



Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

www.mzluth.org

June 22, 2008

6th Sunday after Pentecost

Matthew 10:34-42

Pastor Randy Ott

First Lesson: Jeremiah 28:5-9

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 89

Second Lesson: Romans 6:1b-11

Gospel: Matthew 10:34-42

Find Life in Christ

A life that has earthly crosses

A life that has earthly and eternal blessings

I've seen commercials for dentists talking about pain-free dentistry. When I grew up, the words "pain free" and "dentistry" did not go together with the dentist I went to. I didn't enjoy going to the dentist. Nice guy, friendly and all that, but still inflicted pain. I would have appreciated a little more pain relief if it would have meant a few less smiles as he was digging in my teeth.

I find that now when I go to the dentist it doesn't hurt anywhere near like what I remember, but I still find myself looking down and my knuckles are white because I'm grabbing onto the end of the chair that I am sitting in so hard and I have to remind myself to quit tensing up. It doesn't hurt like I remember it.

There was one time in my life when I was willing to knock down the dentist's door on a weekend so that I could get in there. When I was in Minnesota, I had a tooth that needed a root canal that was infected and it hurt like the dickens. There wasn't anything that seemed to be relieving the pain. It was on a Friday night and it wasn't until Monday when I could get it done if I remember correctly. I would have given anything to have a dentist inflict a little pain on me right then and there so it would have brought some relief.

It's funny how that works, isn't it? There are times when we recognize that we need a little bit of pain and where to turn when that pain comes. There are times when that pain reminds us, "You know what? You should have been there beforehand, but get there now." That's the way it is, isn't it?

For the last three weeks we've been looking at Jesus' words that are addressed to his disciples when he sends them out to go to the towns and villages and preach the good news of the kingdom, perform those miracles, and do all those things and say, "The kingdom of God is near." But Jesus was telling them about the toothache that was going to come before it came. He was telling them about the pain they were going to face before they got out there and faced it. Last week and this week he is talking about as you serve him in his kingdom, as you proclaim the good news, the most important news there is—that Christ is our Savior—there will be those that will reject you and persecute you. You have pain coming. So he reminds us before that pain comes to find the answer even before the pain starts coming by finding our life in Christ.

Recognize that if we find our life, we will lose it, but when we find Christ and we stay close to Christ, we will have eternal life.

We are reminded to find life in Christ. And when we find life in Christ we find a life that has earthly crosses—a cross being some difficulty we face simply because we are a Christian who is living their faith. That's what he means when he says, "Take up your cross and follow me. Be willing to suffer for my sake." Secondly, we are also reminded by Jesus that, like the relief that comes from the dentist, a life in Christ has blessings, rewards that come, not just in heaven, but also in this life. That is something we have to constantly remind ourselves of.

As he gets towards the end of what he was saying to the twelve before he sent them out, he says something that might sound at first like it just contradicts completely what those angels sang on the hillside by Bethlehem. Remember they sang "Peace to those on whom his favor rests," the phrase we often sing in worship. Jesus says, "Don't suppose that I've come to bring peace to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword." How can those two phrases go together? How can the angels sing that this child that was born was going to bring peace to those on whom his favor rests and then Jesus say, "I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword"? I think the key part in the phrase that Jesus said is "I did not come to bring peace on earth," the kind of peace that people are often looking for, the peace in our daily lives, the peace of getting along with everyone, the peace with everything going fine and never having a problem, never fighting against a big wave as we go through our daily lives. That's not the kind of peace Jesus came to bring. The peace he came to bring was between God and us. You and I are born into this world as filthy, rotten sinners. We have nothing that can bring us closer to God, but Jesus, through his life and death, brought us closer to God. That's the peace the angels sang about.

