

"Peace and Strife" - St. Matthew 10:34-42

Friends in Christ; the holy Gospel for today is from St. Matthew's Gospel, chapter ten, and can be found on page 815 in the pew Bible. What the Prince of Peace says in this Holy gospel sounds entirely inappropriate. But what He wants us to know is that Christian discipleship calls for serious decision about Him, and to eager commitment to Him and His Gospel. Hear this Gospel, which will be our text for meditation for this morning: ³⁴ **“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.** ³⁵ **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.** ³⁶ **And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.** ³⁷ **Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.** ³⁸ **And whoever 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.”** This is the Word of the Lord, Thanks be to God.

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

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Jesus says in this text that He is coming to break up families and turn them against each other. Does that sound like Jesus? What about all the times that the Bible speaks of peace? There are two clues to understand this passage. The first one is that when Jesus speaks of turning families against each other, He is quoting the Old Testament from the Book of the Prophet Micah. Micah denounces the sinfulness and the rebellion of Israel against God. At Micah's time rejection of God's Word led to many terrible consequences. On the national level, rulers were corrupt and judges were easily bribed. On a more local level, Micah warned that friends were not to be trusted because the normal loyalty and trust was being turned to selfishness and greed by sin.

Even more personally, Micah mourned that the family structure was being destroyed. In a family where all follow the Word of God, they will get along. But, declares the prophet, there are terrible outcomes when family members reject God's Word; and this is the passage that Jesus quotes, Micah 7:6: "For son dishonors

father, Daughter rises against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; A man's enemies are the men of his own household."

When some in the family are believers and some are not, there will be strife. When a believing father seeks to correct his unbelieving son for sinful behavior, the son may well rebel all the more in order to dishonor his father. If a daughter-in-law objects to a mother-in-law's false religion, the mother-in-law may turn critical of her daughter-in-law's every action. This is a timeless truth.

When a family is made up of believers and unbelievers, there will always be strife because there are different gods in the household. That family will find peace in only one way. They will all believe in the Lord and live by His Word. And yet, many are lured into a false peace were all decide that family is more important than God and so not speak of religion, or decide that religion just doesn't matter.

This is the strife that Micah mourned because the people were rejecting God's Word, it led to hostility in families. Some held to the truth, and some rejected it. This is the first clue in understanding what Jesus is saying in today's Gospel reading.

The second clue is that Jesus came to undo the wages and consequences of sin. Jesus came to undo death and hell. We all deserve eternal death, because we all are sinful and the wages of sin is death. He came to die for the sins of the world so that all might be forgiven and live forever in heaven. This is the message of the Gospel. Apart from Christ, there is no hope, we face God's eternal judgment.

But, by His death and resurrection, Jesus has undone this; by dying for our sin, He has won God's favor and blessings for us, which means salvation, heaven, eternal life when this life is over. That is what real peace is. That no matter how things go in this life, you can live and die in the peaceful assurance that your sins are forgiven in Christ and that you have a home in heaven.

These two clues help us understand our Lord's words when He says, "Do not think that I came to bring peace on earth. I did not come to bring peace but a sword. For I have come to 'set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law'; and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household (Mt. 10:34-36).

When Jesus comes to us, even today, He proclaims the Gospel; that is forgiveness and eternal life. When Jesus preached this message, many who heard belonged to families where no one believed the Lord's Word; and because no one believed the Lord's Word, there was no strife in the family because of religion. Many will call this a peaceful, happy household but, because no one believed, they are all lost in their trespasses and sins.

But, it is also true that many who hear will believe. Their life will change and they will want to tell this Good News to the rest of the family. They will wisely warn sons and daughters of the dangers of sin and point them to Christ. They will lovingly tell their in-laws about Jesus and warn against other gods. They will seek to guide their parents to the way of Truth. And, it will be right then and there that the battle starts.

Sons and daughters will not want to abandon their worldly lifestyles in favor of repentance, so there will be trouble. In-laws will not want to abandon their religion for true faith in Christ, and a hostile wall of silence will be built. Parents will reject the Gospel message given by their children, and from there the division will grow.

The world will say, "Look how much damage that Jesus has done. That family was getting along fine before all that stuff about sin and grace, cross and resurrection came along. Now they have big problems, and it's all the fault of Jesus and His followers. Those Christians are just trouble makers."

There is no doubt that strife has replaced peace but, it's a good strife that replaces a bad peace. The family was peaceful because all were spiritually dead. The strife has come because some of them are now alive. And as those who have been saved continue to be faithful and speak God's truth, they are wielding the sword of His Word, His saving Word! It is only by that strife causing Word that others in the family can be saved.

This is the strife that Jesus brings; deliverance from sin, forgiveness, faith and eternal life. He raises up believers from spiritual death to life. Where there was only spiritual death, there was no strife because nobody cared about God's Word. Where there is life, there will be conflict as God's people rejoice in the Gospel, spreading it far and wide, even as the world rejects it.

This is the message we hear today. Jesus brings good strife to conquer bad peace. He brings life where there was death. He brings forgiveness where there was only sin and condemnation. He brings faith where there was rejection and unbelief. The world will blame Jesus for bringing life, forgiveness and faith; but for all this we give thanks.

So, what does all this means for us? Surely by now, we know that the world will always see Christianity as a problem and the Gospel as a bad thing. Think of the things that are going on all around us. There are governments who does not want us to speak about the marriage and sexuality they are supporting contrary to God's Word.

God forbid that we, as followers of a loving Jesus, should dare to speak about ethics in science, or business, or government, or question anyone's' lifestyle. Christians are sidelined and will eventually be persecuted for speaking the truth because the truth is supposedly lacking in love. Friends, we must be ready to defend the faith even as we are accused of causing trouble.

Perhaps the most obvious application to all of this is in regard to family, for Jesus warns us of the danger of loving family more than God. "Family-first" is a virtue to the world, even as they had redefined the meaning of what constitutes a family. However, family-first at the expense of the truth of Christ is a destructive sin. It is always a temptation for parents to defend the sins of their children so as to keep some notion of peace rather than deal with them.

Spouses are often tempted to avoid church, at least attend less often, in order to please unbelieving husbands and wives; after all, worship does fall inconveniently on Sunday where is a day to watch or play my favorite sport. Believing children may have opportunity to tell their unbelieving parents about the Gospel, but cannot bring themselves to raise the topic. All such sins are committed in order to keep the family peace but this is a bad peace.

All this is a very delicate situation which calls for a great deal of care. Therefore, we speak the word of Christ in love. Speak up when you see your loved ones going down the wrong road and hanging around the wrong people. Live a life of one forgiven, and then lovingly apply the Word as the situation and opportunity

presents itself. To avoid the topic in order to maintain some notion of a false sense of peace is sin, to speak winsomely at the right time is not. And yet, even then there may very well be some tension and trouble. When such strife arises, you can say, "This strife is here because Jesus is here, seeking to save the lost. He has died for me, and He has died for those here who do not believe. And by His Word which has caused this trouble, He is working to bring them to faith."

Fathers and mothers, grandpas and grandmas, tell your children and grandchildren clearly, while they are young, about your faith, and why it should be important for them too. Young children are far more receptive in the first few years than later on. I have heard from some parents when we contact them about bringing their children to confirmation, "I will ask him/her if he/him wants to go to Confirmation, or they said: I do not want to force religion upon my children, I will let them decide when they are older."

What is the message given other than that faith in Christ is unimportant, and that the Gospel is a take it or leave it sort of thing? Make good use of the time. And, when trouble comes, know for certain that, "This strife is here because Jesus is here, contending for my child. I will therefore endure the strife and see to it that my child hears of Jesus." This is not easy, but, by the grace of God, we continue to confess the saving Good News of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is not called the Church Militant for nothing, there will be plenty of battles, but it is still the Lord's Church, and He continues to be with us.

Friends, where Jesus is, there will be strife as the world opposes. But only where Jesus is will you find true peace, peace with God. Peace which declares He no longer holds your sins against you. Peace that comes from this blessed announcement: You are forgiven for all of your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.