

Jesus Brings the Sword

FOURTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, Proper 8 [a] July 2, 2017

MATTHEW 10:34-42

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. ⁴⁰ Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹ The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. ⁴² And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”**

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.

Luke 2:14:

The angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.” And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!”

That’s the announcement of the birth of Jesus, God the Son come in the flesh—he’s meek and mild, a baby in the arms of his mother; he’s God himself dwelling with weak humans; he’s the Savior reconciling sinners to his Father, and the angels break out in song, *Glory to God in the highest, and on Earth, peace.*

Peace. Not judgment. We already have that. Not retribution. Does anyone have any shortage of that? Not teacher of the Law or instructor in human improvement and motivation, we already have all that.

But peace. The peace of a Lord saying, *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven ... blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the Earth* (Matthew 5); the peace and healing of him who says to the leper, *Be clean* (Matthew 8:3), who says to the paralytic, *“Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven”* (Matthew 9:3). He comes bringing to sinners on Earth, peace.

And yet,

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the Earth, [said Jesus]. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

[Matthew 10:34]

Yet we see him swinging no sword when the chief priests and his goons snagged Jesus out of Gethsemane; no sword when Caiaphas had his mob spit in Jesus’ face and struck him; no sword when Herod mocked him and dressed him in insulting clothing, when Pilate scourged him and handed him over to be crucified, when soldiers twisted a crown of thorns to put in his head; he had no sword in his hands. And no sword for the church, either. Jesus gave to the church no sword when he said,

“My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my servants would have been fighting.”

[John 18:36]

Where is this sword of his which divides father from son, mother from daughter, person from person? This Lord who says to love neighbor as self, to forgive the one who sins against you, to harbor no bitterness, where is this sword of his dividing father from son and mother from daughter, cutting right down the center of any family or any friendship?

He comes with no sword or spear, no troops or armies, no crusades or battles, we know that. He is the crucified Son of God. The shedding of his own blood to redeem sinners, that’s how he gains the victory over sin, death, and the devil.

But that word of the cross, it is his sword. The preaching of Christ crucified, this is a sword cutting through every society, every family, even cutting through to the bone and marrow, the soul and spirit,

of every sinner, of you and me. Hebrews 4:12:

The word of God 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.

Here's how the sword of the preaching of Christ crucified cuts into human society. All people are in sinful human flesh, all trying to build up their lives, trying to establish the principles of the Law as the way to live a worthy life, all are defending themselves from being found out in their guilt, from having themselves exposed in their shame; and then comes the Word of God declaring, **All men are liars** [Psalm 116:11].

And that sword cuts right through the heart of society, separating out those who say, *No, we are not liars, and where we have been caught out in lies, we will find a way to defend ourselves*, and separating on the other hand those who say, *Yes, we are liars, we have been found out, is there any hope for us?*

Then comes the second Word of God, declaring the sinner freely justified by the gift of God, declaring that the blood of Jesus shed on the cross covers all sin, all shame, and that sinners are brought out of sin and death, and into grace and life, by the Name of the Lord given them in Baptism. And that sword cuts right through the heart of society, dividing between those who say, *No, I will justify myself, I will find the way of improvement*, and separating on the other hand those who say, *Finally, a word of good news, a word bestowing what I myself could not accomplish, a word forgiving my sin and setting my conscience free.*

The Word of God, a sharp two-sword cutting through not just societies, through families, too, but also to the very bone and marrow and heart of each of us.

A Word from the Catechism showing where the sword of Jesus cuts:

What does such baptizing with water indicate?

It indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever.

Jesus swings his sword, it is his Word, and his Word cuts us to the very marrow, cutting down the Old Man of sin, cutting down our sinful attempts to gain our own justification, piercing into the heart of our arrogance as we try to put ourselves forth as those who have our own worthiness—his sword cuts us off from all of that, and having cut off the old man of sin, Jesus in his Gospel, brings forth the new man of faith. In this Gospel, Jesus is bestowing the Holy Spirit who is breathing into us the beating heart of faith.

The sword does its job, cutting between self-justification and, on the other hand, justification as gift from God; between the lie of worthiness gained through the Law, and, on the other hand, the truth, the reality, of worthiness bestowed by the Name of Jesus.

Jesus still bears his sword. That is our only hope. That he would daily keep us in his gift of repentance, daily putting us to death in contrition, and daily raising us up in the Gospel, raising us up as those forgiven of all sin, cleansed of conscience, and living before him in nothing but faith, living in the righteousness and purity that we are given through faith in him.

So we, who in our sinful flesh run *from* his sword in fear, at the same time, in our life of faith, we run *to* his sword, saying in joy, *Let me hear your Law, let me know the guilt of my flesh, let the old Adam of sin finally be found worthless, beyond improvement, with no hope, so that I can finally put him to death in repentance. And let me hear your Gospel; let me know your grace and kindness; let me lock onto nothing but your word which justifies me before the Father, so that I find my hope in your word alone, and find my life in the oath you gave me in my Baptism.*

IN THE NAME OF JESUS.