

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Watertown, WI**

“There’s Trouble Ahead . . . and Peace”

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“Jesus said, ‘Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person’s enemies will be those of his own 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 his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it’” (Mt. 10:34-39).

Many of you remember exactly where you were on July 20, 1969. It was the day Apollo 11 touched down on the surface of the moon. You remember the grainy video feed coming through the little black and white TV. It was broadcast live to a world-wide audience. We were gripped as Neil Armstrong carefully stepped down the nine-rung ladder and, at last, planted his feet onto the lunar surface. It was the greatest voyage ever taken in human history. It was arguably the greatest accomplishment in human history. Ever since, there’s been the expression, “We can put a man on the moon, but we cannot . . .” We could sense it was truly a historic event, once in a lifetime, once in a millennium sort of stuff. Recognizing the magnitude of the moment, Armstrong chose his words carefully. “That’s one small step for [a] man, one giant leap for mankind.”

A stainless-steel plaque was left behind and is there to this day. It reads, “HERE MEN FROM THE PLANET EARTH FIRST SET FOOT UPON THE MOON JULY 1969, A.D. WE CAME IN PEACE FOR ALL MANKIND”. We came in peace for all mankind.

If there were a plaque left behind in Bethlehem, what would it say? After all, the birth of God’s Son is an even more notable event. And it’s of ultimate importance, of eternal significance, whose implications are forever and ever, it deserves a plaque. What would it say? Maybe something like, “Here Jesus Christ, Son of God, Israel’s Messiah, Lord of the Universe, first set foot on the planet earth. A.D. 1”

Apollo 11’s plaque reads, “We came in peace for all mankind”. But the plaque in Bethlehem? I’m not sure we would want to use what Jesus Himself said. Verse 34 of our text: “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword”. This “mission statement”, if you will, is meant to shock. It is meant to jolt us out of any misconceptions about the Christian life and the cost of discipleship. At Bethlehem, the angels sang, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace.” That for sure is the real mission, and the end goal, peace with God and one another. But until that day, the Last Day, Jesus tells us we can expect discord. We can expect trouble, confusion, pain and persecution. It’s not the purpose for which he came, but it is often the result.

Earlier, in chapter 5, Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household.” Are Christians being maligned today in the United States? Anyone who taps the brakes on our culture today, especially Christians who are trying to be faithful, are most definitely maligned. A few verses later, Jesus made it clear that we can expect hostility. “Blessed are you when others insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you *because of me* . . . for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Mt. 5:11-12). Let your light shine before others, and some will scorn you for it.

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. The mission of Jesus will be met with universal hostility. Even one’s family may not be a place of refuge. A man will turn against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. Please note, the cause is not always us, our lack of tact or sensitivity or thoughtfulness. We may do everything right, say everything well, choose our words carefully, express them lovingly, and still be met with anger and hostility. No one likes to be held accountable, but if Jesus is Lord, we are all accountable to Him, and many people find that concept threatening.

Earlier in chapter ten, Jesus said, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves” which means, there’s going to be trouble. Expect it. Do not be surprised by it. To agree to follow Jesus is to sign away

all rights to a quiet life of self-determination because Jesus demands of us a loyalty which transcends our loyalties to everything else, even the closest of family ties.

“Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.” If you have young children, they may well dig in their heels, especially this time of year, and insist that church is a waste of time. Other activities are far more important. The younger ones will cry and scream. The older ones will become sullen and angry. They will all play the victim and make you feel unreasonable. But Jesus is in no mood for compromise. “Whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. In other words, let there be no idolatry where the children’s agenda becomes more important than God’s.

Sometimes it can come from one’s spouse, who also thinks the Christian life of faith is a waste of time. The husband resents his wife for taking an offering to church. Or the wife is angered by her husband for spending too much time serving at the church. Let there be no idolatry. Whoever loves one’s spouse more than Jesus is not worthy of Jesus.

In chapter 8, a potential disciple came up to Jesus and said, “Lord, I will follow you but let me first go and bury my father” to which Jesus said, “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead.” In other words, discipleship is a matter more serious than even life or death.

Then come the most difficult and uncompromising words ever. “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.” You and I are accustomed to the cross as a word, a symbol, a necklace. And we blithely throw around the phrase, “That’s my cross to bear” as we speak of a bum knee or arthritis in the knuckles. It is nearly impossible for us to recapture the horror these words must have brought to His hearers in Galilee. Crucifixion was the cruelest form of execution in use. Pin a guy to wood and let him hang there until dead. It also carried the stigma of social disgrace, which began not when the condemned was stripped and fixed to the cross, but with the equally public procession through the streets in which the victim had to carry his own instrument of execution among the jeers and insults of the crowd.

Remember when Jesus was dragging His cross through Jerusalem toward Golgotha, and how he stumbled and fell under its weight? There was a perfect opportunity for one of his disciples to follow Jesus by bearing His cross. Did one step up? And how about those crowds that followed Him around Galilee, and the crowds that hailed Him as king when he processed into the city . . . was there not one individual to step forward and help their king carry His cross? No. A stranger was pulled out of the crowd and was compelled against his will to help Jesus carry the cross.

Are you willing to suffer that kind of public disgrace for Jesus? Are you willing to suffer a savage death for Him? “Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.”

That clinches it. I’m not worthy, and I don’t think you are either. And yet, Jesus Christ *counted* us worthy of His humiliation. He counted us worthy of His death for the forgiveness of our unworthiness. We don’t measure up. We are not of the right stuff. But the Lord has redeemed you and me. He has made us the right stuff by giving us His righteousness and innocence.

So, it’s about commitment . . . not so much our commitment to Him, which changes like the weather. It’s His commitment to us that counts, and that commitment does not change.

Still there may be trouble in our lives because of Christ. It isn’t His purpose, but it is sometimes the result because His kingship will always be met with hostility.

The Good News is that all who endure to the end will be saved. Jesus endured in His message and in His mission. Jesus rose from the dead. What happened for Jesus, God will do also for you. He will raise you too from the dead, and glorify you, give you a new body without the bum knee or arthritis. Realize, however, until then, there may be trouble.

When Jesus first came into the world, He was met with immediate opposition beginning with the soldiers of Herod looking to kill Him even as an infant. And that opposition to Jesus continues to this very day. I’m not promising that as an individual you will experience persecution. Maybe. Don’t be surprised.

I do promise, however, in the name of Jesus Christ who is coming back, there will be peace and joy and satisfaction and blessing and life and wholeness for all you who call on His name and trust in His promises. Thanks be to God. Amen.