

Midweek Lenten Vespers 4
St. Matthew 10:32-42
April 1st, 2020
Sts. Peter & Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, UAC
Simpsonville, SC
Pastor Jerald Dulas

He Shall by No Means Lose His Reward

In Nomine Iesu!

In the Name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit before Sermon:

O Lord, send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead us. O Lord, open Thou my lips, that my mouth may show forth Thy praise. O Lord, graciously preserve me, lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be rejected. Amen.

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior + Jesus Christ. Amen.

At our Lord's birth in the flesh the angels in the heavens sang to the shepherds abiding in the fields keeping watch over their flocks by night, "Peace on Earth, goodwill to men." The Prophet Isaiah when he is prophesying of our Lord + Jesus, he calls Him the "Prince of Peace." In the next verse of that prophecy he prophesies that of the Lord's government there will be never-ending peace. The Psalmist is always singing about bringing peace to the people of Israel, and peace to the city of Jerusalem. The rest of the prophets also prophesy about peace coming to the people and kingdom of our Lord. Our Lord on the night of His betrayal and rest declared to His Apostles that He was leaving them peace: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you." When our Lord + Jesus rose from the dead and entered the Upper Room where His Apostles were hiding for fear of the Jews, He greeted them by saying, "Peace be with you." After our Lord's ascension to the right hand of the heavenly Father the Apostle went into all the world preaching peace through + Jesus Christ to the people of Israel.

As you can see, throughout the holy Scriptures peace is preached on behalf of the Lord + Jesus Christ. His Kingdom is peace. He is the Prince of Peace. Where is Church is, there is peace for His Word dwells in it. So then, why does our Lord + Jesus say to His Apostles in the Gospel reading from the Evangelist and Apostle St. Matthew that He did not come to bring peace, but a sword? It seems out of place with the entire rest of holy Scripture. Our Lord is supposed to bring peace, not a sword. But this is not what our Lord + Jesus says. Why then does our Lord say that He comes to not bring peace, but a sword?

He says this because where sin and evil exist there can be no peace. Where unbelief and heresy exist, there can be no peace. For these things are at enmity with the Word of God; they are in conflict with the Word of God; they are at war with the Word of God. These things cannot be tolerated where true and everlasting peace is desired among the people of God. Sin and evil must be cleaved out of us with the sword of the Law. Unbelief and heresy must be cut out of the true Church, so that their lies do not affect those who desire to learn and believe the truth of the Word of God.

Our Lord + Jesus must cut down and destroy all our enemies: the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh. The sword He uses is the Word of God. Specifically, He uses the Word that proclaims His redemption on our behalf. He convicts sin with the sword of the Law; slashing out of us all props and good works upon which we depend. He cuts in two all of our idols, so that when He is finished with the

preaching of the Law, we have no legs to stand upon by ourselves. He takes away our false gods, our hope in our good deeds and good hearts, and leaves us realizing that keeping the Law of God perfectly is impossible for us. We have no salvation in ourselves. We cannot save ourselves by our works and merits.

Our Lord then sends us His prophets and righteous men. The prophets and righteous men—the preachers of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ—proclaim the good news that our salvation is found only in the Only-Begotten Son of our heavenly Father. Our salvation is found only in the One Who fulfilled the Law perfectly in our flesh and blood. Our salvation is found only in the One Who offered up Himself as an atoning sacrifice for the sins of the whole world. The prophets and righteous men—the preachers of the Gospel promise—give to all those who hear the promise and believe on Him for salvation a cup of cold water. We receive from the lips of the ministers a refreshing drink to quench our dry sin-parched throats.

For those who receive the sword of the Lord—who allow the sword of the Law to pierce their heart so that they no longer trust in their own ability to save themselves or in any other worldly thing to give them hope—will by no means lose their reward. For through the faith implanted in us through the work of the Holy Ghost through the means of grace, we cling in faith to the promises proclaimed by the prophets and righteous men sent by the Lord + Jesus to preach into our ears the good news of the salvation found only in Him. This message brings our souls peace; it brings to us a Kingdom of Peace ruled by the Prince of Peace—our Lord + Jesus Christ.

We have been granted an inheritance in the eternal Kingdom of Peace. Our citizenship is in Heaven. We will live for all eternity in peace with our Lord and Savior, and with all of those who also cling in faith to the peace He offers. However, we still live and breath in this earthly kingdom which wars against the Kingdom of Peace and against all the members of this Kingdom of Peace—against us—all the days of our lives. This Kingdom of Peace is not obtained without a battle.

We battle our sinfulness daily. We battle the world daily. We battle the accusations of the devil and his demons daily. Our sword of defense is the Word of God. The Lord + Jesus warns His Apostles in this Gospel reading from St. Matthew that this is not an easy war. He promises us a cross.

It is easy for us to gloss over this statement of the Lord about taking up our cross and following Him, because we know that He bore the cross for us and our salvation. But, when we consider this in the context of the history of the Apostles, our Lord + Jesus had not yet bore His cross when He is telling this to the Apostles. It was a well-known custom that the person who was condemned to die by crucifixion would have to carry his cross to the place of his crucifixion, while the crowds jeered at him and mocked him. What our Lord + Jesus is saying is that taking up our cross and following Him is not an envious task. It is not something that brings joy. To take up the cross is to endure mocking, shame and condemnation by all of our enemies—all of the enemies of the Gospel.

These enemies may even include the members of ones' own household. For where the truth is rejected their will be enmity between those who want to cling to a lie. Our Lord + Jesus demands that we love Him—to love our Lord God—even more than the people who are most dear to us in this world. We are to love our Lord and the truth of the Gospel even more than our families. This is no easy task. This is why the Lord + Jesus compares it to taking up a cross and following Him.

This is why we continue to cling to the truth of the Gospel of our Lord + Jesus Christ, and we continue to pray that our Lord + Jesus would continue to send to us His prophets and righteous men to give to us a cup of cold water—the cup of the forgiveness, life and salvation found in our Lord + Jesus Christ alone. Not only do we desire this for ourselves, but we also pray that our Lord + Jesus would cause His Word to be heard and believed by all those who continue to sit in darkness and shadow of

death. We continue to pray for all those who desire to destroy our peace and continue to be at war with us. We pray for them that they might cease their enmity and be inclined to walk with us in meekness and in peace.

Our Lord + Jesus has come down from Heaven and taken upon Himself our flesh, so that He might win peace for us. He has come with the sword of the Law to convict us of our sin and reveal to us that victory over sin and death is found only in Him. He has come to wage war against the devil, the world and our own sinful flesh—our enemies—so that we might be granted an eternal home in His eternal Kingdom of Peace. Those who believe on Him and His promises have exactly what He promises. We will certainly not lose our reward, for He grants it all to us by grace. In the Name of our Lord + Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prayer in Pulpit after Sermon:

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name give glory! I will extol Thee, O Lord, and I will praise Thy Name forever and ever. Amen.

The Votum:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria!