

Sermon 6-28-26
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Based on the Gospel for The 5th Sunday after Pentecost, Matthew 10:34-42

War And Peace

This past Wednesday and Thursday as I sat in the sessions of the national convention of our American Association of Lutheran Churches, I noticed the dates and said to myself, "Oh. It's six months until Christmas." Indeed, on Wednesday, liturgical churches like ours celebrated the birth of St. John the Baptist who was six months older than Jesus.

So, here we are on June 28th, six months after last Christmas, and a Gospel lesson quite the opposite of Christmas rolls up. For, in the familiar Christmas Gospel, didn't angels from heaven sing to the shepherds of Bethlehem "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"? (NKJV) Peace! And yet, today, we saw Jesus proclaim in Matthew 10:34, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." No peace, but a sword. That's war. So, which is it — peace or war? Or could it be both? Indeed, the English Standard Bible translation hints at "both" when it translates Luke 2:14 as, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

If we preach the Gospel, we'll see exactly how both statements are true. Gospel means Good News. The Gospel is Good News that an intractable, really bad situation has been resolved in our favor. The bad situation is that by simply being born on this earth all of us inherit a state of war with our Creator — a war which we cannot win.

The book of Genesis unequivocally tells us that the Creator of the universe created at least one specie of being in His Image — namely us. The Image of God is many things, but at the head of the list is righteousness. Our Creator is perfectly good, perfectly righteous. He not only does what is right, He is the Right; the Good; the Perfect; the source of all Righteousness. Therefore, in His Image, Yahweh designed us to perfectly reflect His perfect Goodness.

Yahweh also created us in Love. For, He is also Love. Real Love is total commitment of two parties toward each other in perfect righteousness. However, Real Love demands freedom. Unless the parties in a relationship of Love are free to walk away from each other, there can be no real commitment, no Real Love.

Therefore, when Yahweh created our first parents, He made their love for Him real by giving them the option to walk away. That's what the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was all about. Adam and Eve were not Yahweh's slaves. They were not Muslims. Every time they walked past that tree and freely ignored its fruit, they were freely affirming their Perfect Love, their perfect Commitment, to their Perfect, Loving Creator. And human existence was as it should be — perfect before a perfect Creator. Human life was as it should be — freely loved and freely loving in perfection.

However, Genesis is also clear that human existence was interfered with by an alien being, a non-human being that Genesis calls The Serpent. Interestingly, Genesis calls The Serpent a beast of the field. The ESV translation also calls the Serpent a "crafty" animal. But

the Hebrew word translated “crafty” also has the sense of being wise and prudent. What animal do we know of today that is so wise, prudent and even crafty that it can dialogue in speech with a human and make philosophical, moral and spiritual arguments? Obviously there was something quite unusual about the Serpent of Genesis chapter 3.

This Serpent seemed also to have been made in something approaching the Image of God. For, in its unrighteousness, it knew about righteousness. In its rebellion, it also knew about love and freedom. For, it deceived Eve — and Adam through Eve — into exercising their freedom to walk away from Yahweh. And this was the terrible disaster that has bound humanity ever since.

The primary consequence of Adam and Eve breaking their covenant of Love with Yahweh was that in forsaking God, they were forced to become their own gods. And thus they became “sinners” — those who are in opposition to their Creator and His perfect righteousness.

Scripture remains silent about how the Serpent became a sinner. But apparently he became the first sinner. For, Scripture does tell us that The Serpent actively seduced members of all the species of heaven, as well as Adam and Eve, into becoming sinners in rebellion against their Creator.

However, there’s a distinct difference between us and the other species. Jesus told us that the species of heaven do not reproduce like humans. And it’s human reproduction that makes the seduction of our first parents most tragic. For their Original Sin was and is transmitted to all their descendants, including us, through reproduction.

Therefore, we are all born sinners in rebellion against our Creator. The best we can do on our own is fear Yahweh. This means that we can acknowledge that Yahweh exists. We can respect and honor Him. To a certain extent we can heed Him and bring our lives in line with His righteous decrees.

