



SERMONS THAT WORK

Pentecost 10 – Proper 15 Year C

The Cost of True Peace

[RCL]: Isaiah 5:1-7; Psalm 80:1-2, 8-18; Hebrews 11:29-12:2; Luke 12:49-56

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth?” Jesus asks and then answers, “No, I tell you, but rather division!”

The cost of following Jesus comes into focus as Jesus, the Prince of Peace, says, “From now on five in one household will be divided, three against two and two against three; they will be divided: father against son and son against father... mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

Jesus experienced this separation himself as his own family was torn by his ministry. Though Jesus’ mother Mary would be with him at the cross, the Gospels tell us that there was a time when his family wanted to bring him home as they wondered if Jesus hadn’t gone crazy. And he is well aware that this is just the beginning of the ways that the path he offers will divide many, even as a new community comes into being.

Six chapters further into Luke’s Gospel, Peter will say, “Look, we have left our homes and followed you.” And Jesus will respond, “Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children, for the sake of the kingdom of God, who will not get back very much more in this age, and in the age to come eternal life.” Jesus wants those who follow him to understand not just the rewards of this new life, but also the cost they will pay. This is the price of true peace.

The word for peace in Hebrew is “shalom.” Not just the absence of war, shalom means wholeness, well-being, and health, as well as what we think of as peace. All of those meanings are present in shalom. This is God’s peace which passes our understanding. Shalom is a truer, deeper peace. That promise of God’s peace was part of Jesus’ life and message all along.

Jesus often sent those he healed on their way by saying, “Go in peace.” Jesus makes them whole, healthy, peaceful, gives them well-being, and then sends them away in that deeper peace, called shalom. In his final word of peace in this Gospel, Jesus appears to his disciples after the crucifixion. It was the first time they saw Jesus after they had betrayed him and run in fear to avoid arrest. Jesus avoids any talk of all that has

happened between them and says, "Peace be with you." Jesus, God's own son, was a man of peace who brought shalom, God's peace, to broken hearts and lives. And yet, this Sunday he says that he came to bring division.

Jesus longs to bring a deeper health and wholeness to our world and the cost of that process will be division. The greater peace will come at the cost of lesser peace. The peace of God brings an end to the false peace and, as Jesus says, pits family members against each other.

Lesser peace looks like a family distorting their lives to enable an abusive father's rages to inflict emotional and physical abuse while never letting those around them know that life at home is anything but ideal. Lesser peace is an eldest child falling into a prescription drug addiction, moving to heroin that consumes the child and then the family as the denial continues until it is far too late and the deadly addiction is unstoppable. The signs of an affair are everywhere, but it is easier to pretend not to see them than to face the fracture already present in the marriage. The examples go on and on. We see problems. We say nothing and so try to keep the peace.

This is just in the family, but the same problem is also writ large. Across much of the history of our nation, the lesser peace treated formerly enslaved persons and their descendants as less than fully human. The Civil Rights Movement divided families precisely because the lesser peace came with no cost to those in power. It can seem tempting to want to return to the simple life with Andy and Opie Taylor in the fictional televised world of *Mayberry* without recalling that in that same time, if not in that fictional place, not all shared the same opportunities, the same rights. And we still have a long way to go before all of God's children experience the wholeness and well-being that are the shalom found in the Reign of God.

Jesus wants no lesser peace to take the place of true and lasting peace. Until the abuse stops and the drug use is addressed compassionately and firmly, how can there be peace in the family? Unless the affairs stop, how can there be peace in the marriage? But all too often we grab hold of a lesser peace as tightly a security blanket. Rather than having the courage to speak the truth in love, we remain silent, preventing the possibility of real peace.

Jesus continually reached out to the outcast in his own society. Jesus upset the status quo and eventually was killed for rocking the societal boat a little too much. Jesus did bring God's peace to the earth, a true and lasting peace, but the price was division. Throughout history, there are thousands of examples of people settling for a lesser peace when God was calling them to something more. The peace of God brings an end to the false peace and so can easily pit even family members against each other.

Living into the new life in Jesus which is promised in baptism can and will change your behavior and your attitude over time if you take it seriously. Taking the promises made in baptism should change our lives. Yet, this is in tension with a desire to avoid conflict and so to preserve a lesser peace. The cost of accepting these accommodations and compromises is that this prevents our breaking through to the deeper peace

waiting for us. Shalom, God's true and lasting peace, calls us to stand against injustice. Any time we preserve the peace at someone or some group's expense, we trade God's shalom for a poor imitation.

Where have we become accommodated to peace for ourselves at the price of peace for someone else? What would it look like to speak out against a lesser peace in your family, our community, and our world? When you do so, it may divide a household two against three or mother against daughter. But if the Holy Spirit is speaking truth to your heart, the Spirit is leading you from a lesser peace to true and lasting peace. The cost will be high, so high that most of us shrink back and become lesser men and women. We let coworkers steal from the company, friends cheat on their spouses, brothers fall deeper into drug use. We fail to stand with those being bullied, with neighbors being denied human rights. We do all of this in the hope of keeping the peace and instead fall short of the deep peace Jesus wants for us, our families, our friends and our places of work.

The real question is not why did Jesus teach that following him could be divisive, but why does our faith never disturb anyone? In what ways are we holding back? How should we be bolder instead of remaining silent? The gift of speaking the truth in love is not the division we fear, but the deep peace for which we long.

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