

## Fourth Sunday after Pentecost

June 28, 2020

**Psalm 119:153-160 (NIV)** <sup>153</sup>Look upon my suffering and deliver me, for I have not forgotten your law. <sup>154</sup>Defend my cause and redeem me; preserve my life according to your promise. <sup>155</sup>Salvation is far from the wicked, for they do not seek out your decrees. <sup>156</sup>Your compassion is great, O LORD; preserve my life according to your laws. <sup>157</sup>Many are the foes who persecute me, but I have not turned from your statutes. <sup>158</sup>I look on the faithless with loathing, for they do not obey your word. <sup>159</sup>See how I love your precepts; preserve my life, O LORD, according to your love. <sup>160</sup>All your words are true; all your righteous laws are eternal.

**Jeremiah 28:5-9 (NIV)** <sup>5</sup>Then the prophet Jeremiah replied to the prophet Hananiah before the priests and all the people who were standing in the house of the LORD. <sup>6</sup>He said, "Amen! May the LORD do so! May the LORD fulfill the words you have prophesied by bringing the articles of the LORD'S house and all the exiles back to this place from Babylon. <sup>7</sup>Nevertheless, listen to what I have to say in your hearing and in the hearing of all the people: <sup>8</sup>From early times the prophets who preceded you and me have prophesied war, disaster and plague against many countries and great kingdoms. <sup>9</sup>But the prophet who prophesies peace will be recognized as one truly sent by the LORD only if his prediction comes true."

**Romans 7:1-13 (NIV)** <sup>1</sup>Do you not know, brothers--for I am speaking to men who know the law--that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? <sup>2</sup>For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. <sup>3</sup>So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. <sup>4</sup>So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you

might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God. <sup>5</sup>For when we were controlled by the sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our bodies, so that we bore fruit for death. <sup>6</sup>But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. <sup>7</sup>What shall we say, then? Is the law sin? Certainly not! Indeed I would not have known what sin was except through the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, "Do not covet." <sup>8</sup>But sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, produced in me every kind of covetous desire. For apart from law, sin is dead. <sup>9</sup>Once I was alive apart from law; but when the commandment came, sin sprang to life and I died. <sup>10</sup>I found that the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death. <sup>11</sup>For sin, seizing the opportunity afforded by the commandment, deceived me, and through the commandment put me to death. <sup>12</sup>So then, the law is holy, and the commandment is holy, righteous and good. <sup>13</sup>Did that which is good, then, become death to me? By no means! But in order that sin might be recognized as sin, it produced death in me through what was good, so that through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful.

**Matthew 10:34-42 (NIV)** <sup>34</sup>"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. <sup>35</sup>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—<sup>36</sup>a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' <sup>37</sup>"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup>and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. <sup>39</sup>Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>40</sup>"He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the

one who sent me. <sup>41</sup>Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. <sup>42</sup>And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

### **The Cost and Reward of the Kingdom**

Matthew 10:34-42

- ❑ **Spiritual warfare** (verse 34; Isaiah 9:6; Matthew 5:9; Luke 2:14; Luke 1:79; Ephesians 6:12, 15; Hebrews 13:20; Jeremiah 28:8-9; Revelation 12:7-10, 12, 17; John 14:27; 16:33)
  
- ❑ **The Cost of Discipleship**  
(verses 35-39; Romans 12:18)
  
- ❑ **The reward of the Kingdom** (verses 40-42; Matthew 25:35-36; Hebrews 11:6; Colossians 1:19-20; Romans 5:1; 2 Corinthians 5:18)

### **The Cost and Reward of the Kingdom**

Matthew 10:34-42

The great preacher, Peter Marshall began one sermon with a vivid word picture from the German trenches of World War I:

It was an afternoon in the early summer; there was a strange quiet on the battlefield.

In the bright sunshine, the air was balmy and had a breath of garden in it.

By some grotesque miracle, a bird was singing somewhere near at hand.

On the firing step, with his rifle lying in a groove in the protective parapet, stood a private soldier in field-gray, his uniform stained with mud and blood.

On his face, so young yet strangely marked with the lines of war that made him look old, was a wistful faraway expression.

He was enjoying the sunshine and the quiet of this strange lull in the firing.

The heavy guns had been silent—there was no sound to break the eerie stillness.

Suddenly a butterfly fluttered into view and alighted on the ground almost at the end of his rifle.

It was a strange visitor to a battleground—so out-of-place—so out-of-keeping with the grim setting.

rifles and bayonets

barbed wire and barriers

shell holes and twisted bodies

But there is was—a gorgeous creature, the wings like gold leaf splashed with carmine, swaying in the warm breath of spring.

As the war-weary youth watched that butterfly, he was no longer a private in field-gray. He was a boy once

more . . . in sunny Saxony. That strange visitor to the front-line trench recalled to him the joys of his boyhood when he chased through fields of clover and buttercups collecting butterflies.

