

Matthew 10:34-42

On September 20, 2001, President George W. Bush addressed a joint session of congress and the American people. It was only nine days after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon; and the country was still in shock. In his speech, the President described the **kind** of terrorists that were behind those attacks. He then drew a line in the sand for all the nations of the world saying, “You are either with **us**, or you are with the **terrorists**.” The war against **terror** had begun, and the President wanted the **world** to know that there was **no middle ground** in this war. In our Gospel for today, Jesus applies this same kind of thinking to the **spiritual** war that is raging in the world, between those who follow the King of kings - **Jesus**; and those who follow the prince of **this** world - **Satan**. Jesus wanted His disciples to see that being on **His** side would take **commitment**, even in the face of **persecution**. It’s our prayer that we **too**, will be able to remain **Completely Committed To Christ**.

The first words of today’s reading might sound a little bit surprising. We don’t expect Jesus to say, “*I did **not** come to bring **peace**, but a **sword**.*” What about the song the angels sang at Jesus’ birth which proclaimed that now there was, “***Peace on earth?***” What about the **name** the Prophet Isaiah gave to Jesus - the **Prince** of Peace? How can Jesus say that He hasn’t come to bring **peace**? His disciples were probably pretty surprised and **disappointed** by those words too. They had the idea that Jesus had come here to the earth to usher in an era of **peace** and **prosperity** for the children of Israel. They agreed with the commonly held view that the Messiah was going to be an earthly **king**, and that He would bring earthly **peace**. But, that was **not** the role which Jesus came to fill. Jesus **did** come to bring **peace**, but it wasn’t the kind of peace people were **expecting**. Instead, **Jesus** would bring **spiritual** peace - an **inner** peace - the kind of peace that comes from having the forgiveness of **sins**, and being reconciled with **God**. Jesus **didn’t** come to bring **earthly** peace. In fact, He tells us that His coming would mean **conflict** and **division** between the **followers** of Jesus, and the **enemies** of the Gospel.

Jesus wanted to make sure that His disciples had a clear **understanding** of this truth, because the strife that would result from following Jesus would even have an effect on their **closest** relationships. Jesus said, “*I came to turn a man against his **father**, a daughter against her **mother**, and a daughter-in-law against her **mother-in-law**. A man’s **enemies** will be the members of his own **household**.*” That doesn’t sound very **pleasant** does it? But it’s the **truth**. The disciples of Jesus would be **alienated** from some of their closest **friends** and **family** members just because they had chosen to follow **Jesus**.

The expectation of our Savior is **simple**, and it is **clear**. **He** is to come **first** in our lives, even ahead of **family** members. That's what the **first commandment** is all about. Jesus explained it to His disciples this way: "*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. Whoever does not take up 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.*" There were two **paths** facing the disciples. Following **one** path - by **denying** Jesus - would mean an easier **life** for them here on the earth, but in the **end** they would lose their **souls**. Following the **other** path involved **denying themselves** and facing **persecution**, but in the **end** they would receive the rich reward of **eternal life**. It's pretty obvious that the more **difficult** path was the **better** choice - the path of **Complete Commitment To Christ**.

Those words of Jesus still apply to us **today** as His followers. We never **like** to do things the **hard** way, so it would be **nice** to think that following Jesus would always be **easy**. It would be **nice** if there were no such thing as having to take up a **cross** for the sake of the Gospel. But that's simply not **reality**. Following **Jesus** means facing **opposition** from the world around us. There may not be a **state sponsored** persecution of Christians going on in our country, although that may not be very **far off** either. But at any rate, there is **certainly** persecution of our Christian **beliefs** going on. It's all **around** us. When we hold on to all the teachings of the Bible, we are accused of being **non-inclusive** and **politically incorrect** and completely **out-of-touch** with reality. The great majority of people in our society **mock** us, and make **fun** of us for our beliefs. And, sadly enough, that persecution may even come from members of our own **family**, or close **friends**, just like Jesus **said** it would happen.

