

October 8, 2017

The Radical Sayings of Jesus
I Did Not Come to Bring Peace
Matthew 10:34-39

Opening words: Today, I continue my sermon series called *The Radical Sayings of Jesus*. You know the truth. Most people read the Bible selectively. There are certain things we have read countless times. We read them continuously because they comfort us. However, there are other passages in the Bible we have never read because we find them hard to understand or harsh to our ears. It is true of the entire Bible, including the Gospels. We try to ignore certain words from the Master. The truth be told, there are certain things we wish Jesus had never said. They are just too radical. This is the problem: We can't dismiss those words, because they came from Jesus. We must wrestle with them. We must not just understand them, we must apply them to our daily lives. Today's radical saying of Jesus is a fine example. In our scripture reading for today, Jesus reminds us that he did not come to bring peace, but a sword. There is no other way to say it. Jesus's words for us today are harsh.

The founder of Koinonia Farm, Clarence Jordan (1912-1969) was getting a red-carpet tour of another minister's church. With pride, the minister pointed to the rich, imported pews and luxurious decorations. As they stepped outside, darkness was falling, and a spotlight shone on a huge cross atop the steeple. "That cross alone cost us ten thousand dollars," the minister said with a satisfied smile. "You got cheated," said Jordan. "Times were when Christians could get them for free." If you can understand the point of that story, then you will understand this morning's message. Our scripture reading for today is Matthew 10:34-39. Let me call this message, *I Did Not Come to Bring Peace*.

Matthew 10:34-39 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.³⁵ For I have come to turn

"a man against his father,

a daughter against her mother,

a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law—

³⁶ a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.'

³⁷ "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.

David McGee once said, "*We should be more concerned with reaching the lost than pampering the saved.*" That quote makes me think. If that quote makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

We find ourselves today in the tenth chapter of Matthew. In this chapter, Jesus is not speaking to the crowds. He is speaking to the disciples. To be more exact, the Master is commissioning the disciples. In the first verse of this chapter, we are told Jesus gave them authority to drive out demons and to heal the sick. However, before they leave, Jesus gives them a few parting words. There is no other way to say it. Jesus was completely honest with the disciples. He tells them clearly that their journey will not be an endless party. Their journey will not be a vacation. Their journey is a business trip, and everyone will not welcome them with open arms. Some will reject their message and resist their presence. It is in the heart of this hard message, Jesus says, *"I did not come to bring you peace, but a sword."* Those words sound harsh but they are true words. It has been true of every generation. The gospel message has met resistance from the very beginning. Jesus' words in this morning's reading are prophetic.

Have you ever stopped to consider the violent way the disciples died in service to our Lord? Of the twelve, only John died of natural causes. The rest had a more violent end. Andrew took the Gospel to present-day Russia, Turkey and Greece. Tradition tells us he was crucified. Thomas went as far as India and died when speared by four soldiers. Philip went to North Africa and died in a prison. Matthew, the writer of this gospel, went to Ethiopia and was stabbed. James went to Syria and was clubbed to death. Simon the Zealot went to Persia and was killed because he wouldn't make a sacrifice to the god of the sun. Matthias, the disciple who replaced Judas Iscariot, went to Syria and was burned to death. Paul and Peter went to Rome. They both died in the year 66. Paul, the greatest evangelist the world has ever known, was beheaded. Peter was crucified upside down at his own request because he felt he wasn't worthy to die like Jesus. Our scripture reading for today is prophetic. Jesus didn't come into this world to bring peace. It is not that Jesus is promoting violence. It is that Jesus knew the world would resist the gospel. Every generation has resisted the gospel message.

Have you ever stopped to consider how many saints have been martyred in the history of the church? There is no exact number because some are unknown, and not all are accepted by every denomination or sect. Only God knows the answer to that question, but the incomplete list is filled with impressive names. Polycarp of Smyrna and Justin Martyr died in the age of martyrs, the second to the fourth century. In the Middle Ages, from the fifth to the fifteenth century, John Huss (1415) and Joan of Arc (1431) were martyred. During the Reformation Era, the sixteenth century, William Tyndale (1535) and Anne Askew (1546) were martyred. Even in the twentieth century believers were martyred for taking a stand for the gospel. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1945) and Oscar Romero were martyred (1980). Jesus didn't come into this world to bring peace. It is not that Jesus is promoting violence. It is that Jesus knew the world would resist the gospel. Every generation has resisted the gospel message, and our world is not an exception.

