

Matthew 10:24-39
June 21, 2020

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

Let me say that one more time – Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Grace and peace. Grace and peace go together. You can't really have peace without grace. Grace and then peace.

I know the past couple Sundays have been really hard. On top of Covid and Black Lives Matter and the Emmanuel 9, we've had Matthew breathing down our necks, making us uncomfortable. And, if Matthew doesn't make you feel uncomfortable, then you're probably not be reading it properly.

And Matthew is not letting up today. Today, on Father's Day, we hear Jesus in Matthew tell us that Jesus did not come to bring peace, but a sword. Jesus did not come to bring unity, but to tear families apart.

Yay! Happy Father's Day! Is this really the Gospel, the good news of our Lord?

Well... yes. This is actually good news, but we have to reframe Matthew in order to be able to see how this is good news. I hope this doesn't come as a surprise to you, but you and I are not the demographic Matthew was writing to.

Matthew was writing to a group of exiled people. Jews and Christians who had been kicked out of Israel. They were the marginalized and outcasts. They were the minority. They were not 21st Century Americans.

So, we have to reframe everything that is written in Matthew, picturing ourselves as those who are the least, last, and lowly. That's a hard thing for us to do. We are not under occupation. We are not destitute. And most of us are not the minority. So, for us, Matthew's Gospel, as a whole, may not seem like great news.

But, for the oppressed, this is the best news possible. Are you dejected? God sees you and knows you! Are you abused? God is on your side and you will be set free! Can you never seem to catch a break? God's justice is on your side!

So, Yes – Matthew is full of good news – great news in fact. But for us 21st Century American Christians, we may actually find ourselves on the other side of that good news. We are not the oppressed. On the contrary, we may actually be

the oppressors. Not overtly, but just in the way our government operates. A lot of what happens may be great for us, but really horrible for the Earth, indigenous peoples, minorities, and developing countries.

And so, in the Episcopal Confession, we say, “forgive us of the sins done on our behalf.”

We may not be building an oil pipeline through Dakota lands. We may not be manufacturing goods in poor countries so that we can get them on the cheap. We may not be in charge of the deals being made that make it really difficult for other countries to compete in the Global Market. We may not be the ones building the cars with poor gas mileage. But, we benefit from them.

In the US, we only spend, on average, 10% of our income on food. Most other countries it's 40%. Gasoline in Europe costs 4 times as much as it does here. We thrive on disposables. We make up only 4% of the world population, but we produce 12% of the world's garbage. We also produce 15% of the Green House gasses.

So, we, on the whole, are on the other side of the people to whom Jesus is talking, but that doesn't mean that the good news isn't for us as well.

Liberation theology holds that it is not only the oppressed who need to be set free, but the oppressors as well.

Oppressors have to be set free from the fear that holds us all captive, the mindset that there isn't enough, so I need to be sure to get as much as possible, so that I can be secure. We also have to be set free from the idea that we are more deserving of wealth than anyone else is deserving of just being able to live.

I have almost 30 first cousins, and I'm positive 29 of them never hear me preach, so I'm going to tell you about one of my cousins.

This past week he posted on FaceBook that because he was such a good boy, who did everything right and paid all of his debts, outside of his house mortgage, he deserved a Maserati. He deserved it. And, it is a gorgeous car! I'd love to take a spin in it.

Now, my issue really isn't with the Maserati. Great. Have fun! Enjoy. Italian auto makers need to make a living too.

My issue is that in previous posts he has talked about how others deserve to be destitute, how they deserve to be imprisoned, and it's the fault of the impoverished that they are impoverished. It's nice glory theology I guess, but it's not grace, and unfortunately that is the story we are told in our American culture.

The issue is that any time we say we deserve good things and others deserve bad things, we put a barrier up between us. We stop having compassion. We start to believe that it's all about us and what we do, without taking into consideration all of the others who have helped us get to where we are, or have helped to keep the poor poor.

But Jesus comes to break those walls down so that we can see one another and love one another. The oppressors need to be set free just as much as the oppressed.

Grace is Jesus dying for us - all of us – every one of us – purely out of love, not because we deserve it. Grace is the fact that God loves us all unconditionally – meaning that just because God created us, we are loved. It has nothing to do with what we do or where we're from.

Grace is us not getting what we really deserve, which is punishment for our sins. Grace is God knowing each hair on our head, regardless of how much we do or do not have.

God loves each and every one of us entirely, Maserati or tin roofed shack. God loves us all equally. But, Jesus did not come to bring peace, but the sword. The sword is justice. Not Judge Judy style justice, but the justice of the Prophets, God's justice that gives everyone a fair shake at life.

You know the old saying: Give a man a fish, and he eats for a day – that's charity. Teach a man to fish, and he eats for a lifetime – that's education. But, Justice is making sure that every person has eaten, has a fishing pole and bate, and also has access to a clean healthy lake.

God wants all people to have life and have life abundantly, but we fall into the trap of thinking that some are more deserving than others, and that's the whole issue the Prophets, and Jesus, bring up.

In all of the books of the Prophets, the prophets are constantly being sent to the rich, ruling, and elite, to tell them to stop taking advantage of the poor. Don't steal the widow's land. Don't charge more than what is due. Don't make dirty deals.

Let the slaves go free. Basically – stop being greedy and thinking it's all about you!

Jesus picks up that mantle as he takes on the Pharisees and the Temple leaders, who have made deals with the Romans to keep themselves propped up nicely at the expense of the poor. And so, they call Jesus the lord of the demons – the ruler of the demons.

Instead of seeing God's justice in letting the possessed go free – they accuse Jesus of ruling the demons. In their minds, the possessed people deserved their demons. But, in God's understanding, they are the ones who are really possessed. Anyone who cannot have compassion on another person is the one who is actually possessed – possessed by greed and self-centeredness.

Nothing has changed in 2000 years.

So, Jesus comes not to bring peace, but a sword. The sword of justice. The sword that comes to let all of God's people be set free from the fear of there never being enough. A slavery which binds both the oppressed and the oppressor.

And because of that sword, families are torn apart - the ones who are okay with the status quo are at odds with the ones who cry for justice. But, there cannot be true peace until God's justice is lived in the world. And so, we are called to rock the boat, to shake things up, in order for true peace to reign.

Jesus rocked the boat, that's what got him nailed to the cross, and we are called to pick up that cross and follow him, knowing that we're not alone. The Holy Spirit is with us. So, we have nothing to fear.

Jesus did not come to bring peace, but a sword – a sword that cuts open the shroud of death and lets the light of God shine in – the light of grace – the light of undeserved and unconditional love – the light of compassion. Grace is justice.

God loves all of us, each and every one of us, too much to leave us held captive in fear about only our own well-being. So Jesus brings the sword, the cross, and he dies with us so that we can be resurrected into new life with him – a life in which we care for one another.

The cross is the worst thing that can happen, and Jesus has already been there, pulling us through to the other side, where we live outside of our fear about ourselves, so that we can live for others.

Set free from sin, we are resurrected to new life – eternal life connected to God’s amazing grace, which binds us to absolutely every other person in the entire world. We are they and they are we. We together are the body of Christ.

Grace and peace be with you.

Thanks be to God. Amen.