

"True Peace on Earth"
Matthew 10:34-39

July 2, 2017

4th Sunday After Pentecost

On one episode of the popular television program M*A*S*H*, Dr. Hawkeye Pierce was forced to watch a close friend die on the operating table by wounds received in a battle of the Korean War.. Overcome by grief, Hawkeye wanted to know why this happened. Lt. Col. Henry Blake tried to console him by saying, "If I had the answer to that, I'd be at the Mayo Clinic." Then, looking around, he said, "Does this look like the Mayo Clinic?" Of course it didn't – not by a long shot.

I thought of that when the festival half of the church year – where we talked about the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ – recently ended. Remember when started that with the birth of Jesus? The angels over Bethlehem that night sang, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace, goodwill toward men." The implication was that, if the Messiah just comes, there will be peace on earth. As we read the news, watch the news on TV, or view it on the screens of our various devices and read of war, terrorist attacks, unrest based on race, nationality, economic status, et. al., we might paraphrase Henry Blake's words and say, "Does this look like 'peace on earth'?" Well, no, it doesn't. What then does peace look like? How is peace obtained?

Some think that peace is simply lack of conflict and is obtained by doing ANYTHING to avoid conflict. In the mid-1930's, Adolf Hitler was creating great conflict all throughout Europe. He wanted to expand the territory of the Third Reich by taking a piece of territory, called the Sudetenland which lay between Germany and what used to be Czechoslovakia. Neville Chamberlain, the prime minister of England, led a group of European leaders who met with Hitler to discuss the situation. Desperate to calm the conflict and avoid war, Chamberlain and the other leaders signed a treaty with Hitler called the Munich Agreement which transferred the Sudetenland to Germany's control. Chamberlain returned to England and boldly proclaimed, "We have achieved peace in our time!" Of course, he had achieved no such thing. Giving in to Hitler's demand to avoid conflict did not achieve peace. It only made Hitler more bold and greedy. A year later, Hitler invaded Poland and began World War II.

As we approach another 4th of July, we remember that peace is something that comes, not by giving in or giving up a foe, but by defeating that foe. It is never easy and the cost is never cheap. It involves the shedding of blood and death. We've seen that in the wars of our country -- the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World Wars I & II, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Desert Storm, and all the other wars in the Mideast since. In any of these conflicts, we could have simply given in to our foes to stop the conflict and obtained "peace". Yet we realized that such concessions would produce only a bogus peace. Rather, the young men and young women of our country gave of themselves, some making the ultimate sacrifice in order to obtain peace.

That's not the end of the story, though. Once peace is obtained, it must be maintained. That is a difficult task as well. It requires the diligence and determination

to never give in and allow the enemy to overturn the peace for which such hard fighting had occurred.

All this is important to keep in mind when we read the Gospel lesson for today. Jesus said, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth." An odd statement, don't you think? Wasn't Jesus, the Prince of Peace, supposed to bring peace? As I said before, didn't the Christmas angels announce peace on earth? Again, it all depends on what you mean by "peace". If, by peace, you mean a resolution of military conflicts or a resolution of spiritual or interpersonal conflicts by simply by giving in or being "nicey-nice", then, no, Jesus did not come to bring peace.

Jesus did come to bring another kind of peace, however. Since Satan's fall by grace as an angel in heaven and his success in getting Adam and Eve to fall in his rebellion, there has been a war between Satan and God. This conflict is the greatest battle the universe has ever seen -- far greater than any war -- for its outcome will determine the fate of the universe and the destiny of every human being who has ever lived or ever will live, including you and me.

