

The Sixth Sunday after Pentecost

July 16, 2017

St. Matthew 10:34-42

Jesus Presents a Realistic View of What it Means to Follow Him.

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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

The angels' message to the lost world at Jesus' birth is "Peace." God the Father does indeed endow peace to all mankind because his favor rests on us in his Son. Our Savior's words here are part of his instruction to the twelve prior to sending them out to the lost sheep of Israel. The Lord's words may at first seem to contradict the angels' message to the shepherds. They do not.

Jesus is making the point that even as some will listen to them and have the peace that comes to all who believe in his saving name, others will resist that peace and persecute those who possess it. We heard an Old Testament example of that very thing last week in the experience of the prophet, Jeremiah.

Disciples, followers of Jesus because he has called you out of the world to follow him, be ready for rejection. The Lord does not candy coat what it may cost when we are bold and continue to proclaim God's Word. **Jesus Presents a Realistic View of What it Means to Follow Him.** First, expect rejection for following him. Second, expect God to accept you through Jesus' merits.

People long for peace and work hard at achieving it. Apart from Christ there is no peace. "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked," we read in Isaiah 48:22. Peace must come from God as he calls us to peace through his Word. Peace does not come as the wicked falsely believe by quieting a guilty conscience by soft pedaling sin or regarding sin as less serious than it is. You can seek a false peace in trying to ignore the fact that your sins separate you from the righteous God. That is not peace but delusion.

I mentioned Jeremiah who pointed out to Israel, who only wanted to hear a message of "Peace, peace" when there was no peace in their sin and impenitence, that peace comes only when God removes our wickedness. Jesus came to be that "Prince of Peace."

Jesus did not come to bring peace apart from himself for the guilty conscience. He did not come to bring peace to the Jews by throwing off the Roman shackles that enslaved them. Jesus is telling the twelve not to subscribe to, or share the common misbelief that he had come to establish political and social peace on the earth., or, for that matter, that he is coming again to do that "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth."

"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword," Jesus told the twelve. That sword would cut and divide even members of the same family. What is that sword? We may think of the "sword of the Spirit that is the Word of God." Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a Lutheran pastor the Nazis hanged in Flossenburg concentration camp in 1945 wrote in his book, The Cost of Discipleship, "But the cross is the sword God wields on earth. It creates division. The son against the father, the daughter against her mother, the member of the family against the head-all this will happen in the name of God's kingdom and his peace. " [pg. 243]

Followers of Christ, boldly preach the Master's message to the lost sheep. But expect rejection for following him. The sword of the Spirit, the cross, Christ will continue to divide believers and unbelievers. Enmity against God and his peace in Christ will continue. That enmity may come even in those we love the most. Notice Jesus does not say do not love father or mother, son or daughter. He says do not love them "more than me."

God will not share us with any other god including family members should we put them ahead of God and his Word. This mirror shows us all that we have not loved God with all our hearts, souls and minds. We have put ourselves, our family, our jobs and success, our thoughts and efforts into this life. Such wrong focus means losing my life for eternity. When I lose my life for the sake of Christ, put everything in the here and now apart from love for God, I find my life for eternity.

Discipleship is emptying the heart of love for and connection to all things present and worldly. Discipleship is obedience to Christ who calls me by the Holy Spirit through the means of grace to follow him. Following Christ, expect God to accept you through Jesus' merits.

Our Savior connects himself, his prophets, and those who are righteous with his righteousness through faith. When the twelve went out and people received them, which means to welcome them into their homes and learn from them, those people would also be welcoming Jesus himself. Through the Word those people would receive a connection with Christ which endowed them with the blessings of forgiveness and eternal life.

When we go out and people listen to us and learn from us, they are welcoming Christ. They welcome us as those who speak God's Word as his spokesmen not our own opinions. We are prophets. They receive us as those who see our holiness before God not as our own efforts and works but as the perfect obedience of Christ to the law which Jesus offered in sacrifice on the cross. They have that righteousness also as they deny themselves and cling only to Jesus Christ.

Jesus equated welcoming his disciples with listening to his Word. As we go out, we may expect God to accept us through the merits of Jesus. Those who welcome us and listen to us may also expect those great blessings of eternal life and all the rewards of grace that God has prepared for those who love him. The hearers of the Word show their love for Jesus and his disciples by acts of love, like offering us a cup of water.

These are the realities of what it means to follow Jesus. We can expect to be rejected. We can expect to be welcomed. We can expect some will not listen. We can expect some will listen. What we can expect for ourselves and for those Jesus' calls to into his kingdom through the Word is that God the Father accepts us through the merits of Christ. <SDG>