

Midweek Lenten Vespers
St. Matthew 10:32-42
March 21st, 2018
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Who Loses His Life for My Sake Will Find It

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

This text poses a problem for a lot of people. What is our Lord + Jesus saying? Did He just say that He did *not* come to bring peace? Is that not what the Lord + Jesus is all about—peace? Does not what the Lord + Jesus say here fly in the face of everything that the world knows about Him? Yes, it absolutely does! The reason being is that the world is wrong in its assessment of our Lord + Jesus. The world has made the Lord + Jesus out to be something that He is not.

They have made Him out to be the big peacemaker. The One Who makes everybody get along, so that there is no more fighting or dissension. Now, there is nothing wrong with getting along with your fellowman. In fact, we *should* love our neighbor as ourselves, even as we learn from the second table of the Law. The problem is (and this is why this sort of thinking is so dangerous, is because it appears to be something good and wholesome, but) it turns our attention from what is true peace. True peace is not just being nice to your neighbor. Having peace does not just mean do not fight, do not go to war, and so on. True peace is the peace that exists because sinners realize their need for a Savior and trust that their sins are forgiven in Him. This kind of peace is an eternal peace. This kind of peace involves the sacrifice of Christ for our sins. Peace involves having our sin paid for by Christ's death on the cross. Peace involves being justified with God through faith in His Son + Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Peace means being forgiven by God the Father for His Son Jesus' sake.

This is why the Lord + Jesus says; "*He did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*" The Jews were looking for some sort of earthly peace. The problem is that what the world means by peace, and what Holy Scripture means by peace are two different things. When the world says, "let there be peace on Earth it means, "let's not fight anymore"; or, "Can't we all just get along;" or, "Let's not have any more war;" or, "Let's get rid of firearms and then there will be no more killing." But this kind of peace is not the peace that is spoken of in the Bible. The peace that Christ would have for us is not the kind of earthly peace that does not last, but the eternal peace that comes from knowing that one's sins are forgiven; the eternal peace that declares to us that we have been saved from sin, death, and the devil; the eternal peace that promises to us an eternal home in Heaven. This is the kind of peace that Christ brings—a heavenly, eternal peace.

The Jews however, and sadly a lot of people in this world today, are looking for that earthly peace which will not last. And that is the *only* kind of peace that they are looking for, as if the true eternal peace did not matter. This earthly peace, where men do not fight, but everyone gets along, is not the kind of peace that the Lord + Jesus came to bring. He came to bring something more substantial, something that lasts forever, and not something that can fly away at a moment's notice. He came to bring us Himself. He came to offer up Himself in our place, as the *only* means of salvation.

The Lord + Jesus is the One and only Savior. We like to hear that He is our One and only Savior. We like to hear that our Lord + Jesus is the only way into Heaven; that apart from Him and His keeping of the Law on our behalf, and His sacrifice of death on the cross, there is no salvation. We like to hear that our Lord + Jesus did this for us poor, miserable sinners. We like hearing that our sins are forgiven, not because of something we did, or have to do, but they are forgiven freely, and abundantly forgiven, by our One and only Savior + Jesus Christ. On account of this, we willingly sacrifice our will to do what the Lord would have us do. We willingly lose our life (the life that the world would have us live) for an eternal life with our Lord + Jesus and all the saints in Heaven.

However, the world and our sinful flesh, do not like to hear that the Lord + Jesus is the only way into Heaven. They do not want to be told that all salvation has been wrapped up in + Jesus Christ alone, and that no more works are necessary for salvation. They do not want to hear that no other religion, but Christianity, is the true religion. They want to believe that there are many, if not at least a few ways, to eternal peace. But there is only one way to eternal peace, and that way is faith in the Lord + Jesus Christ alone. This is why our Lord + Jesus says; "*He came to bring a sword.*" That sword is the sword of His holy Word, which divides between those who hear His Word and believe that what He says is true, and those who reject His Word as false.