In such a crucial struggle, there is no room for compromise and capitulation to Satan to obtain spiritual peace as Neville Chamberlain had attempted to do with Hitler in order to obtain political peace. Satan is much too wily and the stakes are far too high. Therefore, Jesus said, "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." One commentator explained it this way: "He brings no cheap peace, no half peace, no peace by compromise. He can create peace only by destroying evil;" (Martin Franzmann, Follow Me: Discipleship According to St. Matthew, p. 96)

Therefore, Jesus allowed no compromise with Satan and evil, but remained faithful, fully and completely, to His Father's will, despite the rejection and ridicule it brought him. He signed no paper peace treaties, but paid the ultimate price to end the conflict between God and Satan -- offering up His life upon the cross and signing the peace treaty with His blood shed there. Satan and His power was crushed there on the cross. The sin of the world which had prolonged the war was silenced when Jesus' holy and innocent life was deemed sufficient compensation for a holy and righteous God. Three days later, God the Father ratified that treaty, placing His seal of approval on it, by raising Jesus to life again.

You, despite your fighting with God and against God because of your sin and rebellion against His will, now have peace with Him. As the Word of God states, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Rom. 5:1) As St. Paul writes in the 6th chapter of Romans, in baptism, you were buried with Christ and united to His death. His death became the death for you and your sin. You were united to His resurrection. His resurrection to new life becomes the resurrection for you and your soul. You have new life now and new life for all eternity. You are at peace.

Maintaining that peace obtained on the cross and the empty tomb is not easy. Although Satan has been defeated, he keeps on fighting until the final day of judgment, seeking to disrupt that peace between God and ourselves. Since we usually like to "all just get along", we are often tempted to give in on a small matter of morality or compromise on a tiny point of doctrine in order to do so. But, like the Allies

giving small parts of territory to Hitler here and there nearly caused them to lose all of Europe in World War II, our giving in and compromising on points of morality and doctrine will not only not give us peace, but it can cause us to lose the victory and the peace already obtained for us.

As one commentator pointed out, "since men love evil and cling to that which excludes them from the whole peace of God, His [Jesus'] coming forces a decision between good and evil, and proves to be, for all its peaceful intent, the sundering sword." (Franzmann, p.96) Our loyalties cannot be divided between God and men. Rather, those loyalties must be to God or man.

Relationships will be disturbed as you seek to follow Christ faithfully. Such conflict is not accidental. Jesus calls us to leave behind anything that that seeks to draw us away by Him, even if it is the members of our immediate family. As He said, "For I have come to set a man against his father, 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." We might be tempted to "go along" with ideas, beliefs, and behaviors of our family members because we don't want to "rock the boat" and, after all, they are our family. Jesus' words in response to that way of thinking are frighteningly blunt: "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." One who chooses peace with family over loyalty to Christ will end up without the peace of God.

Suffering of some degree will always follow faithfulness to Christ. It may be anything by petty ridicule or rejection all the way to what some of our brothers and sisters in Christ throughout the world are suffering: death for the cause of Christ. We may be tempted to water down the Word of God in order to be more "sensitive" to people of different faiths or no faith whatsoever so that they might like us. We might be tempted to want to avoid persecution by going along with the crowd, even though we know it's not right, so that they will accept us. Jesus' words here are equally blunt: "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me." One who chooses the easy way out of a conflict over the truth of God will end up without the peace of God.

A great paradox occurs here. Jesus says, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." In other words, anyone who is frightened at the prospect of emotional suffering, bodily suffering, or even death for being faithful to Christ and seeks to find life by denying Christ, will, in fact, lose it. On the other hand, anyone who cares for nothing but remaining faithful to Christ, even though it means suffering, rejection, and death and loses his life by being faithful, will, in fact, find life abundantly and eternally. By disregarding the promptings of our flesh, of our families, and of our world, by responding to the promptings of Christ, by losing what the former offer, all that the latter assures is gained.

So, if you want peace - true and lasting peace, do not look for it in compromise, capitulation, or just "getting along". Look for it in the peace with God, which Christ obtained for you, not by abandoning the conflict with evil and trying to "get along, but by conquering evil on the cross and making peace between God and us. Trust in Christ and then follow Him faithfully no matter where He leads and no matter what it

involves. Allow Him to live in you and through you. Allow Him to strengthen you for the way through His Word and Sacraments. Give in to no one, no matter how close they might be to you and no matter what it might cost you. And then, and only then, "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus." Amen.