

## The Sword of Jesus

**Grace and peace to you from our Lord Jesus Christ...**

And again, Happy Father's Day to all of our fathers (and may the blessings of God be with you) on this day – and always...

I must admit that I found it much easier to preach on the subject of Father's Day (before I had children) – because back then I knew so much (and so I won't be doing that today) - but I sort of laughed at what a cynical friend observed about the four stages he said that all children go through with their dads... he said, "First they call you 'Dada'... Then they call you, 'Daddy'... As they get a little bit older they call you 'Dad'... and then finally, when they're all grown up - they call you collect to borrow money..."

No one said that being a father was easy (that's for sure)...

But easy or not – if you are a father and you're doing the best that you can to be a good role model – know that God also looks upon you with love and grace... because the world needs more men like you... and it's through your goodness and your commitment of being a good dad – the best one that YOU can be - (that you also give to the world a great gift)... and so, we say 'thank you' on this day (and we pray that you don't give up!)...

In our Gospel lesson this morning (from the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew's Gospel) Jesus doesn't specifically say much about what it means to be a good father, but he does speak words that sound out of character (to the Jesus most of us know and love)...

In fact, listen to what he says in verse 34... he says "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth, I have not come to bring peace, but a sword*"... and then goes on to say that "*he has come to divide a man against his father, daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*" and then finishes by saying, "*and one's foes will be members of one's own household*"...

I mean, does that sound like the Jesus that you know?...

Well, I can tell you that this is one of the most highly debated texts in the whole Bible (with as many explanations as there are questions)... But perhaps the most humorous was how the Irish took care of the problem (in that the Book of Kells (which is actually a translation from the Greek into the Latin) and has the word 'gladium' (which is the Latin word for 'sword') and alters it to 'gaudium' (which

is the Latin word for ‘joy’) - and has the translation then say, “*I came not only to bring peace, but also joy*”... The Irish can make anything fun...

But the general consensus among more serious scholars is that what Jesus meant by bringing a sword (and dividing families) is that his message (is not so much about a military conflict) but that his teachings (about radical love – that people still struggle with today) would cause a sharp social division that would sever even the closest family ties...

Imagine living in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century (and after spending the day listening to Jesus preach his Sermon on the Mount) you’re then found speaking words of forgiveness and God’s love to a tax collector, or a prostitute – or even to a family enemy (and then word gets back to your parents)... there’s a very good chance they’re not going to be happy (and if you kept doing it – there’s an even greater chance that your parents would disown you)... especially if your parents were strict traditional Jews living in an honor/shame culture and who still believed in an ‘eye for an eye’...

In fact, what made that first group of believers even more suspicious to people was their practice of what was called, ‘Agape’... Agape as you may know means ‘love’ but it was a very specific type of love in that it was always an act of service and wasn’t motivated by what it could get in return – it was always an act of the will and wasn’t motivated by how you felt about the person – it was a stooping down to lift someone up (someone in a weaker social or physical or emotional position in life than you were) – and it required great humility... all of which sound honorable to our ears...

*“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres ([1 Corinthians 13:1-7](#)).”*

But what made it problematic in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century (where social status was a symbol of virtue) the last thing you'd want to see your son or daughter doing was hanging around a leper colony all day – or caring for the mentally deranged – or giving all their money away to help the widow down the street (I mean, doesn't she have a son? – and how did she become our problem)... and it was this radical love that so often created division within families (some who saw the light and believed in Jesus – and some who did not)... just like it may divide families today...

And why did these Christians practice Agape (when they knew they'd cause division at home and with friends)?... Well, because these were the things that Jesus did (and they knew in their hearts – that if they were going to remain true to their faith – they had to do it too)...

In fact, this is what's meant in Matthew 10:8 when Jesus says, "Freely you have received and freely should you give"...or as Matthew 7:12 says, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you"... and of course, in 1 John 4:19, we read, "We love, because he first loved us"...

And then in our Gospel reading this morning Jesus goes on to say, "*and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me*"...

I think I mentioned a few weeks ago that to carry a cross is not related to the terrible things that happen to you in life... but the crosses we carry are all the things that we do for someone else... in fact, if you remember the story – Simon the Cyrene carried the cross for Jesus – and Jesus carried the cross (and died on it) not for his sake (but for the sake of the world)... it's the ultimate image of Agape...

And what Jesus is saying is that if we're not willing to do the same acts of service (that he did for us) then how can we say we have faith in his message?... and "*those who find their life* (or their purpose in the things of this earth – like a house, or a car, or whatever money can buy) *will lose it* (because when you're dead it's gone) – *and those who lose their life for my sake* (by practicing Agape) *will find it*"(in other words, they will find the promises of God – not as a reward - but as an awakening to the truth and the true meaning of life)... that we are spirit (having a human experience)... but we go back to God...

And practicing Agape (which many have called the highest form of love – or Divine love) is what keeps the spirit focused on the truth (that this world is temporary and our higher state of being is when we make conscious contact with

God)... and Jesus has shown the world how to do that (and only with his help – can we do it)...

So here's a question Gang – with all of the things plague our world right now (with people getting sick with the virus – or dealing with the loss of a loved one, with unemployment sky rocketing and small businesses struggling to hold on, with racial unrest and social upheaval, with divorce, and addiction, and suicides on the rise, with millions of people in poorer countries facing a shortage of food and an increase in hunger – what will that radical love look like in your life?....

And no, I can't tell you how to respond to any one of these needs – but I can tell you that if you call upon the Lord (he will show you the way)... and blessed are you (if you follow)... and just like the world needs good fathers (the world also needs those who love Jesus to carry their crosses – because then there is hope in the world (and let me remind you – that you are the hope of the world)...

May the peace of our Lord cleanse your heart from fear – May the love of God guide your steps – and may all of His promises be made known to you in this world (and in the World to Come)...

In Jesus' name we pray...

**Amen!...**

Would you pray with me?:

God of all Compassion and Truth – we know that the troubles that face our nation and the world (are bigger than we are) but we also know that You have the power to do all things... inspire us to serve You – serve our neighbor – and become instruments of your peace and blessing... In Jesus' name we pray...

Amen!