

Pentecost 10 / August 14, 2022

Luke 12:49-53

“Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth?”

Peace on Earth?

Do you think Jesus came to give peace on earth? You don't have to raise your hand, I'm sure that's exactly what we expect. We have plenty of scripture to back up that expectation. Centuries prior to His birth, Isaiah sang of Him saying, “For to us a child is born, to us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder, and His name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and of peace there will be no end.” Micah, who pinpointed Bethlehem as His birthplace, also prophesied peace, saying, “He shall be great to the ends of the earth. And He shall be their peace.” Luke's gospel begins with angels singing, “Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom He is pleased.” Why does Jesus say He did not come to give peace on earth, but rather division?

Peace was the purpose for which Jesus came, but it was not an earthly peace, but a heavenly peace. He came to make peace between His Father in heaven and humanity. He made peace between God and humanity by the blood of His cross, through which He atoned for human sin and took away the guilt of sin for all who believe. St. Paul wrote in the letter to the Colossians, “For in Him all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.” Jesus made peace through the blood of His cross. Jesus offers peace with His heavenly Father for all to receive in the gospel, by which He is proclaimed as Saviour and through which, people are called to faith in Him. Jesus gives peace with His heavenly Father to all who believe and are baptised in His name. He is our peace!

Jesus came to make peace between God and human beings. Jesus offers peace for all to receive in the gospel, but not everyone wants to receive His peace and so there is division. Consider the reception Jesus received from the religious leaders of Israel. Despite the power of His words and the powerful signs with which He showed the truth of His words, they refused to believe. They said He deceived the people. They claimed He did His miracles not by the Spirit of God, but by the power of the devil. Even His own family did not believe in Him. At one point they came to seize Him and take Him away, because they thought He was out of His mind. Not everyone wants to receive the peace Jesus gives and as a result there is division among people; even in families, as there was in Jesus' earthly family. The problem is not with Jesus, or the peace He made and brings. The problem is with humans, which is where the problem began, when the first people turned away from God in the garden.

Not everyone wants Jesus. Not everyone wants the peace He brings. Not everyone thinks there is a problem that needs repair. Some people say sin, suffering and death are simply the way of the world. Even people who acknowledge a problem with sin, don't necessarily see Jesus as the answer. People have their own answers. An alternate translation to the angel's message at Jesus' birth is, “Peace on earth to those on whom His favour rests.” God offers and extends His favour to everyone in Christ, but not everyone wants His favour to rest on them. Some people brush it off, as they would snow, freshly fallen on their shoulder. In the prologue to his gospel St. John said, “He came to His own people, but His own people did not receive Him.” Not everyone receives Jesus and so there is division among people. But for those who receive Him, who believe in His name, there is peace in heaven and peace on earth. Peace with God in time and for eternity through faith in His name.

We may think of war and peace as polar opposites, which they are in terms of their effects. War is hostility, violence and death. Peace is security, safety and life. Nevertheless, war is the well trod path to peace. There is peace when the war is over. Peace comes through war. When the issues that led to war are dealt with and eradicated, there is peace. Jesus came to make peace between God and humanity. He would do this ultimately through the violence of the cross. Jesus made peace between God and humanity, first by sharing in our humanity, living as one of us and fulfilling the law in our place. The author of Hebrews says Jesus was tempted in every way we are, yet without sin. Jesus made war against sin by resisting its desires. Jesus made war against the devil, by resisting his temptations in the wilderness. Jesus struggled with Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane the night of His betrayal. The struggle was so fierce that His sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground. Jesus' greatest battle was His suffering on the cross.

In our gospel Jesus says, "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" The baptism to which He referred was the ultimate battle He would wage in the three hours He hung on the cross. Spiritual warfare? Whatever spiritual battles we wage are a drop in the ocean compared to the war Jesus waged on the cross. Jesus engaged in the ultimate spiritual warfare as He suffered on the cross. Jesus made war on sin, the devil and death by paying the debt of sin which we owe God's justice. Jesus owed nothing to sin, death or the devil. They are parasites feeding off the break in humanity's relationship with God. In the end, He will cast them all into the lake of fire. Jesus suffered the righteous judgement human sin deserved, in order to fulfill God's righteousness and earn forgiveness for all who believe. In 2 Corinthians Paul writes, "God made Him who had no sin to be a sin offering so that in Him we would become the righteousness of God." The apostle John wrote in his third letter, "He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world." He is our peace in relationship with the heavenly Father. In Him we have forgiveness.

He is our peace. In Him we are reconciled to the heavenly Father. Nevertheless, there is division among people. People are divided, because not everyone wants to receive Jesus and the peace He brings. People are divided, because not everyone sees Jesus as Saviour. Some see Him as a teacher, but nothing more. Jesus certainly was a teacher. He had a wisdom greater than Solomon, the wisest man in the bible. But more than a wise man, Jesus is the Son of God from eternity. More than a great teacher, Jesus is the Saviour who died for our sins and was raised for our justification. History and the grave are filled with great teachers and people who followed their teachings. Jesus is the way of eternal life. He said, "I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me." Jesus taught the way of salvation through faith in Him. Unlike any other human, Jesus backed up His words by dying for our sins and rising from the grave. Jesus teaches the wisdom of salvation through faith in His name.

Some people believe Jesus is the only way to the Father and other people reject it. Some people think that is crazy. Some people think people who believe that are crazy. Some people think that those exclusive beliefs have no place in a diverse post-modern, progressive society. There is division because of Jesus. There was division from the beginning. In the first century, Jewish Christians experienced persecution from fellow Jews, who refused to believe Jesus is Messiah. Gentile Christians suffered persecution from other Gentiles, who refused to believe in Jesus as their God and Saviour and continued to worship the gods and goddesses of their ancestors. There is division between those who believe and those who don't believe. But to those who do believe in Him as Saviour, Jesus brings the peace of a good conscience in relationship with God.

We may experience division because of our faith in Jesus from our increasingly non-Christian world and anti-Christian society. We may experience division even in our own families, because of our faith in Jesus. In the world we have trouble, but we take heart because Jesus has overcome the world. Jesus warned of trouble, trial and suffering because of faith in His name. He warned, not to discourage us, but so we would be prepared and remain steadfast in His word. In his first letter St. Peter wrote, "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as through something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may rejoice and be glad when His glory is revealed." The peace Jesus brings causes division, but for all who hold to Him in faith, even in the face of suffering and persecution, there is peace. There is the peace of good conscience in relation to God in time and the promise of eternal peace in His presence when He returns, makes all things new and calls us to share in His resurrection. God in His grace, keep us to that day. In Jesus' name. Amen