

³⁴ *Don't assume that I came to bring peace on the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.* ³⁵ *For I came to turn*

*a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*

³⁶ *and a man's enemies will be
the members of his household.*^[k]

³⁷ *The one who loves a father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; the one who loves a son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.* ³⁸ *And whoever doesn't take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.* ³⁹ *Anyone who finds his life will lose it, and anyone who loses his life because of me will find it.*

⁴⁰ *"The one who welcomes you welcomes me, and the one who welcomes me welcomes him who sent me.* ⁴¹ *Anyone who welcomes a prophet because he is a prophet^[l] will receive a prophet's reward. And anyone who welcomes a righteous person because he's righteous^[m] will receive a righteous person's reward.* ⁴² *And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple,^[n] truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward."*

A Sword

Swords are fun. It's a child's first toy, a stick. Before came the plastic or foam swords they were making swords. Any stick would suffice and the swinging would commence. They would run around back and forth swinging their swords like a feather duster until an "accident" happened and they found out that even a dull stick still hurts. But swords, the original rifle, weren't just toys they were tools meant to keep peace among people who are naturally inclined toward evil. They were tools used to keep one from imposing their will on another.

In the church the sword has taken a prominent position as well as. Jesus tells us, "*I have not come to bring peace but a sword.*" The writer to the Hebrews speaks of this sword, "*Living and active sharper than any double edged sword, penetrating soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judging the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*" (Hebrews 4:12) This sword is the power of the word of God to divide, to cut, and to kill.

This is what churches wanted to capture with the symbol of a sword standing over an open bible. That symbol was attached to the front of a pulpit or lectern as a reminder to God's people of the purpose of this word. It cuts both ways, killing even those who wield it. You should expect the Word of God to hurt. You should expect the sword – not a comfortable lounge chair with cup holders. Not peace but conflict: a sword.

Jesus doesn't negotiate but his Word is at work. It divides. It hurts. Maybe you have felt that division in your life. But it doesn't just kill it also brings to life and unites us with the whole host of heaven. But there is no middle ground as this Sword is sharp.

But the thought of Jesus saying, "*I have not come to bring peace but a sword,*" just doesn't sound like Jesus. Jesus sounds more like Muhammad than he does the Lamb of God. What does he mean? There is much discussion over this passage being either hyperbole (Jesus is just exaggerating) or dialectical negation (Hebraism). This could be translated, "*I didn't come just for peace but even more so for*

war,” but that doesn’t sound much better does it. We know Jesus is the prince of peace. We know he came to establish peace between God and humankind. But the result of Jesus’ coming into this world is conflict and strife. And the result of sending out his disciples will find more of the same. There will be conflict and strife as this sword divides.

There are consequences to carrying this sword. It turns *a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*³⁶ *and a man’s enemies will be the members of his household.* But why the conflict? Other relationships may demand allegiance and conformity. Jesus demands primacy, priority, and allegiance. Often these relationships are severed as a result of the Word. Later the disciples would face persecution and a sword. Later the Romans would demand allegiance to Caesar and sacrifice to their pagan Gods. Later Christianity would be a capital crime. Later Christians were seen as Atheists tearing apart the social structure of society through disobedience to family and government. Many Christian literally bore a cross, perished in the fire, at the hands of gladiators, or wild beasts.

But we’re supposed to be calming fears, not creating them. Jesus does promise them *anyone who loses his life because of me will find it.* There is life even in death. There is the promise, “*Whoever welcomes you welcomes me.*” because wherever they go Jesus goes with them. Jesus identifies with them. He promises eternal reward. *And whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is a disciple,^[n] truly I tell you, he will never lose his reward.*” Jesus tells them they have no need to be afraid, no need to fear the sword because it is this very sword that saves.

The instructions are simple. Go as you are a child of God. Play with sticks but be careful if you are swinging them around like a sword. Sooner or later, you’ll hit yourself or someone else. And there will be conflict. Which is why I find it funny that some preachers will tell prospects, “Just try Christianity out for a few weeks and see if your life isn’t better.” Take this sword, it’s sharp, deadly, just swing it around for a while and see what happens. “*You’ll be hated by all because of me,*” Jesus said. Jesus promises problems.