Have you ever stopped to consider the countries in our world today who persecute believers? According to *Christianity Today*, these are the most dangerous countries in the world to be a Christian:

1. North Korea
2. Somalia
3. Afghanistan
4. Pakistan
5. Sudan
6. Syria
7. Iraq
8. Iran
9. Yemen

If you promise to pray for Christians who are living in those countries, say, **"Amen!"** Jesus's words in our scripture lesson for today are prophetic. Yet, Jesus's words in our scripture lesson seem far removed from us. In America, we have religious freedom. In one way that is blessing. Maybe in another way, it is a curse.

On Monday night, I went to a friend's house. He is not a member here, but is my former neighbor. We left that neighborhood in 2003, but I still see my former neighbor on a regular basis. When I got there Monday night, I wanted to hear about his and his wife's vacation. They took a cruise up the Atlantic coast, starting in New York City and ending in Halifax. As he sat there with his wife, I asked first thing, "How was the cruise?" She gave me a few highlights, but it was nothing over the top. We soon moved on to other topics. When his wife got up and went to bed. I returned to the topic. I said, "So you liked the cruise?" He responded, "Russ, I have never been so bored in my life." My former neighbor is the perfect product of the Youngstown area, which means you are wasting time if you are not working. He also believes if you are not sweating, then you are not working. That means he believes that I have never worked. He continued, "We didn't do anything but sit and eat. After two days, I thought I was going to die from boredom. All I wanted to do was go back home and go back to work. The ship's crew was very nice but they didn't ask us to do anything." This is the connection between my neighbor's cruise and us: Maybe that is the problem with the American church? We aren't asking people to do anything; we aren't asking people to make a difference. Let's look at the text one more time.

Jesus is commissioning the disciples. They are about to leave Jesus and spread the Good News. Jesus is honest with them. He tells them there is going to be some danger and risk. However, it is worth the danger and the risk because they have the opportunity to change the world. The scripture does not say any of the disciples reconsidered and went home because home was safe. The scripture says they went into the world and told people about Jesus. I have been consumed with the next line since Wednesday.

Maybe, just maybe, one of the fatal flaws in the American church today is that we just aren't asking people to do anything of worth. We ask people to do simple things, not world changing things. We ask people to make brownies for the next dinner. We ask people to be a greeter. We ask people to lock the doors and turn the lights off when we leave. We apologize for asking for the smallest amount of money. We ask people for small things, but we never ask them to do big things because we don't want to offend anyone. We don't want to lose anyone. We ask for next to nothing and that is exactly what we are getting, next to nothing. Our comfortable Christianity is killing us. That is why our churches have become so self-centered. That is why we are preoccupied with our own opinions and comfort. That is why we worry about upsetting other church members. That is why we do next to nothing to solve a single world problem. That is why our churches are only curious about Jesus, not passionate. We are our own worst enemy. I am not the first to recognize this problem. There have been others.

Do you remember the words of the great Danish philosopher, poet and theologian Soren Kierkegaard (1813-1855)? He said:

"I went into church and sat on the velvet pew. I watched as the sun came shining through the stained-glass windows. The minister dressed in a velvet robe opened the golden gilded Bible, marked it with a silk bookmark and said, 'If any man will be my disciple, said Jesus, let him deny himself, take up his cross, sell what he has, give it to the poor, and follow me.' And I looked around and nobody was laughing."

This is the point: Our comfortable Christianity is our demise. We are our own worst enemy. The great reformer Martin Luther said it another way. He said, "*A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing, and suffers nothing, is worth nothing.*" If that makes you think, say, **"Amen!"**

So, there is Jesus! He is talking to the disciples, yet he is talking to us. His words are not comforting. They are challenging. He did not come to bring peace. He came with a sword. The words were harsh but the disciples stood united, because they wanted to make a difference in this world. I believe you want to make a difference in this world too.

Do you remember the story of Earnest Shackleton (1874-1922)? He gained fame for his polar exploration. History tells us, he led three expeditions to the Antarctic. In 1914, he attempted to cross the South Pole on foot, going sea to sea. Folklore tells us, he ran this advertisement in a newspaper to recruit his crew. This is the advertisement:

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Low wages, bitter cold, long hours of complete darkness. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in event of success – Earnest Shackleton

Can I ask you a question? Would you apply for that job? Folklore tells us so many men responded positively to that advertisement, men had to be turned away. The question is, why? I believe many people responded to that ad because they longed for an adventure. They didn't just want to live and die. They wanted to make a difference in this world. That spirit didn't die with that generation. That spirit lives on in our generation. That spirit for adventure lives in you. It is time to reject our comfortable Christianity and take a risk for Jesus. Do you remember the words of David McGee? He said, "*We should be more concerned with reaching the lost than pampering the saved.*" And all of God's people said, "**Amen!**"