Now this Word divides people in a couple of ways: First, it divides those out who flat out reject Christ, the Church, and everything else that has to do with Christianity. But secondly, this word also divides out those who want a part in their salvation—the works-righteousness of the papists, the synergism of all the Reformed denominations, and the co-mingling of the Law and Gospel by all the moralists. All these people seek a part in their salvation. Some say that we have to do certain works in order to have the forgiveness of the Lord + Jesus, just like the works-righteous papists. Some say that yes indeed, Christ did save all of mankind by grace as a free gift apart from works, but now we have to prove that we have that free gift by performing certain self-prescribed good works, just like the synergists. And then you have the moralists who turn the Lord + Jesus into some sort of new Lawgiver, whose example we must follow otherwise He will not love us.

All of these are centered in the Law, and it is these Law-oriented philosophies that Christ has come to kill and destroy with the sword of the Gospel. The Lord + Jesus comes to divide and conquer all that would destroy the saving Word of the Gospel by adding their own works onto His. The Lord + Jesus does not need us adding our pitiful works onto His perfect works. That is like lumping a pile of mud onto a beautiful wedding cake. No sane, rational person would ever think of doing that, but for some reason, we keep thinking that we need to add our works to the works of Christ. He, however, tells us that we should lose our lives in order to gain them. He means that we should give up our way of saving ourselves apart from His works and cling to Him alone. But praise be to our Lord + Jesus, because He comes to cut off from us all the works that we think we have to do with His sword of the Word, so that all we are left with is His works of salvation for us. He does this by preaching and the administration of the Sacraments; through the work of the Holy Ghost.

Christ does not want us looking in ourselves for our salvation. He wants us looking at Him and His sacrifice for us on the cross. He does not want us looking for peace in things that do not last. He wants us looking for the eternal peace that He bought for us with His own flesh and blood. And He

does not want us to be offended by that sacrifice. He wants us to lose our life (our will and our self-perceived merits) so that we might have an abundant life in Him and with Him.

We show that we are offended by Christ's once and for all sacrifice on the cross, whenever we try to do anything to prove to ourselves our own salvation by our works and merits. The eternal sacrifice of the One, True Lamb has already been made. Our salvation has been completely bought by His blood. There is nothing more that we need to do. It is given to us freely, out of His great love for us and for His Father in Heaven. This sacrifice is complete there is nothing more that we can do to add to this sacrifice to make it better—not our works, not our feelings, not our emotions, nor anything else we may want to add to it. This here is our salvation—Christ hanging lifeless on a tree. There in the crucifix is our eternal peace. There is our sins forgiven. There is our eternal life and salvation won for us. In faith we cling to this cross, for we know that it gives eternal peace to all those who believe.

This sacrifice brings us eternal peace and comfort, because in it we know that our salvation is sure, and we can have all confidence that the promises that we have received in our Holy Baptism have truly been given to us. And we can take comfort that when we do sin, we have a mediator Who fights for us, Who kills our enemies and our accusers—the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh—with His sword of truth—the sword of His holy Word. These three—the unholy trinity—scoff at this sacrifice of Christ. They belittle it; make it seem of little or no importance. They do this to destroy our faith in this sacrifice. They do this to destroy our peace. They get us looking inside ourselves, and lead us into puffed up pride, or sorrow and despair over our unfulfilled lives.

Do not let them take your true peace! Peace has to be fought for, for peace cannot exist without a battle. But even the fighting is not done by us, the war for true peace was accomplished on the cross, and the battles that we face each day that we are in this sinful, worm-bag of a body, are fought by the Holy Ghost. He fights to keep us in the one, true, peace by preaching to us the Holy Word. When we stop listening to the Word of God, or think that we know it well enough, that is when false notions and ideas come creeping into our minds, and we lose that true peace, which the Holy Ghost desires us to hear. This is why we surround ourselves with God's Word, to keep the peace that Christ has won for us, to be reminded over against this sinful flesh that keeps on wanting to seek out on its own and its own salvation, that Christ has once and for all conquered sin, death and the devil, and has won for us eternal peace and gives us that peace through the working of the Holy Ghost in the means of grace.

This is why we come to this holy house to hear God's Word and participate in His Sacraments. It is why we carry the promises preached and shared in the Word and Sacraments with us as we go out into the world around us, so that this one, true, eternal, heavenly, peace that comes from + Jesus Christ alone, may be proclaimed in all the world as we carry it with us on our lips and in our hearts. And by this the world shall deny themselves take up their cross and follow Christ as the One and only Savior, that they may find and have true and everlasting peace, even as we do now. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo gloria!