The peace Jesus is talking about here is peace and smooth sailing in our daily lives. That's not what Jesus came to bring us. He says he came to bring a sword. I think the sword he might be speaking of here is the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God—the Word of God that proclaims the Law that shows us our sin and proclaims the Gospel that shows us our Savior. That sword is going to do exactly what Jesus says. Sometimes it's going to bring problems even within our own families. Quite often you and I want to establish peace or we run into people that want to establish peace and smooth sailing in our daily lives by soft pedaling sin. When someone is caught up in sin, we don't want to rock the boat and point out the fact that what they are doing is an affront to God. What they are doing damns them to hell. We don't want to use such harsh, unloving language, or people around us don't want that for that reason, so we just kind of ignore it or maybe we change the subject and we are especially tempted to do it within our families. Sometimes it's pretty hard to talk about the Law with a family member. It's pretty hard to say to someone that you know you are going to have to face over and over again because you are afraid that a barrier will go up between the two of you and that Thanksgiving dinner won't be the same because they will be mad at you. So for the sake of peace between family members at times, we love father, son, mother, daughter, brother, sister, cousin—I don't know what it might be—more than we love God, just what Jesus warns us against. When you and I do that, we sin.

That sin has consequences at times, doesn't it? Consequences that at times hurt, not because it rocks the boat in the here and now and leads to this loss of peace that Jesus is talking about, but because sometimes you and I become so fearful of how we might be perceived that we shut up and it costs eternal peace.

I have a half brother, grew up in Baltimore. I saw him not always all that often. He was a lot older than I was, a lot older than my other half brother. He was murdered about ten years ago. I honestly can't say that I know I am going to see him in heaven. So earthly peace—what good is it? If I was unwilling to talk to my brother about what is truly essential, what good is earthly peace?

God wants us to take up our crosses and follow him and that means at times that we bear for him, because of our love for him, maybe the temporary dislike of a relative because we speak the Law so that we are able to speak the good news that Christ took away that sin. We speak it lovingly and we speak it faithfully, but at times it will be a cross. And the sad thing is that there are times when you and I will have failed to serve our God in this way. That's why, at those times, we need this reminder from our fellow believers and from our God to turn to God in repentance and see that Christ lived and died in our place for the times that we didn't take up our cross, for the times that we valued earthly peace over eternal peace. Christ lived and died for that sin as well. When we kneel at his altar and receive his very body and blood, we can rejoice that it is the body and blood that was poured out so that our sins might be forgiven so that we stand holy and pure and whole in the presence of our God because we have found life in Christ—not in our efforts, not in our failures, but in the perfection that is Jesus Christ.

The glorious truth is that when we find our life in Christ, it brings blessings beyond what we could imagine. We receive a prophet's reward. We receive a righteous man's reward. We won't lose our reward as we live our faith in such simple ways as even giving a cup of cold water to a little one who believes in Jesus. We have blessings that come because we won't lose the reward. We ourselves will have heaven—that much I think we understand. I think we get that. That's why it's worth putting ourselves on the line. We might not always carry it out, but I think we get it.

But sometimes I think we might forget that there are blessings, the reward of a prophet, the reward of a righteous man, in this lifetime. The comfort and the confidence of the forgiveness that we have in Christ that is there when we face heartache and tragedy in this world. We are going to face it. There are going to be things that come that just stink to high heaven. They are miserable to go through and you wouldn't wish them on your worst enemy. We will go through them. But as we go through them, we go through them with a God who loved us enough to die for us at our side. We go through it with the everlasting arms beneath us, lifting us up and carrying us on eagle's wings when we don't know how we can keep going. That's the blessing we have. That's what makes this Gospel of Jesus Christ, the Word and the Sacraments, so important in our lives that we set aside time for it, not just at worship, but in our daily lives so that we get closer to Christ, so that he lifts us up and makes us stronger, so that we can pick up those crosses and find joy and purpose in serving the one who loved us first.

Our God has put us in a special place in a special time. He has put us into this family of believers so that we can comfort and encourage one another. He has given us the Gospel of Jesus Christ and ways to communicate it that no other age has enjoyed. It's time for us to take up our cross and follow him so that others may find life in Christ.