

Matthew 10:34-42 – Pentecost 5 – Take Up Your Cross – June 28, 2026

+In Nomine Iesu+

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus says some surprising things. But remember the context. We have been in this same chapter for the last two weeks. This is Jesus' Missional Discourse. He sends out the Twelve with the command to preach, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."

And as he prepares His Disciples, he warns them of the opposition that they will face—even in their own families. And he characterizes this as a real conflict. He says, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

It is true. The Word of God is "living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

Now, maybe this doesn't sound much like the Jesus we hear about in popular culture. Many think of Jesus as a man of peace with a big beard and a "coexist" bumper sticker on His Volkswagen Bus. For them, Jesus came with a message of love—and love never confronts or contradicts. It's easy. And Jesus would never tell us we are wrong.

Let me push back against this right away. Remember what Jesus says about love. In John 14, He says, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." And in John 15, He says, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends."

And think of St. Paul in 1 Corinthians 13, "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth."

Jesus' preaching, if we are listening, is not the simple universal message of tolerance and affirmation that some would have you believe. Jesus says that He didn't come to put an end to all human conflict, rather He came to cause a little.

Jesus has been known to flip over a few tables. He calls out the sins of His own Disciples. He confronts political and religious leaders. And the trouble He causes will enrage His hearers so much, everything will end at a Roman cross. "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword."

I received a brochure in the mail some time ago from a local so-called Christian group advocating for peace. Although peace, as they define it in their brochure, appears to be something like John Lennon's song *Imagine*. The song is something along the lines of an atheist, communist, Hinduism—if such things can actually *come together*. If you know it, I hope you can see through it. The song wants to get rid of religion. There is no heaven. No hell. Everyone just lives for today. Yeah, that will work.

Such sentimentalism fails to address the fundamental issues of peace. Now, I am in favor of a peaceful evening—no commitments—with a good cup of tea or a glass of wine, and a good book. I just finished Agatha Christie's *Endless Night*. It was excellent—and a little disturbing. She understands the human heart very well—and the violence within. She shows us what sin looks like when it is unbridled.

And so, we need to do some work as we talk about peace. It is not a word to be tossed about so thoughtlessly. And to get it right, we need the words of Jesus—even the difficult ones. And when Jesus says something surprising, like in our Gospel reading, He wants us to listen.

Let's back up about thirty years. As the holy angels announce the Nativity of our Lord, they reveal the significance of the incarnation. They sing out in praise words we still sing most every Sunday, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

In light of their proclamation, we must at least say, that in some sense, Jesus came to bring peace. But this is a notoriously difficult passage to translate. Very literally, it says, "peace among men of goodwill." But what does that mean?

The Old King James Version assumes that peace comes to all men through Jesus' first advent. And goodwill is something parallel to peace, when it says, "on earth peace, goodwill toward men." But that's not quite what Luke is saying.

The ESV, our Bible translation, is better, "peace among those with whom he is pleased." The goodwill of this angelic announcement is God's good news for His repentant and faith-filled people. Remember that the mission of both Jesus and John the Baptist begins with, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

And so, this passage probably means something like what the Psalmist prays in Psalm 106:4, "Remember me, O LORD, when you show favor to your people; help me when you save them." The angels announce peace, specifically peace with God, that is good for the people of God, repentant, and full of faith, chosen according to His will. And this is an invitation to be the people of God.

So divine peace is not the reward for those who have human goodwill. There won't be peace just because we decide to be nice—and more accepting—for a while. Peace is not universally bestowed everywhere, even at Advent. Rather, at the birth of the Savior, God's peace rests with those He has chosen in accord with His good pleasure. Peace is the possession of those who repent and believe.

And then we must define exactly what peace is. The peace of the angelic announcement in Scripture is the end of hostility between us and God. And this is amazing news and it meets our most fundamental need—more than the end of conflict in the Middle East. And more than a quiet evening without any interruptions. These kinds of peace are fine gifts—and sometimes a little hard to find—but they are incomplete apart from peace with our God.

And the Prophet Jeremiah warns us today in our Old Testament reading that those who claim to announce peace, where there is no peace, peace without the resolution of our problem with God, are false prophets and their words are to be rejected. We won't have peace on earth apart from the work of Christ. Peace without the Cross, without Christ, isn't peace at all.

In Ephesians 2, St. Paul says it this way, "For he himself is our peace...reconciling us to God through the cross, thereby killing the hostility." So peace is given as a gift by grace, because the wrath of God was poured out on Jesus for our sake. Peace is earned at the cross—which becomes important in our text today as well. But not everyone is interested.

