

Commentary on the Gospel for Mon, Jul 13th 2015

Jesus said to his Apostles:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace upon the earth.

I have come to bring not peace, but the sword...

Today's Gospel reading is part of Jesus' conversation with his disciples as He gives them authority and instructions to go out into the community bearing the gifts and messages He has entrusted to them. “I am sending you out like sheep among wolves. Therefore be shrewd as snakes and innocent as doves. Be on your guard; you will be handed over to the local councils and be flogged in the synagogues (Matthew 10:16-17).”

Wow, think about this: this is a “church” conversation. The religious community in all its power and glory is getting it wrong enough that here is Jesus in the flesh trying to get the good news out and this most unwelcome news arouses deadly anger and resentment within the structures of privilege and power. Jesus certainly did not come to tell the leaders and “successful” members of his religious community how on target they were and to make them feel good about themselves. If that were the case, why would He have come at all? And so He tells his disciples to prepare to be flogged, arrested, unwelcome, even killed for saying and doing what comes next.

I love the image of the sword in this statement: the swift, heavy, decisive and sharp impact of the truth in action and word as it cuts through all the religious fluff. And in the face of the humiliation and arrogance of the leadership Jesus tells his disciples to be shrewd, be on your guard, and keep your reputation clean because the powers that be are going to rip you apart in public.

He has also reassured them just moments before: “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known (Matthew 10:26).” The authorities and leaders have their skeletons and their secrets, and Jesus knows it. He makes sure his disciples know this as well. “Do not be afraid.” But yet we are afraid -

“...For I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; and one's enemies will be those of his household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and whoever does not take up his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it...”

With Jesus, it is always about relationship. What will the impact of His message be on the core, fundamental family relationships for those who embrace it? Neither will this be peaceful, and indeed it will probably be deeply disruptive to the family expectations and definitions of “success.”

This is as true now as it ever was. Parents, I wish you could stand in my shoes as students come through my life almost daily to talk about discovering who they are and the ways they feel called to live their lives. I wish you could watch the permeating sadness, defeated shoulders and fallen faces of the young men and women who say, “My dad wants me to be a doctor,” or “My parents don't know

what I really believe and I could never tell them,” or “I don’t want to disappoint my parents” as they make key fundamental life choices. The deadness of a life already stolen fills the room, though stolen with all of the best and priciest intentions.

There are also those students who radiate excitement about their life, their unique adventure before them, their calling resonating deeply in their hearts and souls, joy on their faces. They don’t have all the answers yet, but they know they are on their path. Their path, their journey, and not the one their loved ones chose for them. And sometimes their parents are afraid for them or question the wisdom of their decisions, and my students share this with me. This is understandable, because Jesus’ path is not usually the “safe” one.

And parents, I am not only speaking to you, I am also speaking to myself. I have four children of my own, ages 23, 20, 15 and 13, their lives before them, and I do it too. I have some pretty specific ideas about what my hopes and dreams are for my children and what kind of lives I hope they enjoy. I am not terribly detached from their decisions and choices. I am proud when they make the “right” decisions.

Part of Jesus’ “good news” is that He knows why each of us was born. He knows our true identity and He knows the true identity of those closest to us. If we will “just” lose control of our lives to Him, He will give them back to us in better ways than we could have ever created ourselves. Parents, he knows and loves your children more than you do. Spouses, he knows and loves your spouse more than you do. The only life any of us can rightly own is our own. Jesus is asking us to let go of our loved one’s lives to live as they feel called to live (assuming a search for good will and an honest examination of conscience) and says that if we don’t, we are not worthy of Him. Jesus is asking us all to trust Him with the process of the growth and development and journey of those we love most dearly.

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me. Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and whoever receives a righteous man because he is righteous will receive a righteous man’s reward. And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple—amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward.”

I have come to believe that conditional familial love is one of the most cruel things on the planet. “I love you IF _____.” IF you are who I want you to be, IF you don’t embarrass me, IF you do what I want you to, and IF you make me look good.” And of course many, many families transcend the bounds of conditional love, but also many do not and the resulting rejection of spouses, parents, siblings and in-laws is deeply painful and the road is lonely. “And whoever gives only a cup of cold water to one of these little ones to drink because he is a disciple – amen, I say to you, he will surely not lose his reward,” Jesus invites.

Be on the lookout for people who love the “good news” as they understand it in their hearts, and it has cost them. It has cost them the acceptance and support of their loved ones and they carry that cross silently and alone. They have chosen to be who they are and not who other people wanted them to be. This is what Jesus told us would happen and it is a heavy cross indeed. That cup of cold water you offer will mean the world to them.

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