

Trinity 4

Homily by Ed Pacht

Homily

Our second lesson today from Matthew is part of Jesus' larger missionary discourse to his disciples. In this section, he talks about committed discipleship in the face of conflict. Jesus said that he came "not to bring peace, but a sword." Jesus' sword is the word of God. Jesus came to divide his people into two groups- those who are saved by grace and those who reject him and are condemned to spend eternity in hell.

When people follow Jesus, they can expect to have conflicts, even with their own families. Choosing loyalty to anyone other than Christ disqualifies a person from being a disciple of Christ. Peace is the practice of refining everything that is not part of God's righteous realm. Once they are refined, righteousness and justice will reign. Peace will realign our priorities and relationships.

Being Jesus' disciple is not an invitation for glory. It is an invitation for sacrifice and suffering in the presence of powerful opposition. Jesus never promised us an easy life if we become his disciples. In fact, being Jesus' disciple is one of the hardest things we can do.

So, it is no wonder that the Scripture we heard this morning can be a little intimidating.

We all spend a great deal of time and effort in complaining about things in our life and what we wish would happen. It is human nature.

Seldom are we completely satisfied with anything, and we often feel unlucky, deprived, or picked on. Things always could be better, and we won't rest easy until they are.

Well, here's how Jeremiah put it in Lamentations

*"It is of the LORD's mercies
that we are not consumed,
because his compassions fail not."*

He made us, he holds us in being, and, if He ceased remembering us, we would no longer be.

"... his compassions .."

said the prophet,

"... are new every morning: "

... actually, they are new every hour, every minute, every second.

It is all a series of gifts from Him, and what more could we need?

"The LORD is my portion, saith my soul; ...

The LORD is good unto ... the soul that seeketh him. "

At times, it can appear that we are so caught up in ourselves, and in the things that surely pass away that we tend to forget what really matters in this life.

"It is good that a man should both hope and quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD."

You see, come what may, His promise is sure, and will not fail us. The weight is thinking about the pain, the suffering and the trouble we all face. Again from Jeremiah....

"It is good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth. He sitteth alone and keepeth silence, ... He putteth his mouth in the dust; ... He giveth his cheek to him that smiteth him: he is filled full with reproach."

To me that seems a rather grim prospect. But there is hope, because God is love'

"For the LORD will not cast off for ever: ... For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men."

The passage from St. Matthew bears the same thoughts:

"The disciple is not above his master," said Jesus, "nor the servant above his lord. "
And do we indeed deserve better than He received?

He was despised and rejected of men. He was scorned and beaten and bruised. He died a painful death on the Cross, and he said to us:

"... he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. "

It's not easy to take up a cross.

There's nothing easy about being a good Christian. Our Lord gives us reason to expect problems, with the warnings he left for our ears to hear, Christians have suffered and died for and with their Lord, from the very beginning up to the present.

The Twentieth Century probably produced more martyrs than all the centuries before, and this Century is off to a strong start. Today even the best and most democratic societies are putting up all sorts of roadblocks against the proclamation of the Gospel and the free practice of the Christian faith.

It's not easy, and Jesus said it wouldn't be. He said, in fact,

"Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.

For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. "

Now that's a degree of commitment that leaves most of us, perhaps all of us, falling very short indeed. The fact is that we are not worthy of Him, and we aren't going to make ourselves worthy of Him, and there aren't any good things that we deserve, but rather, what we have deserved is known as "Hell".

That is exactly why He came. To take the unworthy, like us, to adopt us as His own brethren, to change us and lead us home. In the midst of these hard words, listen to His promise:

*"Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing?
and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your
Father.
But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.
Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many
sparrows."*

He wants us to follow Him. He died for us and rose again. He calls to us even today. It will not be easy but we CAN follow Him.

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, we implore thy grace and protection in all our days. Keep us temperate in all things, and diligent in our several callings. Grant us patience under our afflictions. Give us grace to be just and upright in all our dealings; quiet and peaceable; full of compassion; and ready to do good to all men, according to our abilities and opportunities. Direct us in all our ways. Defend us from all dangers and adversities; and be pleased to take us, and all those who are dear to us, under thy fatherly care and protection. These things, and whatsoever else thou shalt see to be necessary and convenient to us, we humbly beg, through the merits and mediation of thy Son Jesus Christ, Our Lord and Savior. Amen