

Matthew 10:34-42

July 2, 2017

- here we are ... summertime and the living is easy
 - life starts to coast along for the summer and we wish and we pray and we think that our Christian life can just coast along for a while too
 - then we come to a text like this one and we wonder
 - why can't our Christian life be one of leisure and enjoyment?
 - I distinctly remember angels singing about "Peace on Earth"
 - Jesus said something like "My yoke is easy and my burden is light"
 - he said, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"
 - were those just a come-on to get us in the door?
 - was it false advertising?
- don't you know that our faith and our Christian life inevitably put us in the midst of conflict
 - there are parts of the world where Christians are attacked, forced to convert to Islam
 - places where churches are burned down or blown up
 - people are killed on the way to worship, and even inside their churches
 - men and women are arrested and condemned to death for the crime of becoming a Christian
- for all the stories we read about there are a hundred that go un-reported
- Pastor Luke's speaking opportunity in front of the UN in Geneva is one of the articles in the most recent Canadian Lutheran
 - most media focus these days is on the continuing struggle between Sunni and Shite Muslims

- most world focus is on radical groups attacking large cities without warning
- Pastor Luke was invited to the UN, along with other presenters to generate awareness of the plight of Pakistan's Christian community which is being persecuted with impunity

- similar things are happening in South Sudan and Egypt and other African countries
 - the are all too frequent in Iran and Iraq
- in our own country Christian refugees from Syria, the Middle East and Southeast Asia are routinely passed over while Muslim refugees are fast-tracked into Canada
- our country celebrates principles of acceptance and tolerance, and yet this same society is silent on the persecutions of Christians around the world

- but now here's something surprising to the world
 - Muslim refugees from Syria have been met with help and care give by Christians in neighbouring countries
 - help they don't get from people of their own faith, they get from Christians
- is that surprising to you ... that Christians should care about their enemies and those who persecute them?
 - that we should love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us?
- Jesus tells us plainly that our faith will inevitably cause conflicts ... with the world ... within our families ... sometimes even within ourselves
 - the challenge is not to see them as unwelcome burdens that interrupt our lives, but to see them as opportunities to share our faith
 - even when it is painful to do so

-how often have you heard a doctor say, “I’m not here to make you feel better ... I’m here to make you feel worse ... this is going to hurt ... a lot”

-doctors want to make us better ... that’s their job

-but sometimes it has to hurt for them to do their job

-there’s a hymn that we often don’t like to sing

Have thine own way, Lord, Have thine own way

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay

Mold me and make me after Thy will

While I am waiting, yielded and still

-do you really want to give God that kind of power over you?

-God’s treatment plan for your sinful heart is to bring the power of his Word and the power of his Spirit to work in your heart to sanctify you

-to plant faith

-to make faith grow

-to cleanse you of sin and make you more and more into the likeness of Christ

-to ultimately bring you safely home to heaven

-and what you and I have to understand is that Jesus is not content to stop half way

-when we pray, “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me” we are asking for the full treatment ... even if it hurts

-C. S. Lewis wrote this about his Christian life ...

When I was a child I often had toothache, and I knew that if I went to my mother she would give me something which would deaden the pain for that night and let me get to sleep.

But I did not go to my mother—at least, not till the pain became very bad. And the reason I did not go was this. I did not doubt she would give me the aspirin; but I knew she would also do something else. I knew she would take me to the dentist next morning.

I could not get what I wanted out of her without getting something more, which I did not want. I wanted immediate relief from pain: but I could not get it without having my teeth set permanently right. And I knew those dentists: I knew they started fiddling about with all sorts of other teeth which had not yet begun to ache. They would not let sleeping dogs lie, if you gave them an inch they took a mile.

Now, if I may put it that way, Our Lord is like the dentists. If you give Him an inch, He will take a mile. Dozens of people go to Him to be cured of some one particular sin which they are ashamed of or which is obviously spoiling daily life. Well, He will cure it all right: but He will not stop there. That may be all you asked; but if once you call Him in, He will give you the full treatment.

That is why He warned people to ‘count the cost’ before becoming Christians. ‘Make no mistake,’ He says, ‘if you let me, I will make you perfect. The moment you put yourself in My hands, that is what you are in for. Nothing less, or other, than that.

If you choose, you can push Me away. But if you do not push Me away, understand that I am going to see this job through. Whatever suffering it may cost you in your earthly life, ... whatever it costs Me, I will never rest, nor let you rest, until you are literally perfect—until my Father can say without reservation that He is well pleased with you, as He said He was well pleased with me. This I can do and will do. But I will not do anything less.’

- do you begin to see why Jesus says what he says in our text today?
- our Christian life this side of heaven is going to have pain and hurts
 - we are going to feel it in ourselves
 - we are going to see it in the world around us
 - we are going to experience it in our family relationships

- there are times when we will be tempted to compromise for the sake of a temporary atmosphere of peace ... but that peace a delusion
 - it's not peace
- true wholeness and true peace only come through the cross of Christ

- think about how closely you and sin are attached
 - think how much it hurts to pull off a Band-Aid
 - then ask yourself if sin just stuck on the surface, or if the problem deeper?

