

Homily for Trinity IV -2023

“Don’t imagine that I came to bring peace to the earth! I came not to bring peace, but a sword. ‘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. Your enemies will be right in your own household!’”

These words are jarring to us, mainly because we often find ourselves talking about peace on earth and how Jesus makes that possible. Today we hear Jesus saying that he didn’t come to bring peace, but a sword, and to divide even families? How do we reconcile these two understandings?

Jesus’ coming to earth does in fact bring peace...but only to those who will submit their lives to Him. The other side of the coin is that Jesus’ also brings division, because there are many who will refuse to submit to Him.

Jesus draws a line in the sand — there are two groups of people, the followers of Christ and the enemies of Christ. There isn’t some sort of middle ground, where people can like Jesus, or agree with Jesus on some things. It’s an all or nothing proposition. And that kind of proposition, by definition, creates division.

In our society people don’t like the idea of absolute truth, or anything that definitively says that one group or idea is right and another is wrong. Some would even confidently tell us that there is no such thing as objective truth...that ‘truth’ all depends on our individual understandings. We are always looking for some sort of middle ground that will allow both sides to be right, but the nature of truth is that only one answer can be right, and all others are wrong. If I say that $2+2=5$, I don’t simply subscribe to a different mathematical viewpoint, I’m wrong! The right answer is that $2+2=4$ —it doesn’t matter how I feel about that truth or whether I like it or not. Any other answer is wrong. The same is true of the gospel message. Either Jesus was and is the Lord of all and thus is worthy of our allegiance, worship, and submission, or He is not. Those are really the only two options available to us.

These first verses are hard enough, because quite frankly most of us want to be at peace with others. If you're like me, you hate confrontation and really want to have good and happy relationships with everyone.

However, Jesus brings the issue into even sharper focus for us in the next couple of verses,

“If you love your father or mother more than you love me, you are not worthy of being mine; or if you love your son or daughter more than me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you refuse to take up your cross and follow me, you are not worthy of being mine. If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.”

In these verses Jesus tells us what it means to make Him Lord of all. If Jesus is truly the Lord of our lives, it means our first allegiance is to Him. He explains that a little further by telling us that if we love our parents, our children, or anything else more than we love Him, then we really don't trust Him as Lord. These other things have become idols.

It's worth noting that Jesus is not saying that we should NOT love our parents, children, siblings and friends. Rather, He is saying that we should love Him even more. Devotion to family is a cardinal Christian duty but that devotion must never become absolute to the extent that devotion to God is compromised in the process.

Now, this is not a popular message in Australia or in any church in Australia today, for that matter. If there is one thing that everyone seems to agree on it is that our families are of supreme importance, so for Jesus to say that anything is more important than our family relationships is scandalous. But He's right. If we love our parents, our spouse, our children, our jobs, our position, our money, or even ourselves MORE than we love Him then we are chasing after idols, and we are treating Him as less than He deserves.

Jesus goes even further saying that if we refuse to take up our cross and follow Him we aren't worthy of being His. This was a picture that would have been incredibly vivid to His listeners, because crucifixion had been common in Israel for hundreds of years. When Jesus said, “Take up your

cross,” His hearers knew immediately what He was talking about. He was talking about dying. How did they know that? They were from Galilee. With the exception of Judas Iscariot, all 11 others were from Galilee. Around the year 3BC there had been an insurrection in Galilee led by one Judas of Galilee. This Judas had gathered a band together and decided to throw the Romans out. The Romans crushed Judas and his insurrection. The conquering Roman general, after occupying Jerusalem, decided to teach the Jews a lesson. So, he crucified over 2,000 Jews, and he put their crosses up and down the roads leading from Jerusalem to Galilee so everywhere the people went, they saw them hanging on crosses along the roadside. And every Jew that was crucified carried the crossbeam for his own execution on his back as he marched to the cross.

Though the picture is still vivid even today, the phrase “take up your cross” has become so common to us that we can easily miss its meaning. Bearing our crosses has become the equivalent of putting up with what we might call .. “irritations.” Essentially Jesus is saying that unless we are willing to give up everything for Him, and to endure whatever hardship may come our way we are not truly His followers. This is hard, because there are lots of things that we would struggle to give up for any reason, even for Jesus.

Our job, source of income, or security.

Our families, friends, or other relationships we enjoy.

Our money, homes, or possessions.

Our freedom to do, say, wear, and spend what we want.

Our comfort, or the comfort of those we love.

Our time, our status, our popularity, or our “happiness.”

Certainly our very lives themselves.

This is not one of those passages of scripture that lots of people like to memorise and quote and hang on their refrigerators, but maybe we should. This passage reminds us to keep our priorities in check, to make sure that we aren't compromising on the gospel and that we are willing to take up

our cross (whatever that may be) and follow Jesus without reservation, regardless of the cost.

The temptation with this message is to hear what Jesus said, to agree that it's important to put Him first, and then to simply walk out of this place and resume life as usual. But if we do that, we have simply wasted our time. So let me challenge you to do something. Right now, ask God what He wants you to do. If you're like me, there is probably some area of your life, some sin you've been struggling with, some decision that you've been putting off that will immediately come to mind. Ask yourself what is keeping you from being obedient to God? Is it because you're scared that doing what He asks is going to cause you to miss out on something? Is it because you value something else more than you value your relationship with the Lord? Is it simply because you don't trust Him?

Dear People let us all remember what Jesus said: *“If you cling to your life, you will lose it; but if you give up your life for me, you will find it.”*