It spoke to him of days of peace, a symbol of the lovelier things of life . . . a reminder that there was still beauty and peace in the world—that somewhere there was color and the scent of flowers and gardens and butterflies.

He forgot the enemy a few hundred yards across no-man's land. He forgot the danger and deprivation and suffering. He forgot everything as he watched that butterfly.

With all the hunger in his heart; with the resurrection of his dreams and visions that he thought were gone, he reached out his hand toward that butterfly.

His fingers moved slowly, cautiously, lest he frighten away this visitor to the battlefield.

In showing one kind of caution, he forgot another.

The butterfly was just beyond his reach—so he stretched, forgetting that watchful eyes were waiting for a target.

He brought himself out slowly—with infinite care and patience—until now he had just a little distance to go.

He could almost touch the wings that were so lovely.

And then . . . ping . . . ing . . . ing . . . ing . . .

A sniper's bullet found its mark.

The stretched fingers relaxed . . .  
the hand dropped to the ground . . .

For the private soldier in field-gray, the war was over.

An official bulletin issued that afternoon said, "All was quiet on the Western Front . . ."

And for a boy in field-gray it was a quiet that no guns would ever break.

It is a dangerous thing to be on a battlefield and forget you are at war.

The words of Jesus in our Gospel lesson today remind us that we are on a spiritual battlefield and that a war is raging around us.

We reach out for those things which we think will bring us fulfillment and joy, only to become the target of the enemy.

Jesus first warned His apostles, and He warns us today that we will face . . .

### **Spiritual warfare** (verse 34)

Jesus said in verse <sup>34</sup> *"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."*

I don't know about you, but these words seem harsh to me. My heart and mind recoil from them. What did Jesus mean *"I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."*

Isn't Jesus the *Prince of Peace* (Isaiah 9:6)? Did He not call his disciples to be *peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9)? Wasn't the message the angels sang at His birth *peace on earth, goodwill to men* (Luke 2:14)? Didn't Zechariah prophesy that the Christ, the Messiah, would come, *to guide our feet into the path of peace* (Luke 1:79)? Are we not called to proclaim the *gospel of peace* (Ephes. 6:15)? Is the Lord we serve not called, *the God of Peace* (Hebrews 13:20)?

Then how can Jesus say *I did not come to bring peace, but a sword?*

What Jesus *is* saying is that He was sending His apostles, and He is sending *us*, into a great spiritual conflict.

Ephesians 6:12 says, *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* (NIV)

Jesus came to depose the “*ruler of this world.*” Jesus spoke about the victory He would win on the cross in John 12:31: *now is the ruler of this world cast out.* (Literally, thrown out!)

Jesus did not come to make peace *with* this sinful world which has been led astray and dominated by the evil One. Jesus came to wage war against the Kingdom of Satan.

Matthew 10:34 could be literally translated: *Do not imagine that I came to throw peace upon the earth; I came not to throw peace but a sword.* (Lenski)

That Greek word for *throw* is the same word used in Revelation 12:7-10: *Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, <sup>8</sup>but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. <sup>9</sup>And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. <sup>10</sup>And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.*

Because Satan has been *thrown down* to earth, Jesus must *throw down* the sword in battle with him and his forces.

Revelation 12:12, 17 says: *Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!”*

*. . . <sup>17</sup>Then the dragon was enraged . . . and went off to make war against . . . those who obey God's commandments and hold to the testimony of Jesus.* (ESV)

When Jesus commissioned His apostles, He sent them into battle against the Kingdom of Satan.

Jesus did come to bring peace—but only to those who believe and receive His message of peace.

John 14:27 (NIV)

*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Our peace is in Jesus, not in the world.

John 16:33 (NRSV)

*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”*

We are in a great spiritual battle. Jesus is sending His disciples and us to war. As He does so, Jesus makes clear . . .

### **The Cost of Discipleship** (verses 35-39)

Jesus is not nuanced about this: As His disciples go to war, people will be on different sides of this conflict.

The *sword* is used in Scripture as a metaphor, a word picture, of division. That dividing line is not a national border, nor is it about ethnic origin, nor is it ideological. The dividing line is Jesus Christ—whether or not He is one’s savior and Lord.

*<sup>35</sup>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—<sup>36</sup>a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.’ <sup>37</sup>Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; <sup>38</sup>and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

Jesus plainly says that we are to love Him more than family; more than anything in this world.

Jesus prepared His disciples for the reality that to follow Him may even bring them into conflict with the God-given blessing of family. In this way Jesus expresses our conflict with the world in the starkest contrast possible.

But let us not misunderstand. The division in families, should *not* come from us. One does not say to your mother-in-law, you are my enemy because you are not a Christian. We are to be peacemakers, we are to be sheep and doves, not wolves and lions.

Romans 12:18 says, *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* (NIV)

But sometimes that is not possible.

That is true for Poh, a young Hmong Christian man in northern Vietnam. According to the ministry begun by Brother Andrew called *Open Doors*, Poh grew up worshiping demons. When he came to faith in Christ his father threatened to kill him. In Hmong culture, to become a Christian can mean risking everything—family, status, community and even life. Poh has greatly suffered for following Jesus, and yet he longs to follow Christ even more closely.

