

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin
February 26, 2017

#WhatJesusSaid

“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Transfiguration Gospel: Matthew 17:1-9

After six days Jesus took with him Peter, James and John the brother of James, and led them up a high mountain by themselves.² There he was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.³ Just then there appeared before them Moses and Elijah, talking with Jesus.

⁴ *Peter said to Jesus, “Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters—one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.”*

⁵ *While he was still speaking, a bright cloud covered them, and a voice from the cloud said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”*

⁶ *When the disciples heard this, they fell facedown to the ground, terrified.⁷ But Jesus came and touched them. “Get up,” he said. “Don’t be afraid.”⁸ When they looked up, they saw no one except Jesus.*

⁹ *As they were coming down the mountain, Jesus instructed them, “Don’t tell anyone what you have seen, until the Son of Man has been raised from the dead.”*

Message Text: Matthew 10:32-39

³² *“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven.³³ But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.*

³⁴ *“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. **I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**³⁵ 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—³⁶ a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’

³⁷ *“Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.³⁸ Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me.³⁹ Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.*

“I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

How odd to hear that from the lips of our Savior!

Taken out of context, it sounds like Jesus is calling us to jihad like a radical Muslim ayatollah.

But Jesus was speaking to his disciples whom he was sending out on a missionary tour. He gave them a commission that would fill anyone’s heart. Preach the gospel. Heal the sick. Raise the dead.

But he also warned them in advance that their ministry would not be an easy one. They weren’t to go out spoiling fight a fight. But if they were faithful to their calling, they would face opposition. They would be arrested. They would be flogged. They would be hated. They would be called Satan himself. And some would be sentenced to death.

This would be a heavy burden on their hearts. These pressures can squeeze the fight right out of us. To strengthen their hearts and ours, he gave them promises like these: “Don’t worry what you will say... It will not be you speaking but the Holy Spirit speaking through you... He who stands firm to the end will be saved... Even the very hairs of your head are numbered.”

Jesus also knows that every one of his disciples and every one of us has a split personality. We are all born with a sinful nature. But when the Holy Spirit brings us to faith, he creates a new self within us.

So Jesus spoke the first words of our text to each part of our hearts. To the sinful nature he warns, “Whoever disowns me before people, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.” And to the new self within us he makes this promise, “Whoever acknowledges me before people, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.”

Then he speaks these words into our hearts: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. **I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.**”

To prepare us to face those pressures as soon as we walk out the door today, let’s step back into the Transfiguration account in Matthew 17. Let’s say with the Apostle Peter, “It is good for us to be here.”

What did Peter see that made him want to stay there? He saw Jesus in all his divine glory.

Jesus was always the Son of God as he walked upon this earth. He always had his divine power and glory. But most of the time he didn’t use it. He would perform a miracle and everyone would be amazed. But then he would get tired and thirsty and hungry just like anyone else.

But on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples saw Jesus’ glory as God. They heard the Father speak his words of approval: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!”

The disciples didn't understand the importance of this yet. A week earlier Jesus had for the first time clearly told his disciples that he was going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die. But they didn't get it. Remember how Peter pulled Jesus aside and told him, "Never, Lord! This shall never happen to you!"

In a few short months the disciples would see Jesus arrested, tormented and crucified. They needed to be here to see Jesus in all his glory because very soon that glory would be hidden in his suffering.

The Christian Church observes today as Transfiguration Sunday because it is the last Sunday before Lent begins. In the season of Lent, we too will walk with Jesus as he steadfastly sets his face to go up to Jerusalem. We'll look at his sufferings again and be amazed.

But if we are to understand his suffering, we have to remember that his glory is hidden in his suffering. God is going up to Jerusalem to suffer and die.

When, by faith, we see Jesus' glory in his suffering, when we see his love for us that he was willing to endure that suffering so that we might be forgiven, then we see our glory too. Right now, it is hidden. Right now we are called to struggle and defeat over and over again. But in the midst of defeat and pressure, we can be at peace. God died for me. This is my glory. This is your glory. We are infinitely precious to our God. What the Father said about his Son is true of us as well, "This is my daughter. This is my son. I love you. With you I am well pleased."

