



## DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

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### “PRINCE OF PEACE???”

~ Scripture: Luke 12:49-53 ~

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### INTRODUCTION

There are all kinds of verses in the Bible in which God promises or delivers PEACE. . .

- [Isaiah 26:3](#) – “You will keep in perfect *peace* him whose mind is steadfast (fixed) on You.”
- [Mark 4:39](#) – Jesus in his earthly ministry rebuked the wind and said to the waves, and said “*Peace! Be still!*” Then the wind died down and it was completely calm.
- [John 14:27](#) – “*Peace* I leave with you; *my peace* I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.”
- [Phil. 4:7](#) – “And *the peace of God*, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”
- [Isaiah 9:6](#) – “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, *Prince of Peace.*”

But here’s one. Jesus is speaking. . .

- [Luke 12:51](#) – “*Do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you; but rather division.*”

Where did that one come from? Shouldn’t Jesus be saying, “*I am the Prince of Peace. I have come not to bring discord and division, but peace. I have come to bind the wounds of broken-ness that separate fathers & sons. I have come to bridge the gaps of misunderstanding that drive apart mothers & daughters.*”

Perhaps that’s what the passage should say. Perhaps that’s what we want the passage to say. But like it or not, this is a passage that talks about division, not reconciliation. Matthew’s rendering is:

- [Matt. 10:34](#) – “*I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*”

Same difference! Either way, these words are hard to swallow. What in the world was Jesus thinking when He said He’d come NOT to bring peace BUT division? Well, Jesus actually tells us. He makes several comments just before this verse that give us a window into His thoughts. And they give us a context for this troublesome verse. Let’s read them. . .

<sup>49</sup>*I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!* <sup>50</sup>*But I have a baptism to undergo, and how distressed I am until it is completed!* <sup>51</sup>*Do you think I*

came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division. <sup>52</sup>From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three. <sup>53</sup>They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."

FIRST, Jesus says: ***"I have come to bring fire on the earth."***

Fire? What is this fire all about? Often in the Bible, fire is seen as an instrument of God's JUDGMENT. He is talking about a time when the chaff—representing all that is wrong in our world, all that is evil—will be burned away. Like when you burn the leaves in the fall.

But fire also purifies the righteous like a furnace smelting gold. It cleanses from all hypocrisy. I like to connect fire in this figurative sense with REVIVAL—with the burning, exciting, dynamic presence of God in the lives of people. When revival comes:

- Jesus is glorified anew in the midst of His people;
- And all that is unlike Him (e.g.: hidden sin, lethargy, coldness) is driven out.

The fire of revival will change the church. It will take us out of our comfort zones. Are we ready?

NEXT, Jesus says: ***"I have a baptism to undergo; how distressed I am until it is completed!"*** Baptism, as you know, means "to be immersed"—in this case, it's being immersed in agonizing pain and torture. Jesus knows that suffering and death are waiting in his future. He knows He will go to Jerusalem and face crucifixion. What if you knew that something like that was going to happen to you? You can imagine the stress He was under anticipating that moment. Plus He knew that His followers would also suffer rejection and persecution on his account.

So, the coming of the Kingdom of God will not be all peaches & cream:

- For those who reject Him it will be a sad day of deep sorrow;
- For those who receive Him / turn to Him, it will be no picnic either.
  - He himself will have to die on a cross to ransom the faithful;
  - And many of the faithful will have to give their lives as a result of following Him.

It is in this context that Jesus makes this troubling statement about peace and division:

***"So, do you think I have come to bring peace to the earth? Are you kidding! My coming actually brings division!"***

It was that way from the beginning. Think back to the entrance of Jesus into this world as the Messiah. What a traumatic event. Look at Joseph & Mary. They certainly had their comfort zones messed up. MARY had to deal with the response of people who would find it incredulous that her Child was conceived of the Holy Spirit. "Yeah, right!" they must have thought. ☹ And this Baby she carried in her was truly God!?! How would she ever get her friends or Joseph to believe that? She must have been filled with such angst and anxiety.