That is what Jesus meant when he said in verse

*<sup>39</sup>Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.*

Jesus calls us to love Him more than our families and even more than our own lives.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, gives us an insight into what that looks like in relation to our battle with the world.

As a young man, Martin Luther, against the wishes of his father, gave up the prospect of a promising legal

career and entered the strictest monastery he could find in order that by losing *his life*, he would *find it*.

Bonhoeffer wrote: “Luther had left all to follow Christ . . . he had renounced the world in order to live the Christian life. . . . The call to the cloister demanded of Luther the complete surrender of his life.”

But no matter how noble and good that was, Luther discovered that salvation could not be earned by his good works, but was a gift of God’s grace given through the gospel.

Bonhoeffer goes on to say, “The renunciation [Luther] made when he became a monk was child’s play compared with that which he had to make when he returned to the world. Now came the frontal assault. . . . The conflict between the life of the Christian and the life of the world was thus thrown into the sharpest possible relief. It was a hand-to-hand conflict between the Christian and the world.”

Luther would write, in the words of the beloved hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*: “Let goods and kindred go. This mortal life also; the body they may kill; God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.”

These words of Luther remind us that although the cost of discipleship is great, so is . . .

### **The reward of the Kingdom** (verses 40-42)

*<sup>40</sup>He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. <sup>41</sup>Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward. <sup>42</sup>And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”*

To receive Christ is to receive a great reward: The Kingdom of God and eternal life.

To receive the messenger of Christ—and to receive the good news of the kingdom—is to receive that great reward.

That reward is not earned, it is entirely by grace. But to reject Christ's disciples, is to reject Jesus and the grace that He offers. To receive Christ's disciples is to receive Jesus and the grace that He offers.

When Jesus spoke of *these little ones*, He was not referring to children, although children were very dear to his heart and He often spoke of them as recorded in Matthew. *These little ones* refer to even the least of the disciples of Jesus.

These are the ones Jesus spoke of when he said in:

Matthew 25:35-36 *"For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup>I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."* (NIV)

To these Jesus said, *'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.* (Matthew 25:34 NIV)

That is the reward of the Kingdom.

Hebrews 11:6 . . . *without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.* (ESV)

Again, that reward is by grace alone as we respond by faith to the gospel—the good news of the Kingdom!

The reward of the kingdom *is* the peace that Jesus did come to bring:

Colossians 1:19-20 (NIV) *For God was pleased through [Christ] to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ* (NIV).

And we are called to this work of reconciliation by proclaiming the good news of the kingdom.

2 Corinthians 5:18 *All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation* (NIV).

Taysir who is called, "Tass" was a Palestinian fighter who was trained to kill Jews. His hatred was so strong he dreamed of poisoning Jews who frequented the restaurant where he worked even after emigrating to the United States.

But Tass was intrigued by regular customer at the restaurant, a Christian, who radiated peace, a peace which Tass longed to have for himself.

In the course of some months, that customer whose name was Charlie Sharpe, was able to share the gospel and God opened Tass' heart to receive Christ.

Tass came home that day and told his 18-year-old son that he had become a Christian. His son hugged him with joy, which greatly surprised Tass.

"Dad," He said, "I accepted Christ three months ago, too, and I didn't tell anybody, because I thought you'd kill me if you found out."

My pastor told me, "go back to your father's house and love him more." The pastor then called a special meeting at the church to establish a prayer chain, to pray 24-7 for Tass and his family.

Moran Rosenblit was a soldier for Israel who became embittered after a Palestinian suicide bomber killed

seven of his friends. He was depressed and angry over the continual conflict in the Middle East and moved to the United States to find peace. He lived with a Christian family, who invited him to Church with them, and soon Moran gave his heart to Jesus Christ.

Improbably, these former enemies met at a Christian conference for reconciliation between Arabs and Jews, and now talk to each other almost every day, sharing a profound friendship and love only possible because of Jesus Christ.

"Do you want a picture of the solution for the Middle East?" asks Moran. "If God changed my heart and Tass' heart, he can change anyone's heart." "God delivered me from this hatefulness toward Arabs and he's been teaching me to love my enemies."

*Jesus said, love your enemies . . . and your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.*

The cost of the kingdom is great, and so is its reward. Let us pray . . .

Heavenly Father, we know there will not be peace in our world until there is peace between nations; that there will not be peace among nations until there is peace in our country; and that there will not be peace in our country until there is peace in our cities; that there will not be peace in our cities until there is peace in our homes; and there will not be peace in our homes until there is peace in our hearts. Lord, bring your perfect peace into the hearts of everyone, through faith in Jesus Christ and His blood shed for our sins. Send us as ambassadors of reconciliation to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom, in the name of Jesus. Amen.

*Benediction: And [now may] the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, . . . guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*