Many of you probably enjoyed the day on Wednesday. What a beautiful day to enjoy nature in the middle of winter. You can see on a day like that that our God is glorious. You can see his wisdom and power in creation.

But you can't truly see his glory. You can't see that the God who created all things is the God who walked on this earth and walked to Jerusalem for you and me.

Yes, it is good for us to be here, in public worship, and in your private worship at home, in Word and Sacrament, we see Jesus' glory and our own. For we are called to not to enjoy peace, but a sword, as Isaac Watts' hymn reminds us:

**Am I a soldier of the cross,
A foll'wer of the Lamb,
And shall I fear to own His cause,
Or blush to speak His Name?**

**Must I be carried to the skies
On flow'ry beds of ease,
While others fought to win the prize,
And sailed through bloody seas?**

It is also good for us to be here where we find our sword. Jesus warns us that as we carry out our ministry, we will face opposition. Family members and friends will see us as judgmental. They will call us fools for believing that Genesis is history. Jesus wanted his disciples to be mentally and spiritually prepared for that opposition.

But we are not to be spoiling for a fight. In fact, the only way we are going to win people for Christ is not to be belligerent, but to be filled with the Spirit: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy,

peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22,23).

But what happens when we feel pressure from others. Those pressures have the power to crush all that fruit right out of our heart. The sinful nature in us grows stronger. Rather than being filled with the fruit of the Spirit, our hearts are filled with selfishness, envy, bitterness, hatred.

That is why it is good for us to be here, not only where we experience the sword of opposition from outside, but also where we find the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6).

The season of Lent is an excellent time to take up that Sword of the Spirit. The mid-week messages will focus on the Hidden Glory of Jesus and the cross. For those of you who would like to dig deeper, we are recommending the book *The Theology of the Cross* published by Northwestern Publishing House. This is going to become a Lutheran classic as Dr. Deutschlander helps us understand our experiences of the cross and the sword. Jesus came not to bring peace but a sword.

May the words of the hymn encourage us to take up the Word of God anew this season of Lent.

Are there no foes for me to face?	Sure I must fight if I would reign;
Must I not stem the flood?	Increase my courage, Lord
Is this vile world a friend to grace,	I'll bear the toil, endure the pain,
To help me on to God?	Supported by Thy Word.

Finally, it is good for us to be here were we find our life.

Jesus spoke first to our sinful nature and warns: “Whoever finds their life will lose it.”

If what this world has to offer is what we focus on, if family and friends, wealth and health, are more important to us than Christ and his mission, then we have all that we are going to get. We will find “life,” only to lose it. This is a powerful warning to our sinful nature.

But then Jesus speaks to the new self within us. “Whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.” When we commit ourselves to Christ’s mission, we will find a life worth living.

Often we become discouraged in our Christian life because we don’t see the results we’d like to see. What we have worked so hard for doesn’t happen as we had hoped. What we have built up crumbles away.

But when we are working to build up God’s kingdom, the work is never without effect. We may not see the results, but God does. Jesus goes on to promise that even if we give a cup of cold water to someone, God will remember it.

It is when we see life from this perspective that our cares and concerns are overcome. We have a reason and purpose in life that others can't even begin to see.

And beyond purpose in this life is the life that will never end, as we celebrate in the last verses of the hymn:

**Thy saints in all this glorious war
Shall conquer, though they die;
They see the triumph from afar,
By faith's discerning eye.**

**When that illustrious day shall rise,
And all Thy armies shine
In robes of victory through the skies,
The glory shall be Thine.**

By Isaac Watts in *The Lutheran Hymnal* 445

It was this confidence that gave our spiritual forefathers the courage to confess their faith in spite of opposition and persecution. Sharing the glory of God's forgiveness in Christ was more important than life itself. Nearly 1700 years ago Christians took up the Sword of the Spirit to confess what we believe in the words of the Nicene Creed. By faith they had seen Jesus' glory as God equal to the Father. By faith they claimed the certainty of forgiveness that only God himself could give. They followed Jesus, even though following him brought the sword. They understood what Jesus meant when he said: "I have not come to bring peace but a sword." And we are the beneficiaries of the Christian confessors at the Council of Nicea in 325 AD as we join with them and confess the faith they were willing to die for.

Nicene Creed

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the virgin Mary, and became fully human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets. We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

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