Proper 8A 2020 A Sword in life but Peace after a Death

Matthew 10: 34 - 42

We don’t picture Jesus as a sword-bringer. Gentle shepherd, Loving Lord and Prince of Peace are more likely the images that come to mind. What shall we do when He denied bringing peace but that He would bring a sword?

Did the crusades of the middle ages have it right? Is this a divine command to pick up weapons and let the infidels feel the wrath of God? Are we to fight for the kingdom of heaven on earth? By no means. Peter was rebuked for picking up a sword in the Garden of Gethsemane to defend Jesus. The result of his sword swinging upon the ear of Malchus was undone by yet another of the Lords’ miracles when he put the ear that he made, back into place. It was his last miracle before his death.

The background of these challenging words helps us to see what He meant. Jesus was sending his disciples to the scattered Israelites to heal whatever ailed them and to let their peace rest upon households that received their message. No command to bring weapons.

Then He restrained their joy by their future of being rejected, persecuted and executed for His name’s sake. In this context of opposition to His words, he reminds them of what a sword does. It cuts in order to divide.

The words of Jesus do the same. They cut to the heart in revealing what goes on there. The law of God divides us from God’s holiness and glory. We have all fallen short of it. Not everyone receives this with grace and appreciation. Not everyone will want His forgiveness although desperately needing it.

So in this life, his followers will experience how divisive Jesus is. Not everyone in the family believes in him. Not everyone in the church believes the same or practices the faith the same.

On earth no peace but the painful division caused by the Lord’s sword of Truth.

Too often we have tried to make peace by agreeing with everyone. By not rocking the boat, no waves will come and everyone will be your friend. If the sin is in your own heart or making itself known in someone else, it is easier and more comfortable to avoid it, escape it and not to mention it. For without the law of God spoken to ourselves or others, how would sin be uncovered?

Isn’t it easier to put our reputation first and to forget about what Jesus said? What if we put our family first ahead of the Lord? What if we cherish anyone or thing more than Jesus?

It means forfeiting the life to come. It means we are not worthy of eternal life. To find our life in the things of this world results in being cut off from the life of God. It is a life doomed to die.

Indeed we have all fallen short of God’s glory and do not deserve to be called faith-full or one of his followers.

But peace does come. Peace comes after a death.

The death of Christ brought us peace. He came in the flesh so that we can see God. He died on the cross so that we can have life with Him.

There cannot be peace apart from the loss of life. Jesus said: …. Whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

The loss of life of the innocent Jesus made peace with His father and gave us peace that is eternal. So now we must lose our lives so that we can begin to live His life. We cannot expect peace in the world as he did not have peace in this world. Even our sinful nature wants life our way instead of God’s way. It wants to survive rather than be crucified.

But God has put it to death. God’s peace came through the loss of his own Son on the cross. From that death springs forth life where our peace was made. So in Christ Jesus, we are set free from our just penalties. We have died to the old way of life and live the life of Christ, a life of service and love to our neighbours and ourselves.

Our peace cannot be measure how we feel, how great our lives are going, or how many friends we have. Our peace came through the loss of life of our Saviour. It is certain and eternal no matter how much sorrow we feel.

Our Lord’s death we died in holy baptism. He drowned the sinful nature there and gave us real peace of being claimed by our loving Father. So if we have this peace through his death, how much more in His resurrection?

In the resurrection of Christ, we see what lies ahead for us. Because He lives so shall we. When our Lord returns and calls us from our graves, we will know his peace and rejoice that lasting peace has come in the life to come.

Christ’s people look forward with joy and confidence to what is coming. He gives us peace after we die in the life to come. It is most certainly worth the pain of the sword we now bear. His death brought us peace now and more fully in what comes next.