword”***?

To unravel this mystery, remember that the angels sang of baby Jesus bringing peace from heaven (God) to earth (humanity), not peace among people—even though people frequently misunderstand it that way. Meanwhile, in today’s reading Jesus says that when his mission takes root there will be conflict within humanity, between people. That is a very important distinction to keep in focus. Jesus says that when he steps into a human life, it sends disruptive shock waves out into all surrounding human relationships.

How can Jesus do that? How can he decide to step into people’s lives through the proclaimed word of God, and dump conflict into their lives?

If we think that people are morally neutral, then it makes no sense. If people are “basically good” (which is not true in God’s eyes), then what good is served when Jesus smashes things saying, ***“I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”*** This can only be justified when we remember that we are born spiritually dead, that our default spiritual relationship with God is “enemy”.

Then we understand that Jesus does not delight in creating family conflict, but that Jesus is on a rescue mission in enemy territory. When Jesus does a pre-dawn raid behind enemy lines, saving a soul through the Water of Baptism and the Word of God, and loads them into the awaiting helicopter bound for heaven, of course the enemy fires upon the departing aircraft! The world is the enemy of Jesus. It does not want to admit its sin, to leave its ways, to rely on God’s forgiveness. Instead it chooses to fight back. The sword, the conflict that is brought through Christ’s incursion into lost humanity is not the fault of our righteous Savior, but of our lost world and its resistance to its Creator and Savior.

So, we understand Jesus’ words. But we must pause to remember the unspeakable heartbreak they describe. We dare never repeat Jesus’ words lightly to another person. ***“I have come to turn a man against his father…”*** We dare never lightly say, “Well that’s just the way it is.” Nor did Jesus lightly dismiss it. What was it he said? ***“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me… and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”*** Jesus said, “The sundering of those relationships, it’s like carrying a cross.” It involves sorrow, shame, pain. In some places and times it has involved death. It involves the loss of things that even believers shudder to consider.

A few years ago I went to a two-day continuing education class about Islam. The presenter was a Seminary professor who had previously done some outreach in Islamic communities. He powerfully spoke of this very point. Muslim communities tend to be extremely family centered. When a Muslim considers converting to Christianity, they don’t do it lightly. They know that if they become Christians, they might never again be welcome at the dinner table where they joyfully ate so many meals with their family. The aunts and uncles who have guided so much of their life may never again say a word to them. The beloved relatives who showed their concern by generously helping through the tough times and emergencies of life may never again give them dime. And we Christians flippantly say, ignorant of their inner turmoil and pain, “Oh, just become a Christian.” We do not understand what they stand to lose. Are we willing to be the family they are about to lose? Are we willing to be more than casual acquaintances, but actual friends to stand the tests of time. They have lost so much; we offer so little. Oh, but that professor spoke so much more eloquently!

If you grew up in a Christian house like I did, we have no idea how Jesus’ words cut to the quick for some, ***“I have come to turn a daughter against her mother…”*** This is not only true of Muslims, it is true of atheists, it is true of cultural Christians. And maybe it is true of a visitor this morning. He finally worked up the courage to come to our church full of strangers, and none of those strangers seem to have a kind word, an encouragement. In the middle of potential loss for Christ, does anyone care?

Jesus words in Matthew 10 were spoken to his hand-picked Twelve. He had already told them, *“I am sanding you out like sheep among wolves…they will hand you over to the local council and flog you in their synagogues…All men will hate you because of me…”* (16-28) Then, as if all that suffering was not enough, Jesus added the solemn burden of today’s reading that their words will break up families, cause all sorts of fighting and that they need to take up their cross. “Dear Lord, please, no!”

Then Jesus adds the last verses, ***“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 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. 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.”***

This world is, in ways, a desert drear to the Christian, but Jesus promises his almost oases of cool water. Those cool refreshing waters are fellow Christians. For the apostles, they will be the ones to welcome in the Apostles. They will be the ones to give them a place to stay and food to eat.

This is where every Christian should find vital support: in the family of believers. This is one more important reason for your Christianity to not be something that you practice from the comfort of your home in a bathrobe, with a coffee mug in your hand. We need you. I need you. The person third pew from the back needs you. People content with just enough faith to get themselves across heaven’s finish line are so unbelievably selfish. Look into the Bible and you will not find individual Christians dotting the landscape. Christians nearly always exist in communities, in groups. This is just one more reason that God wants his people to weekly meet together in his house: God’s people need others of God’s people.

So let us repent of our selfishness in worship and faith. Let us ask God’s forgiveness for the times that we thought that since I know my Savior I am good and I really don’t need to be in church. Let us repent and change from the attitude which is unwilling to be the support to other Christians, to actually put ourselves out so that others can be lifted up, to make up for the loss they have suffered in becoming Christians. Sure, *you* may be ok, but some people live on the business end of Jesus’ words, ***“I have come to turn a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.”*** Let us repent in sorrow for how we have robbed others of the acceptance, assurance and encouragement they needed. And then let us rejoice in God’s generous forgiveness and restoration given through Jesus.

Here at the end I need to share three short little examples to make you think seriously of Jesus’ words.

First, this past week I spoke at length with a man who became a Christian as an adult. (He is neither a member nor a visitor to this church.) In the decade or more since becoming a Christian, he has lost all of his old friends. He earnestly wanted them to come to the faith. He shared Jesus with them. A couple kind of dabbled in it for a while, but none stayed and now they have moved on. He’s okay with it now, and yet you could hear the loss he has felt. Jesus caused division and loss in his life.

Second. There was a boy who went to a Lutheran grade school in a small town. (Maybe you know that religious grade schools are sometimes called parochial schools.) The kids from the public school would often harass the Lutheran school kids. That seven year old boy, relatively new to the town couldn’t understanding why the kids on the school bus were chanting and jeering at him out the school bus windows: “Pinocchio School! Pinocchio School.” That was only the beginning. There are Christians who live the division that Christ brings, and they need you to be there for them as a Christian family, even more than they perhaps know.

Finally, a happier story from my own life when I was about 12. We were on a family vacation in North Dakota—hey, who goes on a family vacation to North Dakota, right? But there we were in Valley City, North Dakota, on a Sunday morning. The plan was to attend the Lutheran church but we pulled into town way before the church service, so we stopped at a city park. When it was finally time to go to church, the car wouldn’t start. My dad went and found a payphone (remember those?), called up the church and they sent someone over to pick us up and get us to church. Then after church they found a mechanic who was willing to help out a family in distress on a Sunday afternoon. While we were waiting for the repair, the pastor’s family invited our family of five over for lunch and half an afternoon at their house. And I thought as a twelve-year-old, “So you mean, when Christians find themselves in troubles, this is what other Christians do?” Awesome family!

And now I tell you Jesus’ word, ***“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.”*** Amen.