

Grace and peace to you from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. **Amen.**

Our sermon text today is written in Matthew 10:24-39

Let us pray ...

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of our hearts be acceptable in Your sight; we pray through Your son, Jesus Christ.

The Peace of God

In this morning's Gospel reading, we heard Jesus say, *"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."* These words sound uncharacteristic for Jesus don't they, I mean, it wasn't all that long ago we heard Jesus say *"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).

To understand what Jesus is teaching here, we need to look at what he is teaching in its original context.

Today's gospel reading follows on from last week's reading as Jesus instructs His disciples as He sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God to the lost sheep of Israel. As you might remember, Jesus gave His disciples the authority to drive out demons, heal the sick, and even raise the dead. He told them how God will care for them as they travel so that they don't need to take extra provisions with them on the trip. And He told them how to bring the peace of God on the places where they stayed.

Now, if you go around healing the sick, driving out demons, and raising people from the dead, you would expect people to be queing up waiting to see the disciples as they brought the good news of the Kingdom to the people.

But the words of Jesus that we heard today are a reality check. You would expect that people would be grateful for all these things, but Jesus tells us not to count on that. In other words, He is telling His followers that they should expect conflict when they faithfully proclaim the Gospel.

Don't get me wrong, it is not that Jesus wants conflict over peace. Rather, as we know, He wants the Gospel proclaimed to the ends of the earth, but as we also know the world doesn't want to hear the Gospel. When Jesus states that His Gospel will bring the sword, He is telling the simple truth that the world will commit violence against those who faithfully proclaim the Gospel. That they should expect the world to rage against them.

Furthermore, Jesus tells His disciples that the violence is not just out there in the world, but it will also come from family and friends. Jesus said, *"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. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.* Again, it is not that Jesus

wants it this way, but He knows that sin, death, and the devil will do everything within their power to rage against the proclamation of the Gospel. They will even use the ones we love the most to attack us.

This of course means is that we may have to go against family in order to remain faithful. That is the point Jesus makes when He said, *“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. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.”*

You and I, as we confess our faith in Christ to the world have the most wonderful, soul-saving, message of peace to share with everyone. We believe and confess that God Himself has come down from His throne to live among us as one of us. That He has taken away all of our sin by taking on the punishment that we deserved for that sin. That He bore the full judgment of God against all our sins to the point of dying on the cross. And then He proclaimed that His sacrifice on the cross was sufficient by rising from the dead. We also believe and confess that He now reigns in heaven and prepares a place for us to live with Him in paradise forever. And that He did this all for free! Even the faith that receives it all is a free gift.

Now, surely you would think that every man, woman, and child would want a piece of what believe we. But Jesus’ words in today’s Gospel tells us otherwise. Here He tells His disciples and us too for that matter, that as wonderful as the Gospel Message is, many will reject it. Even though our message is the most wonderful message of all, there is every chance that it will stir up anger instead of thankfulness. Even in the people who we love.

Here is where it gets really tough. It is as if Jesus said, “Who is more important to you ... your parents or me? Who is more important to you ... your children or me? Who is more important ... you or me?” Thankfully, here in Australia our family, friends, and neighbours were either Christian or at least respected our belief as Christians, although that appears to be changing more and more.

The writer to the Hebrews sums up our situation well when he said, *“In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood”* (Hebrews 12:4). Although we don’t hear much about it in the mainstream media, there are regular reports telling us that groups, whole families are killed in other countries because they refused to confess that Allah is god and Mohammed is his prophet, and we need to ask ourselves, are we ready to follow their example?

Let the words of Jesus in this morning’s gospel reading sink in. When I ask myself if I’d be able to hold steadfast to my belief in that situation, I could only answer NO, I don’t think I could. You see, I can’t live up to the standard that Jesus sets for us in today’s Gospel. No one can.

Well actually, that's not quite true is it? There has been one man that did, and that man is Jesus Christ Himself.

As we continue to read through the Gospel according to Matthew we hear that even Jesus' own family did not believe in Him. *While [Jesus] was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother"* (Matt 12:46–50).

Then on the night of the Passover feast, Judas one of His chosen disciples ... a close friend betrayed Jesus for thirty pieces of silver. Peter, also a chosen friend denied Jesus. The most prestigious members of society backed Pilate into a corner in order to put Jesus to death. The people who should have known and loved Jesus the most were those who hated Him the most.

As we think back to the events of Easter, we hear that Jesus himself suffered the sword that He speaks of in today's Gospel. The gospel according to John tells us that *they took Jesus, and he went out, bearing his own cross, to the place called The Place of a Skull, which in Aramaic is called Golgotha* (John 19:16–17). He literally carried His cross as well as our sin. He suffered shame, torture, and ultimately surrendered His life for us. He kept the standard that we could not keep. He secured the salvation that we could not reach. He earned salvation for those who hated him most, and He earned it also for you and for me.

Jesus continues to offer that salvation to the entire world, and we receive the benefits of that salvation through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith. Along with that faith comes the comfort that carries us when the world responds to our belief with a sword – especially when those carrying the sword are people that we love.

God desires peace. That is the reason He sent His Son into the world to suffer and die. Jesus purchased God's peace with His cruel, bloody death and we receive the peace that Jesus purchased through the Holy Spirit's gift of faith.

That same Spirit also give us the endurance we need to carry the cross of the world's opposition and rejection. The Gospel of Jesus Christ often brings the temporary sword of this world, and it can be painful and depressing. But ultimately the Gospel of Jesus Christ gives us the eternal peace of God, that triumphs over the temporal pain of this world.

Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Amen