

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
The Midweek Liturgy, Wednesday, November 8, 2023
Matthew 10:34-42

HOLY GOSPELMatthew 10:34-42, RSV
In last week's reading, Jesus warns his disciples that they will face troubles in their ministry. Now, he warns that these troubles might include the family too.

[Jesus said to his disciples] ³⁴“Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. ³⁵For 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; ³⁶and a man's foes will be those of his own household. ³⁷He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; ³⁸and he who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it.

⁴⁰“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives him who sent me. ⁴¹He who receives a prophet because he is a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward, and he who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴²And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.”

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Alright! We have ourselves a great tug-of-war in the story of Jesus. It is a struggle concerning peace. In this sermon, I want to suggest that one side wins, and yet both sides have important truth with which we should reckon. Let us start off with the side that loses. Or rather, it is not so much that it loses, but rather that it needs to be understood in light of the *other* side of the rope. Here is the losing side. We find it in this evening's reading from Matthew 10. Jesus is speaking to his disciples, including us modern-day disciples:

Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. (Matthew 10:34, RSV)

So, that is one side of the rope. The other side can be found from first to last in the story of Jesus. We can begin with the Christmas angels and their words of peace:

¹⁴Glory to God in the highest, and on earth *peace*, good will toward men. (Luke 2:14, KJV)

Then, at the very start of his magnificent Sermon on the Mount, Jesus speaks of the peacemakers:

Blessed are the *peacemakers*, for they shall be called sons of God. (Matthew 5:9, RSV)

And then, toward the end of the story of Jesus, we find him comforting his disciples in his farewell discourse. And so read this in John 14:

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, RSV)

Also, in John 16, Jesus says this to his disciples:

I have said this to you, that in me you may have *peace*. In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. (John 16:33, RSV)

And what was the first word our resurrected Jesus said to his disciples? He spoke of peace:

On the evening of that day, the first day of the week, the doors being shut where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, "*Peace* be with you." (John 20:19, RSV)

Finally, of the many, many references to "peace" in the writings of St. Paul, let me lift up but one. The Apostle teaches that peace is one of the fruits of the Spirit:

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, *peace*, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. (Galatians 5:22-23, RSV)

I lift up these other passages — the happy passages about peace — because this tug-of-war about peace illustrates a general theme about Biblical interpretation: that is, the Bible interprets itself. That is how classical Bible interpretation goes. Any one passage of scripture must be understood in light

of other passages of scripture. It is not right to lift up one passage and bang people over the head with that passage. Instead, each passage must somehow take into account the whole flow of the Bible with the chief point being the story of Jesus.

So, in this evening's reading, Jesus says that he has not come to bring peace, but rather a sword. And yet, he *has* come to bring peace. He says so at other points in the Bible. Both sides are true, but both sides must take the other into account.

Likewise, in this evening's passage, Jesus gives his hard saying about hating one's own family. He starts this hard saying by speaking of fathers and sons:

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father...
(Matthew 10:35, RSV)

I am a father. It is a hard thing for me to imagine my sons Sam and David being set *against* me. I certainly hope things never come to that! But the hard truth in this saying is that if push comes to shove and a choice must be made, my sons must prefer Jesus to me. And really, that is what I would want.

I think we can get a hint about a more gentle reading of this evening's passage by referring to St. Luke's version of the same saying. His version goes this way:

If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and *even his own life*, he cannot be my disciple.
(Luke 14:26, RSV)

Here we see that father and mother, wife and children and so on, are placed in good company: they are placed alongside *ourselves*. Jesus says that if one does not hate "even his own life," that one cannot be His disciple. I think this puts a new slant on things. It seems to add up to saying that the best path available to me to take good care of *myself* is to first of all, walk with Jesus with full integrity.

Likewise, the best path available to me to take good care of my loved ones is to try to lead them to Jesus. We must never give up on that path. But in the end, we ourselves must prefer Jesus. If our loved ones turn away from Jesus, we must not turn away with them. Our loyalty to our loved ones must not exceed our loyalty to Jesus. That is not going to help anyone, for us to turn away from Jesus. Jesus does not deserve that, and to turn away from him is to turn toward madness. It is to deny reality. It is to believe that Jesus is resurrected and is king of all creation, and yet to suppose that it is not so. It is to suppose that the world would be better off without this good Jesus. That

would be awful. That would be to abandon both them and ourselves to a much sadder world.

So, this evening's passage calls for loyalty to Jesus above all else — above even our loved ones, above even our own lives. But we can consent to this because the overall meaning of Jesus is the Gloria sung by the Christmas angels so long ago and repeated in the Church to this very day:

Glory to God in the highest and peace to his people on earth.

That is the meaning of Jesus, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.