And what about JOSEPH? He must have had some mental anguish of his own. How would he deal with the news that his espoused wife was pregnant—and not by him, no less?

Even today, the Lord's coming into our lives is traumatic. He causes upheaval. Everything must change. We pray, long, yearn for revival—for our land / our church / our lives. But if and when it comes, it's almost more than we can handle.

Do you remember the story—it's in Mark 5—about Jesus healing the demoniac who lived in the tombs? [He lived there because chains wouldn't even hold him.] Do you remember that He cast the demons out of this man and into a herd of hogs. . .they went wild. . .ran into the lake and were drowned? What was the reaction of the people to this spectacular move of God? They begged him to leave that region. His presence was

more than they could handle. It was too staggering, too upsetting, too threatening to their simple, predictable way of life. So they said: “Jesus, will you please leave?”

David Wallace writes: “*Jesus came to them as Savior, but though they were lost, they did not want Him. He came as deliver, but they would rather remain in bondage than have to change. He, the Creator, was not welcome by His creation. He is not always a welcome guest.*”

You say, “*That certainly wouldn’t be my response!*” Yet, if we’re totally honest, when Jesus begins to change our life, don’t we start to cringe? Don’t you want things back to “normal” (whatever that is)? But God removes the veil from our eyes and we see life as God sees it and wants to make it. And it’s glorious, but scary (to say the least). Because. . . . .

## I. JESUS BRINGS CHANGE TO OUR HOMES

The presence of Christ in our homes will always bring about changes. To begin with, we must begin to live peaceably together. . .to be kind and loving toward one another. . .less cranky and argumentative. It means there will be more prayer. . .more turning to the Scriptures. . .more quality time spent together. . .fewer power struggles. . .more open communication. . .fewer family secrets. . .less tolerance of the things we allow to creep in over time that take us down spiritually. Are you willing to make those changes for the sake of your & your family’s spiritual health?

It needs to be said that a commitment to Christ and Christian values may strain our relations with those we live with and love. Husbands & wives, children & parents, neighbors & friends may disagree about the decision to become a committed disciple of JC.

ILLUSTRATION> That was true in my youth. My parents were cool toward my involvement in church, and less than thrilled when I made the decision to attend a Christian college. But eventually, it all evened out.

## II. JESUS BRINGS CHANGES TO OUR CHURCH

Remember when Jesus, at the beginning of His ministry, came to His home synagogue in Capernaum [cf. Mark 1:21ff]? Up until then, everything had been peaceful, reverent, orderly, predictable. Jesus comes, and the place turns into a madhouse.

A man in the crowd falls to the ground and starts shouting (in the church of all places). Turns out he is demon possessed. [This is not the same man as the Gerasene Demoniac mentioned above.] Jesus commands the evil spirit to come out of him. That brings more people. All of a sudden, their nice little quiet synagogue where people came to worship in “air conditioned comfort” ☺ was turned upside down—with curiosity-seekers (but “seekers” nonetheless).

When Jesus comes, He upsets things. He upsets our routines. He takes us out of our comfort zones (our boxes). He overrules the masks of IGNORANCE / FEAR / PRIDE / UNBELIEF we hide behind. Are you ready? Are you ready to get out of your box and see where it takes you?

## III. JESUS CHANGES OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE WORLD

This is where it really gets tricky. When we truly follow Christ and truly make Him the Lord of our lives, it brings outspoken criticism and resistance from the world.

How much the work, the people of God are spoken against these days. Let someone take a stand for Christ in the public arena, or even mention his faith—note I didn’t say “try to force his faith on everyone” —and the disparaging remarks, the ridicule, the mocking begin. It’s political suicide if a public servant—a president, let’s say—lets it be known that he is a person of faith.

So if you’re going to follow Christ—for real—it will take you out of your comfort zone with respect to the world around you. It will put you in direct opposition to the values, attitudes, opinions & practices

sanctioned by this world—a world dominated by the Enemy (Satan).

