Conditions for Peace
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If you were listening closely to our reading (Matthew 10:24–39), you heard Jesus say, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” What is the Prince of Peace saying when he says that he did not come to bring peace? (Matthew 10:34) He is addressing a very specific concern here and not the other situations that come to mind immediately.

Around the world there are people whom we can call “first generation Christians.” Their parents and their parents before them were Buddhist, or Muslim, or Hindu, followers of some religion other than Christianity. They live in communities where Christians are a minority. For many or most, they are harassed and ostracized or worse by their own families for becoming Christian. Without the experiences of the persecuted Church his words here are mystifying. We might have vague questions such as why would my parent or child, who is a Christian, have a fight with me over Jesus? That is a remote possibility, say that a son takes a stand on his faith when the father ordered him to do something utterly against his beliefs, for example. But that is most unusual and is not the situation here.

What is going on here? Obviously, Jesus was a Jew, his disciples whom he is teaching here were Jewish, everyone in their community was. We live in a culture where Christianity is the predominate religion and always has been. Not that everyone here grew up that way. If you are from Japan, India, or Persia, any number of Middle East countries, whether your family was Christian or you were the first you know what the following is about. I wrote a message this week using Facebook to a young man who is one of our international students, I supervise him in his work-study and I hope to help him achieve some of his goals such as improving the Bible college he works at. He lives in India and his school has experienced a lot of discrimination, in fact it was overrun by militants about ten years ago. Its roots are in merely having a place where new believers could come for sanctuary because they were run out of their homes.

My young friend responded with a video. It shows young men with sticks running down a street and into a park and they are hitting things. I suspected what it was, but I asked him about it and he said it was a group of militant Hindus breaking crosses. I suppose they went to a graveyard and were defacing monuments. And yes, in his response he asked me to pray for the Christians. I asked if this was happening in the south or the north? He replied that it is happening all over India.

In Matthew 10:34 Jesus is telling his disciples that when they become his followers they should not expect people who are not already his followers to welcome that news. What else is he telling us in the verses that follow? He is saying that being Christ comes with a cross and being a Christian comes with a cross. If you want to become a Christian because it is going to make your life somehow easier, you might need to think about the following. Becoming a Christian means change. What would you think about a person like this: you are not a Christian,
that is, you do not know who Jesus is, you decide to learn more, you like what you hear, you
decide to become one of his followers, you do so, you get baptized, and then you go on with your
life just as it was before. No. If you were serious, if you accept this new identity in faith, you are
going to want to change, and in the areas of your life that conflict with Christian belief, you are
going to be conflicted. This is another area where Christ does not simply bring peace. God’s
word will teach you how to live, and the Spirit will strengthen your resolve to live an upright life,
but it is not always easy and we all experience guilt, conflict and remorse.

In what other ways might you want Jesus to bring peace? How about the foremost
definition? Will he bring an end to war, can we expect that? Yes, he will, some day. We know this
from the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament. However, and it is probably hardly
surprising to you that it appears that total peace will come at the end of days. But the Bible
teaches what makes for peace. The prophets, Jesus himself, and the apostles have given abundant
 teaching on peace. We have a very hopeful promise there that Jesus send his Spirit to continue to
bless his brothers and sisters with peace.

Yes, the Bible teaches us how to have peace. It is God’s will that we have mercy, peace,
and love be yours in full measure. (Jude 1:2) Here are some other key passages that show
practical and spiritual truths about peace. All show that Christians are to be a peaceful people.
First and perhaps foremost Jesus said that God blesses those people who make peace. They
will be called his children. (Matthew 5:9). Notice that in the beatitudes Jesus is not commanding us to
 live that way, he is stating a fact. The apostle Peter commands it: “You must turn away from evil
and do good; you must strive for peace with all your heart.” (1 Peter 3:11) Paul teaches in
Philippians 4:7 that God’s peace, which is far beyond human understanding, will keep your
hearts and minds safe in union with Christ Jesus. In other words, it is a gift that comes with our
union in Christ. Here we need to reflect on our Holy Baptism, how we who die with Christ are
risen with Christ, that is, in union with God. We learn more by turning to our reading in Romans
6:1-6: “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means!
How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been
baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by
baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too
might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall
certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.”

This is all explanation of the meaning of Jesus’s words in the Upper Room, “I have told
you this so that you will have peace by being united to me. The world will make you suffer. But
be brave! I have defeated the world!” (John 16:33). Just as Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he
creates a way for us to defeat the world, that is, nothing can truly harm us and we shall not die,
but live and in this life we truly have union in Christ, Holy Baptism. Dear Christian friends, do
everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody (Romans 12:18). The peace that
Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make; for it is to this peace that God has called
you together in the one body. And be thankful (Colossians 3:15). May the Lord himself, who is
our source of peace, give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with you all (2
Thessalonians 3:16).
God is love and Jesus is the prince of peace. Being mindful of this knowledge alone helps present day disciples pursue peace as a way of life, but in fact we have the Holy Spirit giving us the faith needed to endeavor to persevere in face of temptations and even persecution. We end this message today with a benediction from the prophet Isaiah:

   The mountains and hills may crumble,
       but my love for you will never end;
   I will keep forever my promise of peace.”
   So says the Lord who loves you.
   (Isaiah 54:10)