In this world you will have trouble. Even among the most intimate of relationships and there is division. When you head home for the holidays and the family there is the unspoken agreement, “Don’t talk religion or politics.” I’m okay avoiding politics. Leave them behind, but by no means religion. But it will cause division. We can keep quiet so as not to create problems and when there are problems some have been tempted to compromise for the sake of peace and quiet. Compromise however, means that someone or something is to be feared more than God. That’s where the sword starts to strike our hearts.

Jesus’ disciples don’t seem concerned that they’ll face rejection or that people won’t like them. They simply carried the Word, the simple message, the fact that Jesus is the Christ the son of God wherever they went. On the other hand we don’t seem to be as willing to carry this divisive sword with us wherever we go, even among family. Would we continue with our confession if our pews would empty over the next 10 years? What if we were placed on a government watch list? What if our confession also threatened our mortgage, our children’s ability to get an education, or receive

healthcare? Would we still hold on and love him above all things even life itself? That was a question the Early Christian answered with a resounding, “YES!”

What is your highest priority? The temptation is to put family first, a gift of God ahead of God. Jesus is a king who carries a sword and he is a skilled swordsman, unlike a child with a stick or a senile grandfather who ignores sin. He is God. He is powerful. There is only one way to make peace with him. This peace does not come by surrender to enemies or sacrifice of the truth. Jesus does not peacefully coexist with evil. He is the king of the Church militant and he does not seek compromise with those who defy his father’s will. He seeks death, the wages of sin. There are no negotiations. There is no bargaining. This message of his kingship will lead to a violent response.

That violent response was taken out on Jesus by those who didn’t want to hear his terms of surrender. Like it or hate it doesn’t change the fact that Jesus came to give his life for theirs. He handed himself over and took their place under his sword and was struck by it. Jesus promised peace through the loss of life. It was his life that accomplished this peace and his death that restores us to God. Jesus then rose from the dead a righteous warrior sending his troops out to battle with the same sword by which we are saved.

That is the simple message that the disciples believed and carried with them. Jesus is alive and sending them as sheep to wolves. He calls his disciples, *prophets, righteous, and little ones*. These are parallel statements suggesting that they are one and the same person. They are as their savior describes, prophets carrying the very word of God. Righteous because that is what they have been made. They are also little ones, weak and vulnerable with little or of no significance in the eyes of the world.

But they carry a sword, a word with eternal significance. They go out praying for a welcome reception to the word. That reception implies faith in the message they proclaim. That cup of cold water is a simple act, a sign that the salvation offered to them has been received in faith. The sword works both ways. There is no middle ground. And it is sharp.

The disciple would go on to use it on Pentecost and those who heard him were *cut to the heart and asked, “What shall we do?”* (Acts 2:37). They realized there was nothing they could do to make up for their actions of putting to death not only an innocent man, but the Christ. But that sword struck again, “*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.*”” The sword kills but it also brings to life.

We have peace with God. But peace on earth is only ever partially realized in this world. You may still find conflict with family. But you are brought into a new family. That’s why it’s so important for us to come to church. There are people here and for some you’re the only family they’ve got. For them, family isn’t a place of refuge. For some family has severed their ties from Christians. Some countries hold funerals for family that has become Christian. The intent isn’t to cut

ourselves off from them or ignore our differences but to connect them to another family where the baptismal waters are thicker than blood.

That's the simple message that we take with us wherever we go. We were the walking dead. We were all going to die.

But now that's changed. Don't seek the approval of this world. Don't look for safety and security in this life by taking the world's side against God and his Church.

In the end when Christ returns, *all who have lost their life for His sake will find it* (v. 39). We will have true life and lasting peace for all who have found life in Christ. In the end Jesus will separate the sheep from the goats just as a shepherd. Matthew 25 tells us the process and that sheep aren't separated based on what they've done but who they are. So also with you, Christian. Are you baptized? Do you gather with the saints? Do you receive his body and blood for the forgiveness of your sins? Have you not given me a cup of cold water, a parsonage, a place to plant a garden, and even supported my family in the midst of a pandemic? You are sheep. The goats, however, are hostile to God's Word, his people, and the truth.

Yes, there will be conflict. Someone will get hit in the head with a stick. But this sword is sharp. It hurts. It divides. It kills. But following Jesus is worth everything even life itself. He also brings peace and life. Amen.