However, by nature we are forced to be our own gods, defining good and evil for ourselves and acting on our definitions. And because of this, there is no way for us to regain the perfect love and righteousness of the Image of God that is necessary for any Creature to eternally dwell with Yahweh, the source of all perfect Love and Righteousness. All of us fall short of the glory of God. Therefore, without intervention on Yahweh’s part, we are all doomed to inhabit the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels as Jesus said in Matthew 25:41. This means eternal separation from our Creator who is all Love and Righteousness. And, without any love and righteousness, what will such an existence be like? It will be Original Sin to perfection — god-playing to the ultimate degree. Indeed, I invite you to look around at all the behavior around you and even at your own behavior. What would things be like if all restraint against evil were simply removed? It would be hell — far worse than anything you’ve ever experienced or ever will experience on this earth. This is the intractable, evil situation all of us are in without the Gospel of Messiah Jesus.

The Good News is that Yahweh has had compassion on us. He has intervened. He has made the impossible possible. Yahweh, the Son, known by the English name, Jesus, was miraculously conceived as a sinless human being in the womb of a virgin human woman, Mary of Nazareth. He came to redeem lost Israel. But not only Israel. He came to be a light even to the Gentile nations.

To be the Redeemer and Savior of humanity, sinless Jesus had to undo for us the Original Sin committed by Adam. He had to suffer multiple cosmic temptations and repel them all. Each temptation was designed to do one thing — to get Jesus to grasp equality with God,

just as Adam had done. In the worst temptation of them all, Jesus, the innocent one, had to endure the incredible humiliation and agony of the Roman lash and cross, all the while refusing to exercise the divine power He had to crush His enemies even as they gloated over Him. If Jesus had succumbed to any of these temptations, humanity would have belonged to The Serpent forever. But because Jesus obediently suffered unto death — even death on a cross — The Serpent's power over humanity was broken forever.

And Yahweh gave all humanity a glorious sign that Jesus had succeeded where Adam had failed — namely the bodily resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from death. Death could not hold Him. And here, 2,000 years later, modern scholarship has confirmed the historicity of Messiah's bodily resurrection in a way that even skeptical scholars have to honor. Christ is risen indeed!

In the process of delivering humanity from the power of Original Sin, Messiah Jesus also paid the penalty Yahweh's holy Justice demands from every sinner for the sins we have committed against Yahweh and our neighbors — even the sexual sins we have committed against our own bodies. When Jesus cried out "It is finished!", and gave up His life on the cross, He announced to the world that satisfactory atonement for sin had been made for every last human that has lived and will live. Therefore, every Sunday we declare with certainty what Scripture says in 1John 1:8-9, "8 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 [But] If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." And every Sunday we're invited to believe Jesus' words over the sacrament of Holy Communion as it is recorded in Matthew 26:27-28, "28 And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, 'Drink of it, all of you, 28 for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.'"

But forgiveness of sins is not all Jesus did for us personally. On the Day of Pentecost 33A.D., Peter publicly proclaimed what Jesus and Lord Holy Spirit had given him to say in Acts 2:38, "... 'Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" And we're told in Romans 5:4, "... God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." We're told in 1Corinthians 6:9 that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, by the power of Lord Holy Spirit, God glorifies Himself by enabling righteous living and behavior even in our present sinful bodies. And we read in Romans 15:13, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope." The hope we have is eternal life in resurrected bodies restored in the Image of God to the complete Righteousness and Love of our Creator God, Yahweh.

Now the Good News of the Gospel is announced to us in Colossians 1:19-20, "19 For in him [Jesus] all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." In Jesus, all humanity is fully reconciled to God from the estrangement of sin by Jesus' holy and precious blood shed on the cross. Yahweh has declared that the war we make on Him is ended and that the justice He must execute on us is satisfied through the finished work of Messiah Jesus. In Jesus and because of Jesus, there is peace between God and all humanity. This is the peace the angels sang of on the night of Jesus' birth.

Yet, as we saw today, Jesus declared that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Since God does not contradict Himself, what did Jesus mean by this? Listen carefully to

Jesus' words in the following passage, John 3:16-20, "16 'For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God. 19 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. 20 For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed.'"

In this passage what's the difference between those who are given righteous eternal life and those condemned to the darkness? The only correct answer is Jesus Himself. Jesus is the difference. Believing in the Jesus who came in the flesh and gave Himself for us on the cross; who has been bodily resurrected from the dead for us so that we might have forgiveness of sins and new life in the Holy Spirit through Him — this Jesus is the difference.

