

GOSPEL LESSON: MATTHEW 10:34-42

34 “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
35 For I have come to turn “‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — 36 a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ 37 “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. 40 “He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”

PRAYER OF THE DAY

O God, you have prepared joys beyond understanding for those who love you. Pour into our hearts such love for you that, loving you above all things, we may obtain your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

VERSE OF THE DAY

Alleluia. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. Alleluia.
(Mark 8:34b)

SERMON TEXT:

Matthew 10 contains words which Jesus spoke to His disciples as He sent them out into the towns of Israel. It’s an interesting read. Jesus tells them, “*I’m sending you out like sheep among wolves.* (v16)” He lets them in on a glimpse of the future which promises hatred, flogging, being dragged before rulers and authorities, and even death (v17-23). As we heard last week, He also encourages them, reminding them that these are only temporal realities and we ultimately remain in the hands of a loving God who not only has power in temporal matters but guides us into an eternity with him (v24-33). These words, along those of our Verse of the Day this week, have given birth to what is called the theology of the Cross in Lutheran circles. Suffering, trial, and tribulation will be part of the life of the Christian, even as it was part of the life of our Savior. Even crazier still, it can serve a very good purpose! So, many a Lutheran theologian has concluded, **NO CROSS, NO CHRISTIAN!**

I think this teaching is probably one of those that our world today struggles with. To be 100% honest this is a teaching my own human flesh and blood struggles with. I’m reminded of a well-known scene from the movie *A Few Good Men*, which I was shocked to learn was now 28 years old (1992). Tom Cruise’s character is interrogating Jack Nicholson’s character in court and as the exchange becomes more and more heated Cruise blurts out “I want the truth!” to which Nicholson fires back, “You can’t handle the truth!” Today, Jesus drops a truth bomb which, in truth, is pretty hard to handle. “*Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn “‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”*

So what is Jesus saying here? Is it okay when families fight like cats and dogs? Is the social unrest of our world today inevitable and simply something we should all lean into? After all Jesus came to bring a sword, right!?! Wrong!! Jesus is not a war monger who came to destroy peace in fact, the angels announced the Jesus did come to bring peace, real peace between us and God and not the earthly peace we so often want Him to bring and in our sin, fail to live.

Ah but then now we begin to see it. The idol Jesus is getting at here in this statement. Who is first in your life? What do you really want? Oh, we are always pretty quick to say God but then reality begins to settle in on our sinful natures. *Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* Mom, Dad, Children, Self these are not evil in and of themselves. God instituted families and wants it to go well with us, even combining both ideas in the Fourth Commandment. But idols can be formed even from the very best things in life if they are placed before God and His Word.

So tell your spouse they will always play second fiddle to Christ. It just doesn't have the same romantic ring to it now does it. Stick to your guns with your kids and tell them you really don't care what the other kids are doing, you and your house are going to serve the Lord get ready to watch some fireworks that burn hotter and brighter than the finale on the fourth of July. And if those thoughts make you hesitate even for a millisecond ask the final question. Are you hesitant to do that because they are the idols in your life or because deep down you just really don't want to deal with the weird moments that standing with God and His word can bring, which of course means the real idol is you!

We are begin to understand **NO CROSS, NO CHRISTIAN!** a little bit more now. I need Jesus! I need the grace and the mercy poured out in abundance at the cross for sinners because I am numbered among them. For the times I have failed as a child or a parent, for the times I fail as a spouse, for the times I simply fail at being a caring and Christian human being. Because I am simply more interested in me than the many around me, Jesus sets Himself aside, picks up His cross and follows after the will and way of His heavenly Father. Faces the scorn and mockery I would take a hard pass on and utters, *"not my will but yours be done (Luke 22:42)."* In the cross, we come face to face with forgiveness and frankly with a love that we find difficult to reproduce. Produced perfectly for us and for our salvation. Without this, well then what's the point? So God urges us to keep Him and His cross in view, yes, of first importance in our lives because it is, even though the world would cry foul as God would tear down long established idols.

Of course, as in Christ all of that takes place, life begins to look very different. Me, Myself, and I willing take a less important place in life as I begin to contemplate the needs of others and not simply earthly needs, though Jesus certainly speaks of a cup of cool water in our lesson today but more and most importantly their spiritual needs will sit front and center. Yeah I know, don't talk religion or politics unless you're looking for a fight. But that's bad advice for it would seek to pull Christ from the throne, even lumps Him together with flawed and failing human beings and their ideologies. No instead, even if it means a sword swings at me, even if it should divide houses and pit parent against child, God's Word is simply too important so silence and the truths it contains to precious to punt. Not only spouse and children, friends and neighbors, but even my life and limb all play second fiddle to Christ and the forgiveness He has won for. What did he say? *Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

Easy? Well of course not idols will abound in life for us and for others. It's why God sends people out and encourages them, us to pick up crosses and follow Him, to focus us all others on the cross and everything it means that we might peer through it to find purpose and meaning in a world that often lacks both. More importantly, that we might peer at it and through it to see God's love for us, the forgiveness we need, the motivation to hold him out to others. *40 "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. 41 Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. 42 And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."*

So, I think Matthew 10 is an interesting read as Jesus calls the 12 to go out and spread the Word. As He calls us to do the same. If we listen closely, we might quickly conclude that He should find someone else. But then, dear Christian, do not forget **WE ARE WORTHY ONLY THROUGH CHRIST AND HIS CROSS.** While the prospect of a cross of our own may seem like pure lunacy to our sinful flesh, **WE FOLLOW HIM AS HE PROVIDES THE STRENGTH TO PICK OWN CROSS AND CHASE AFTER HIM** demolishing idols, mine and others along the way. No wonder many a Lutheran theologian has penned it, **NO CROSS, NO CHRISTIAN!** Amen.