

Sermon text
June 21, 2020

Let's listen to those words again.

"Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶*and one's foes will be members of one's own household."*

Happy Father's Day!?!?

These are words that Jesus shares with his disciples as he is preparing them to be sent out to proclaim that God's Kingdom has come near.

"...proclaim the good news, 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.' ⁸Cure the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons." (Matt. 10:8) So far, I'm with you Jesus.

¹⁶ "See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves;" Ummm...wait a minute. Say that part again.

Oh, Jesus isn't done yet with his "good news".

²¹ Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; ²² and you will be hated by all because of my name."

Oh, Jesus is just getting started...

"If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!" Wait a minute! Beelzebul?!? Prince of devils? Lord of flies?

²⁶ “So have no fear of them... ²⁸ Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell... ³¹ So do not be afraid;”

And then again, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

³⁵ For I have come to set a man against his father,
and a daughter against her mother,
and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;

³⁶ *and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.”*

One commentator that I read said its kind of like Jesus is saying, “The (bleep) is about to hit the fan.” And then in his sweet and loving voice, “Hugs and kisses.”

Friends, these are not easy words to hear Jesus say to his disciples...or to us. And yet, here they are. Over the years I’ve attempted to follow Jesus, I continue to learn that the words Jesus says that are uncomfortable for me to hear, I need to pay attention to them. So, if you were hoping that I would attempt to make you feel comfortable with these words, I’m sorry, I’m going to disappoint you.

As I’ve sat in my uncomfortableness this week, I was remembering a time in seminary that brought a similar uncomfortable feeling within in me.

I was taking a class from George (Tink) Tinker at Iliff. Tink is a member of the Osage Indian nation, a Lutheran pastor, author on racism and white privilege and a distinguished scholar and speaker across the world.

In this class, Professor Tinker was teaching about the systems of oppression and racism in our country and it was very uncomfortable to hear. It was disturbing to learn the history of white privilege that has been a part of this country’s history from the very beginning and somehow, this part of our history is neglected in most history books. Professor Tinker shared episode after episode of horrific atrocities that white, Euro-Christians did against the natives that lived on the land long before they had arrived. And all in the name of “Christ”.

And if that wasn’t uncomfortable enough, then Professor Tinker looked at me and said, “And you are a part of the problem.”

I could hardly believe I had just experienced those words, directed at me. Everything seemed to freeze in that moment. I can still feel those words penetrating my deepest being as if it was yesterday. I was bewildered, confused, and even angry. Instantaneously, emotions and thoughts swirled within me. "You don't even know who I am. I grew up in a family that taught me to respect ALL people, period. We had family friends that were Native Americans. I can't think of a time that I EVER had even a hint of a derogatory thought or feeling towards Native Americans or any other race. Its just not how I was raised in my family. And...we go to church every Sunday to worship Jesus."

Enter Jesus..."³⁵For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; ³⁶*and one's foes will be members of one's own household.*" No, Jesus is not anti-family. Numerous other passages in the Bible assure us of that. So, what is Jesus doing here?

In Jesus' time and in Old Testament time, family was where you found your primary identity. Family was your security, your reputation, your source of life. And when I was defending myself in response to Professor Tinkers words, I was going to my family as my primary source of identity to defend myself and my identity. There's no issue with this, until... it is a blindfold and fortress that I hide behind and keeps me from seeing and owning the systems of oppression that exist and I am a part of because of the history of my race.

And down comes the sword of Jesus, separating and dividing me from the identity that I held dear, even higher than the identity I have through my Baptism into Christ. By lifting up my family as my primary identity, even over my identity with Christ, this is a sin that I need to continue to repent. My family is dear and a blessing to me, but when it keeps me from seeing the sin of the identity I have in the history and systems of oppression within my identity as a white, privileged male in the world, this is a sin I need to continually repent. And by repent, I mean move beyond the emotions of feeling sorry and bad for the systems of oppression, to listening, learning and advocating for change that will reflect my Baptismal identity.

Paul reminds us, “^{1b}Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?
²By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it. ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? ⁴Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.”

Siblings in Christ, YES, siblings in CHRIST, may we walk in this identity, this newness of life, not ignoring the sin that we have died to, but, with God’s help, transforming this death into the abundant life that Christ died for, for all. Because if we have been untied with Christ in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.

“Hugs and kisses...”

Amen.