Now consider everything you know about Jesus. Do atheists love Jesus? Do secularists love Jesus? Do pagans love Jesus? Do communists love Jesus? Did Karl Marx and his followers love Jesus? What about Hitler and his followers? Muslims have a "Jesus" in the Koran, but they reject the true Jesus of the New Testament come in the flesh. Therefore, do Muslims love the real Jesus? Do Jews infected by the teachings of rabbinic Judaism love Jesus? Do any of the cults that have a heretical Jesus like the Mormons and the New Agers love the real Jesus? Does organized crime of any kind love Jesus? Do sinners of any kind committed to their sin love Jesus? Absolutely NOT. Every person who has never come to peace with Yahweh through Jesus is still at war with Yahweh, even though Yahweh is not at war with that person in this life.

Jesus has made peace. But there is still war. And how does this war demonstrate itself? Jesus answered that question in this morning's lesson. Matthew 10:34-36, "34 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 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. 36 And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.'" Unless an entire human household finds peace with Yahweh through Jesus, there will be distress in that household. For, on one side will be those who have found peace with Yahweh through Jesus and on the other side will be all those still at war with Yahweh.

Let's be clear about something. Even though American culture prides itself on its individualism, the power of family and tradition lurks just below the surface. And it especially reveals itself over the person of Jesus. Some of you here know exactly what I mean. You either have to hide Jesus from your families or your families are at war with you over Jesus. And even if there is relative family peace, there is still an underlying tension that pops its head out periodically. And if the majority of a believer's family considers Jesus either to be worthy of scoffing or a real threat, there comes a time when an important decision must be made. What is more important — family and tradition, or relationship with the living God and the Messiah He has sent? Therefore, Jesus issued this challenge in Matthew 10:37, "'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.'" Notice. Jesus didn't say not to love family members who persecute or would persecute in some way. He said to

measure love. The measure of love the believer gives to Jesus must exceed the love for any family member or tradition opposed to Him. Jesus said that in any contest between Him and family members or traditions opposed to Him, He must win.

But then, Jesus went even further. He said in Matthew 10:38-39, “38 And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” In case you don’t realize it, these sayings are quite extreme. Only someone who is pure, holy, righteous and God Himself can legitimately say anything like this. Only God Himself can put a claim on your life like this. Therefore, anyone who hears these words must consider the dilemma first put forward by English Christian, C.S. Lewis. By saying and demanding such things Jesus is either the worst and most dangerous liar who has ever lived; or He is a complete lunatic worthy of our rejection; or He is who He says He is — Lord of heaven and earth. And if He is Lord, then to reject His words is signing the warrant for our own Second Death in the Lake of Fire.

What did Jesus mean by taking up a cross and following Him? Well, let’s consider where Jesus went. Before the apostles saw Jesus bodily ascend into heaven alive, He told them this in John 14:1-4, “1 ‘Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.’” The place Jesus is talking about is eternal righteous, loving existence in the presence of Yahweh and in loving union with Him. That sounds wonderful.

However, such news creates a monstrous problem for the sinful nature. For, it’s also a place where we are no longer our own gods. And for that reason, our sinful nature is terrified of it. Our sinful nature would much rather be in hell where we can be our own gods forever. Therefore, the Christian’s sinful nature desperately makes war to save itself from Jesus. This is why there is always temptation in the Christian life. What to do?

Jesus has already won this battle on the cross. Therefore, all we have to do is let Him win it again and again in us. Lord Holy Spirit is with the Christian and in the Christian. He’s the great power sent by Jesus who brings Jesus to the believer. Thus, if we appeal to Lord Holy Spirit, He is right there with us. And what should we say to Him? “Put this sinful thing in me to death with Jesus.” This, the Spirit will do. The cross will prevail.

Now, this doesn’t mean that the same temptation won’t return. But when it does, you already have experience that Lord Holy Spirit hears your prayer and takes care of matters too strong for you. All that is necessary is to call upon the Spirit to do so again and again — a million times a day, if necessary. This is what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus.

And we’ve by no means exhausted the matter. There are friends, family, traditions, all kinds of situations and more to deal with. But the Good News is that Yahweh is on our side in everything. As we read in Romans 8:31-32, “31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” Yes. Having a God like that on your side is what the way of the cross is all about. He conquers the impossible sinful nature for you because He loves you more than you can imagine.

And one last thing — the forgiveness of sins. There’s a prophecy about the New Testament found in Jeremiah 31:31-34. Here’s what it says in verse 34: “. . . they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their

iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” It correctly states that in the New Testament, the primary way we know Yahweh is through the forgiveness of our sins. This doesn’t mean that we should sin more to know Yahweh better. But it means that our main way of knowing Yahweh is by following the Jesus who has atoned for our sins and has reconciled us in love to our righteous Father. Amen.

All Bible quotes are from the ESV except where noted.