That's a hard word to hear. It sure doesn't sound like Good News. Especially since Jesus doesn't simply imply that division can occur as a result of him; no, He emphatically states that division will occur because of Him. We should expect it. It comes with the territory.

The CHURCH has often tried to separate church & society. . . politics & religion. . . spirituality & justice. . . social gospel & personal gospel. "*Don't get involved*", we often hear.

The WORLD, from its vantage point, has done the same thing:

- Religion & Politics don't mix. Politics is for the public arena, religion for the personal sphere. These days, mention of faith automatically means you're trying to force everyone to believe like you.
- Separation of Church & State, which we all know originally meant the government couldn't establish (i.e.: dictate) what faith we all would follow. It now means keeping faith so "private" and "personal" that it can have no bearing on the way you do business. . . the way you vote on a hot-button moral or social issue (especially if you're a public servant). . . or the values you teach in school.

I think our religion & our politics should mix. That won't always make for comfort and it'll sometimes be messy, but I think that's what Jesus wants. Let me illustrate. . .

- I think we would all agree that Christians should work to alleviate poverty, hunger and abuse. That's why we walk in the CROP Walk. . . minister at the Alpha House 3 times a year. . . donate time & labor to build a Habitat house. . . provide meeting space for a 12-Step group on Thursday evenings.
- Let's take it a step further. Shouldn't we also work to eliminate them. . . change the conditions that produce them AND the system that perpetuates them? How?
  - Educate yourself about the issues that burn on your heart
  - Pray & search the Scriptures to see what God has to say about that issue
  - Support candidates & issues that reflect Biblical values (i.e.: what Jesus taught)
  - Better yet, run for office or a spot on a board
  - Call your congressman/woman. . . organize a letter-writing campaign
  - Display your view with a yard sign
  - Participate in a protest

There are two kinds of peace: (1) Peace without justice; (2) Peace with justice.

#### **A. There's Peace Without Justice**

Says: "I don't care about the injustices of the world—that so many are oppressed, hungry, poor, unemployed, homeless, victims of racism, prejudice or abuse. The world's full of trouble. The poor we'll have with us always. That's what we've got politicians, law enforcement officials, and social workers for. They will take care of the world's ills & injustices.

"I don't want to get involved. I don't want to get my hands messy. I don't want the hassle, the turmoil. What I want is: Peace no matter what! Peace at any price! No war. . . no conflict".

#### **B. But true peace is Peace With Justice**

This will get you into trouble every time, because it brings us into conflict with the ways and the thinking of the world.

There are times when **we** have to take a stand for what is Biblically right. . . when **we** have to make waves. . . when **we** have to stand up and say racism (et. al.) is a sin. . . when **we** have to say the practices of some

systems (even some in the church) are wrong. Some things are light vs. dark / right vs. wrong in which there is no “middle (common) ground”, no compromise. That may make you very unpopular with your family, friends at work, even fellow worshippers at church. Some moral & ethical issues divide families & friends.

ILLUSTRATION> My wife, Marcie, has a very close friend. Her friend has always been an “unbeliever”; Marcie has always been a “believer”. But over the past few years, as Marcie has become more serious about her faith and has gone much, much deeper, it seems her friend has become more and more hostile whenever the subject of faith or values comes up.

Unless you are an ego maniac who loves controversy and loves to stir things up, taking a stand for what you believe and what has changed (and now governs) your life will take you way out of your comfort zone and make you feel intensely uncomfortable.

When you do take a stand, it should always be done in such a way that preserves the dignity and integrity of every human being. When people react by accusing you of being a bigot or hate-monger (as they do Christians these days), remember arguing and counter-attacking are the “ways of the world”. Always reach out in love & friendship to those who disagree with us. . . who are not like us. . .whom we find hard to like or love (much less agree with).

### CONCLUSION

Just as Jesus had to enter the conflict with the evil powers of this world, so will we.  
Living by God’s Word won’t make your life any easier; it will make you stronger / more honest.  
Don’t ever lose sight of the fact that the Word that divides can also heal & reconcile. AMEN!