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St. John's & Immanuel Lutheran Churches – Kimball, NE & Burns, WY

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8A)

July 2, 2017

Text: Matthew 10:34–42

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

One of the great responsibilities given to the Church is to send out missionaries into the world. Do we not hear frequent appeals to support the mission of the Church in foreign lands? Those appeals are starting to change as we now have to think about sending pastors and missionaries to our American cities. For example, the city of Philadelphia, which has a population of 1.5 million people, only has 3 LCMS congregations! One of which is served by a semi-retired pastor. Cheyenne/Scottsbluff-Gering has that many congregations with a population of 62,000/23,000. During the 2016 Spring pastors' conference, we heard an appeal to support the missionary work in Philadelphia.

Our Church sends out appeals to send men to the seminary because our congregations need pastors to preach, teach, and administer the sacraments. And we do need to send men to the seminary! Our clergy roster is aging; within 10 years a sizeable portion of our current pastors will retire. Reasonable projections suggest a shortage of pastors in the near future. The needs are real at home and abroad.

What I don't hear so much about is that preaching Jesus and His precious Gospel will generate a world of conflict. Yet that's exactly what the Lord Jesus is teaching in today's gospel text. Matthew 10 is often called our Lord's Missionary Discourse. It began with Jesus naming His twelve apostles and giving "them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction" (vs. 1). The rest of the chapter consists of our Lord's instruction on what their apostolic work and the work of the apostolic Church will look like as it goes into the world to preach the love of Christ.

Listen to what Jesus says in vs. 35–36, "For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household." My guess is that most people don't know Jesus said these things; most certainly don't expect these things to happen on account of Jesus.

But Jesus is the reason for the conflict. Or maybe it would be better to say that conflict and division result from sinful humanity's response to Jesus. Our Lord says as much in Matthew 10:13, "And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you." If people hear and receive His message of peace, it will be given. If they reject it, peace will not come to them. It all depends on the response to Jesus.

Our task as Christians and as a redeemed Church is to proclaim Christ's kingdom in all its glory and mystery. The truth about who God is and who we are is revealed most clearly and fully in the life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our God loves this world, all the way to death and back to life again. And this world, in its corruption and bondage to sin and evil, is willing to hate even as it crucified the Lord of life and grace.

The Lord Jesus Christ – His life, preaching, death, resurrection, and ascension – defines everything for us. We interpret the world through the lens of Jesus and His justifying work of redeeming sinners. How we think, how we live, our very heart's desires are constantly being conformed to what Jesus did and does for His people. He is the heart and soul, the beginning and the end of our lives.

And that's where the division comes in. Since humanity's original sin, people want to define life on their own terms, in ways that are contrary to God's Word and will. According to our sinful flesh, we want to be our own gods. Until we are born anew into Christ's kingdom through the Gospel, we sinners live in a make-believe world, thinking we are the masters of our own destinies.

The task of Christian proclamation is to reveal God's truth and expose the falsehood of the devil, the world, and our sinful flesh. This is why preaching the whole counsel of God is often rejected with such ferocity. Christian preaching destroys the false world we create for ourselves and establishes the truth of Christ's kingdom. Christian preaching throws down our idols of human imagination and sets up the banner of Christ's truth. And so, when the Church speaks Christ's truth that exposes the fantasy world of sin, death, and the devil, the world rejects it bitterly. Christ's dividing sword is at work.

I'll give but one example of humanity's attempt to be their own god. How many of you hear, in one way or another, the idea that says, "It's my body and my life, I can do what I want it. I can eat what I want, have sex with whom I wish, spend my money as

I see fit, and so forth. This idolized individualism is engrained in our popular culture, in movies, music, literature; it's in the very air we breathe. It affects how we understand everything from money, to the economy, to sex, to our work ethic, to war, to family, you name it.

God's Word, by contrast, says that we were created in God's image in order to reflect His majesty and glory in the world. The Bible declares (I Cor. 6) that our bodies and souls are bought with the precious blood of Jesus and so we are called to glorify God in both body and soul. My life is not something I get to live as I see fit. The Lord Jesus has made an absolute claim upon my life, upon your life. This divine claim changes how we view everything including money, sex, family, war, time, leisure, culture, society, and everything else.

When the Church goes about her task of proclaiming the truth of God's Word, the fantasy world of sin, death, and the devil resists. Christ came to give peace but a sword of division often follows.

Lest you think I'm overstating the point, hear the Lord Jesus in verses 37–38, “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.” Three times Jesus sets Himself up against family, even against life itself. If you love these things more than Me, says our Lord, you are not “worthy of me.” Christian missionary preaching and devotion declares that Jesus is above all things. Everything else is subservient to Him: family, faith, finances, friends, time, all of life. Jesus is God and Lord over them all!

Our Lord's desire is not to rip families apart – setting fathers and mothers against their children, husbands against wives, in-laws against in-laws. Rather, He wants to restore them to their proper place, thus renewing their own unique honor and dignity. Family and all of life are gifts of God, to be cherished and received with joy and thanksgiving. But the gifts must never be placed above the Giver of the gifts lest they become idols of false worship and devotion.

When the Lord Jesus is loved more than father, mother, son, daughter, more than earthly life itself, all things find their proper place. The believing household is truly a blessed gift of God. Under God's grace, the believing family member will never begrudge the priority that other believing family members give to Jesus for that is where his/her heart is too. When the hearts of all family members are right with God,

the likelihood of peace and tranquility in the home is increased for they share a common devotion to Christ and His Word. All recognize the need for repentance from sin and selfishness. And all know the great freedom given when forgiveness is shared with all.

The mission of the Church is to proclaim where true peace can be found: in Christ Jesus alone. When the Trinitarian waters of baptism were splashed upon us and our families, the make-believe world of sin, death, and Satan is destroyed and we are born anew into the true, eternal life of Christ.

To be sure, we need to support the mission of the Church. Our foreign and domestic missionaries need our prayer and support. Men must be sent to the seminary, which means they need our support, financial and spiritual. But we must know that they are sent out into a world that hates Jesus and His Gospel. And we, who love and worship the Lord Jesus, also live in that same hostile world. But we also know and rejoice in the truth that the Lord Jesus loves this world. Through His Gospel, He will call, gather, and enlighten His holy Christian Church. In Christ, the peoples of our community and our world will find truth, peace, and love that satisfies to all eternity.

May the Lord bless the mission work of preaching, teaching, and administering the Sacraments here and throughout the world.

✠ In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. ✠ Amen.

Now the peace of God which surpasses all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus unto life everlasting. Amen.