Many live as enemies of the cross, as Paul tells us. And it is their rejection that leads to division.

Earlier in this same chapter, Jesus sent the 12 Disciples to bestow His peace on the houses and individuals that received them and the message of Christ. Although, they could also withhold that peace from those who rejected the Word—those who were unworthy. And this seems to be the force of Jesus' comments here.

And so, we understand Jesus—in light of this context—to mean the kingdom of God will be divisive. Because of the condition of sinful human hearts—and the unchanging nature of Jesus' message—which calls for repentance and faith—the inevitable outcome for many will be conflict and strife. Jesus will offend those who prefer to keep their sin—to believe their lies—to live as they please.

Some will hear Christ's call to faith and discipleship, and by God's gracious action through the Gospel will repent and believe and follow. Others will hear the same call, but due to their own ingrained sin and stubbornness, will reject Christ who summons them to a real peace and a real salvation. The same sun that melts wax hardens clay.

And, as we hear, there will be implications here for families, the most fundamental unit of society. Families will become separated from one another because one will confess Christ, and another will deny Him. And both that confession and that denial will have eternal consequences.

Not everyone will be happy with your confession of faith in Christ. Even more will be unhappy because your confession is faithful to the whole council of God in the Scriptures. People in your own families might see you as intolerant and narrow-minded. They might think that you are a religious fundamentalist.

Faithfulness to Jesus means we are out of touch with our world on all kinds of issues. Most importantly, the world will not love our exclusive claims for Jesus Christ, as the one name given under heaven by which we must be saved. He is the only way to the Father. He is the only way to the forgiveness of sins. He is the only way to eternal life.

But we will also clash with the world on human sexuality, marriage rights, financial greed, religious pluralism, what is good for our children, what is good for our nation, what life is all about, what we should do with our free time, what happens after death, and even the definition of peace. And I could keep going.

Standing with Jesus, with what He says about everything, will bring a response from people. Public confession—which Jesus calls for here—will *bring a response from people*. Some will ignore you. Some will reject you. Some will hate you. And all of this might even happen in your own family.

The public nature of discipleship will test the Disciples' confession. And the private nature of discipleship will test the Disciples' absolute allegiance to Christ. And the same is true for us.

There are two last things I want you to notice in this reading. And this first point may be the most important point in this passage. Jesus repeats the construction three times. Look at the interesting way Jesus tells His followers to follow Him.

“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

Discipleship in Jesus means an unqualified supremacy over our lives. In a return to the concept of worthiness from earlier in this chapter, Jesus calls us to follow in His way first—above the demands—or the sins—of the family. This is the only possible choice—as hard as it is.

But notice also the reward for the simple ways in which we align with the way of Jesus Christ. And this is my second point. As the Twelve go out with the mission of Christ—to receive them was to receive Christ—and to receive Christ is to receive the Father. Even the simple act of offering a cup of water will be greatly rewarded.

But this is not just a cup of water to the homeless guy on the corner—as nice as that is. The “little ones” here are the Twelve. The cold water is offered to support the Disciples as messengers of Jesus Christ.

Remember that they were to take nothing with them on their mission. Their hearers received the peace of God, which rested on them as they believed. And their response of support is an act of faith. God rewards the simple ways we come alongside the purposes of the kingdom of God. Our offerings and service to the kingdom of God say something about our discipleship. Showing our solidarity with Jesus Christ—even in simple ways—in a world going the opposite direction—is a practice God values.

You have probably figured out by now that I want you to think of yourself as a child of God. You are a disciple—a follower of Jesus Christ. These things define us—more than our community—more than our schools—more than our own last names.

We are to follow Jesus into the rejection of the cross. We are to hold fast our confession in the Church, in the world, and in the family. Not everyone is going to like it. Discipleship is tough. But don’t quit. Don’t be discouraged or bored or indifferent. Don’t let the persecution or rejection of others cause you to turn away. Don’t let the views of the world cause you to doubt. Don’t entertain them. The rewards of discipleship—of following Jesus—are eternal.

And with the Twelve, look to Christ. Listen to Christ. Find real life in Him—in His Word—and following in His ways. Do what He says. Even when He says tough things—surprising things. Because there in the cross—in that place of ultimate violence—we find peace. Peace with God.

And it is as Jesus says, “Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” In the name of Jesus. Amen.

+Soli Deo Gloria+