- as God works in our hearts and lives to separate us from the sin in us and to create in us a clean heart and renew in us a right spirit, he is also separating us from the sin that surrounds us

- when you turn on the news and see how many of the headlines are about violence, hatred, death, conflict, you are reminded that this world isn't the way it's supposed to be

- six months ago, we celebrated the birth of the Prince of Peace
 - now, here we are, surrounded by conflict
 - between nations, between groups of people, between families,
 - conflict within our own families
 - conflict in our own hearts and lives

- didn't Jesus come to bring peace to all this mess?
 - when do we get to stop fighting? stop struggling?
 - where is my peace?

- the reality is that we like peace, even when it's just pretend
 - counterfeit peace is comfortable
 - no one likes to come home to a house where people are constantly arguing
 - ask any child who's had the tragic experience of living in a house where the parents are in conflict
 - the household is constantly on edge, waiting for the war to start back up
 - it's exhausting, but we don't know what else to do about it besides try to ignore it
 - counterfeit peace is safe
 - change, even change for the better, is unsettling and hard to deal with
 - it keeps a young woman trapped in the abusive relationship -
 - she knows it's wrong and broken and unhealthy, but it's familiar and safe in its own way
 - better the devil you know than the one you don't
 - as a result, we refuse to change, even knowing that the current situation is killing us
- counterfeit peace, by definition, is not real
 - we can avoid talking about the conflict, but we haven't really solved it
 - we haven't really figured anything out
 - it's two people at the dinner table who have this relationship that's just broken and they're dealing with it by not dealing with it
 - you can cut the tension with a knife
 - you tiptoe around the topic, but it's plain that this isn't what real peace is supposed to be
 - ultimately it's no use pretending any longer
 - you live in fear

- things covered are eventually uncovered, and while we wait, they own us
- it looks like peace, but it's fake

-and fake peace comes with a cost

- some of our relationships aren't the way they should be, but we don't know how to change them
- you have a family member with whom you've just agreed to disagree about those subjects that everyone knows not to bring up
- you compromise; you "live and let live" in the name of peace

-fake peace eventually brings death

- as long as we view life primarily as being about pursuing the appearance of peace, we live a lie
- as long as our friendships are about getting along instead of loving discussion, they're mere shadows of what they're intended to be
- as long as our relationship with God is primarily about concealing our sin from him, from others, and from ourselves, we can't find real peace

-so Jesus came to bring not peace, but a sword

- you need a sword to cut through the crap of broken relationships and find real healing and restoration and peace

-real peace is about having restored relationships

- it is about wholeness in body, in mind, in relationships with other people, and in our relationship with God
- and God knows that true peace begins by dealing with the broken relationships that divide us from him and isolate us from one another

- that's why Jesus says, "Don't think I've come to bring peace, but a sword."
- he's coming to cut through that false peace, the lies, to give us the real thing
 - Taking a stand brings a sword. Speaking the truth will bring you into conflict with the lies our world embraces. Don't believe me? Just try it:
 - Say that every life is precious and sacred, from conception to natural death . . .
 - Say that human sexuality is a gift of God to be enjoyed in the context of marriage between a man and a woman . . .
 - Proclaim in any sense that there is an absolute right and wrong to the universe and that some actions bring life and joy and that others bring death and destruction . . .
 - and watch the sparks start flying.
- our world is comfortable with its lies, but for real peace to take root, the lies must first be challenged and revealed for what they are
- when we confront the lies, we know that, ultimately, things aren't how they're supposed to be in our relationship with God either
 - we've done things we shouldn't have, and we've said things we know we shouldn't have
 - sometimes, the things that own us are because we didn't act, didn't do that thing we should have, or we had that moment when we should have spoken and we kept quiet
- there is simply no peace in our world, our relationships, or in ourselves
 - and we extend that to our thoughts about God
 - how could God love someone as broken as I am?
 - but that's the greatest lie of all ... that somehow we've done too much or said too little for God to love us. That somehow

we've pushed it one too many times, and this time there can't be peace

-that we are too fundamentally broken even to begin to make peace with God

-the real problem is that we can't make peace with God

-we try, and we fall so far short

-some of us settle for the false peace where we just ignore the whole thing, though underneath it all we know it's not really peace at all

-but here's where the sword cuts:

GOD LOVES US TOO MUCH TO LEAVE US WITH A FALSE PEACE.

-so instead, God makes real peace with us

-He sent his Son to this world of skinned knees and broken hearts not just to bring a sword and cut through the false peace this world seeks, but to establish real peace with us

-The Son, Christ Jesus, fell on the sword, took the nails, the spear, the death of the cross to take on himself all those reasons we were at anything but peace with God and are at anything but real peace with those around us

-Now he calls us by name in Baptism, and week after week he feeds us with Christ's body broken and his blood poured out. We do not have to be good enough, worthy enough, or able enough to make peace with God, because God has already made peace with us.

So now when we confront the lies, something remarkable happens. When we lovingly deal with the things we're brushing aside and hiding from, everyone involved is set free. We exchange a false peace for the true peace Christ gives. Amen.

Announcements ...

VBS is 8 days away ... next Sunday will be installation of our VBS teachers and staff.

-some ways you can still help ...

-pray for our VBS ... especially for more children to attend

-personally invite people to attend

-come and visit our VBS opening and closing each day

-come to our closing program on Thursday July 10th

-bring some 2 litre plastic pop bottles with their lids and leave them in the cloak room

-couple of strong men to move one piece of furniture this morning ... just outside the youth room at the bottom of the stairs

-some more strong men to set up the stage after church next Sunday

-last minute exercise ... deliver some fliers in the neighbourhood around the church