There is a **part** of us - our sinful **flesh** - that wants to **avoid** all conflict over spiritual matters. It's **easier** to stay **quiet**, or to agree to **disagree**, for the sake of outward **peace**. But that's **not** the path which Jesus wants us to be following. He asks for **Complete Commitment To Him**. In other words, if following Jesus means facing **persecution**, so be it. We know that the trials and troubles we face in **this** life are **nothing** compared to the reward which is waiting for us in **heaven**. Of course, carrying through on that thought is easier **said** than **done**. Let's face it. It's **hard** to be the person who gets **picked** on, or **alienated** from seemingly **everyone else** because of our beliefs. But **thankfully**, our God hasn't left us without **help**.

Jesus told His disciples that even though the great **majority** of the world would be **against** them, there would **also** be **some** who were **on their side**. Jesus said, "*Whoever **receives** you receives **me**, and whoever receives **me** receives him who **sent***"

me.” It must have been a **comforting** thought for the disciples to realize that there would at least be **some** in this sinful world who would **welcome** them, and who would **receive** them with Christian **love**. It’s the kind of comfort and encouragement they would **need**, as they carried out their mission of proclaiming the Gospel in the face of constant **opposition**.

Jesus went on to tell them that in those times when they were **welcomed**, something **wonderful** would happen. There would be a **double** blessing. The interaction would bring a benefit both to **them**, and to the ones who **welcomed** them. He said, “*Whoever **receives** a prophet because he **is** a prophet will receive a prophet’s **reward**. Whoever **receives** a righteous man because he **is** a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s **reward**. Whoever gives one of these **little ones** even a cup of cold water to drink because he is **my disciple** - Amen I tell you - he will never lose **his reward**.*” The **disciples** would receive God’s **blessing** through those who **welcomed** them, and the ones who **welcomed** them would be blessed by God **too**.

It’s comforting for **us** to know that we are also **not alone** as we commit ourselves to following **Jesus** as the **highest priority** in our lives. We know that Jesus is **on our side**. So in those times when we’re **overwhelmed** by the troubles of life, or when we’re filled with **guilt** over how far we’ve fallen short of **Complete Commitment To Christ**, we know that we can turn to our **Savior**, and He will be **there** for us. Jesus has completely committed **Himself** to **us** - giving up His **life** in order to **rescue** us from damnation. Think about it - Jesus **never** gave up. No matter how **difficult** His path might be, Jesus **never** turned back. He knew how **difficult** it would be to **walk** the road that led to the **cross**, but He walked it **anyway**, for **your** sake and for **mine**. Jesus did **everything** that needed to be done in order to bring us **spiritual peace** - not **earthly** peace - not **physical** peace - but **spiritual** peace - peace with God the **Father** - the **peace** of knowing that our **sins** have all been **washed away** in His blood. That’s the peace which enables us to have **Complete Commitment To Christ**.

And just as with the **disciples**, we **also** have other people in our lives who are able to give us **encouragement**. It’s found in our brothers and sisters **in Christ**. As fellow **Christians**, we can build each other **up** and **encourage** one another in ways that no one else can, because we **base** our encouragement on the truth of the Holy **Scriptures**. One place we do that encouraging is right here in our **church**. The **primary** reason we come here is to worship our **God**, as He **blesses** us and nurtures our **faith** with His Word and Sacrament. In response to **His** love for **us** we bring Him our hymns of **praise**, and our **prayers**, and our **offerings**. There is something very **encouraging** about seeing a church **filled** with people - hearing them **speaking** the

liturgy, and **singing** the hymns. These are **vital parts** of our Christian **fellowship**, as we read the **Word** together, and **pray** together, and apply **God's Word** to our individual and collective **problems**. The **encouragement** we receive from our fellow Christians is **priceless**.

But we live in a world at **war**. We live in a **country** at war. Not only are there **territorial** wars and **political** wars being waged all **around** the globe - not only is there a war against a **global pandemic** - but there is also a world-wide **spiritual** war going on - a war against **Satan** and the forces of **evil**. **Some** people are on the side of **Jesus** in that war, but **many** are not. So we will continue to wage our spiritual **battles** day after day, and as we do, may God give us the **strength** and the **encouragement** we need, to continue to have **Complete Commitment To Christ**; so that when the **Last Day** comes, and our spiritual battles come to an **end**, we will finally be able to **lay down** our spiritual weapons, and **rest** in the eternal joys of heaven. Amen.