

+ In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti + Amen.

Text: Matthew 10:28

Theme: Peace and Contention



Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

Hallelujah! Hallelujah is the Hebrew word for 'Praise the Lord'. What a joy-filled privilege to address you today! If distance makes the heart grow fonder our hearts are surely bursting with gratitude. No one could have guessed the calendar year would start with 10 Sundays in our houses of worship followed by 10 Sundays of separation and distant hearing of God's word. But the incarnate Jesus is never distant from us, nor is the ever-present Spirit. God has not forgotten us. He has not left us as orphans. In all circumstances God finds a way to care for His people.

Today's gospel continues on from last week where Jesus sent out the apostles. Jesus speaks frankly and soberly. We don't find here in this section of Scripture the kind-hearted, push over, tolerates-anything-and-everything Jesus. God Himself stands upon the earth and He serves notice that there will be a reckoning. He summons His followers. He calls them to allegiance. He equips them for service. He calls for candidness. He calls for faithfulness. He warns of division.

He says, "*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.*"¹ The Prince of Peace stands and says, "*Do not suppose I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.*"².....The dissidence is deafening! Is He not supposed to broker a truce, oversee a ceasefire, initiate the establishment of a utopia? Is He not the bearer of prosperity, the adjudicator of conflict, and the solicitor of consensus? Shouldn't Jesus be the poster child for the campaign for everyone to just get along? Look at the conflict, tension, anger, and violence we see in the world today. It was no different at the time of Christ. Wasn't He supposed to solve all of that?

Rest assured; Jesus is not of two minds. He is not duplicitous. He is not schizophrenic. He is the Prince of Peace indeed! Yet, He is also a lightning rod for division. This is a necessary reality. There can be no harmony between good and evil, no consensus between truth and falsehood, no amalgamating of heaven and hell. Christ and Satan do not share power. The devil has been defeated and at the final advent of Christ he and the demons, and the wicked, will be forever locked out from the presence of God and the hope of glory.

Do we pray for peace? Yes! Do we work towards peace? Yes! Will there ever be perfect peace in this world? No! There is peace. It is His peace. It is not human peace. How was this peace accomplished? By His bloody sacrifice on the cross. The event of atonement is complete. There is no further sacrifice for sins necessary. Jesus has paid it all. There are no I(s) to be dotted or T(s) to be crossed. There are no hidden costs. The life of God's Son has made recompense for our sins. He went willingly to the cross. He rose victoriously from the grave. He has redeemed us from death and hell. The Scripture says clearly and unequivocally, "*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.*"³

You might wonder, then, why *we* still need to keep talking about it and meeting here. Of course, there is the urgency of evangelism. The gift secured, is not yet the gift received. The existence of money does not mean that a particular person possesses it. The availability of food doesn't mean anyone has consumed it. So too, Christ's procurement of salvation doesn't mean that everyone received it. The continual work of the Holy Spirit is to see to that task. The eternal gospel must be published for those who have not heard it.

And, it must also be taught to those who don't understand it. News that's been heard is not necessarily news that's been understood. Do we have a higher privilege than that of sharing and teaching the faith in word and deed? We are alive on this earth to support others through the joys and struggles of this life. Seen clearly, understood correctly, viewed from the perspective of what really matters, this is a sacred calling.

Yes, but what about us, those of us who are regular members of the church? Aren't we baptized? Aren't most of us confirmed? Do we not call on the Lord's name every day in our family and private prayers? Does that mean, then, that we mainly participate in our congregations because most of us enjoy one of more aspects of the fellowship offered? Perhaps we like the social interaction? Or perhaps we feel a moral or spiritual obligation to be in God's house because that's how we were raised? Undoubtedly there is truth in these reasons.

But, dear friends, the most important reason any of us is present to hear God's truth and receive His gifts is that *we are still sinners*. The gospel is not simply information. It is the power of God for salvation⁴. It is the power that continually revives, renews, and restores us. It has vivifying, life-giving capacity. Hearing the gospel is not a once-off need. When was the last time you had a nice meal and then thought to yourself, "I sure hope I never have to eat that great food again!" If not your palate, your stomach will soon be demanding more food. When was the last time you embraced a loved one and thought, "I certainly hope I never have to suffer through that again?" The same is true for us meeting together in the Lord's presence.

Why are we here? Because of the three great foes that are aligned against us. The devil steals, he obstructs, he white ants, he deceives. He causes contention, commotion, and confusion. He

suffers us to enjoy temporal blessings only in so far as we do this thanklessly and without faith. Spiritual blessings he does not tolerate at all. The world also aligns itself against godliness. It allures, it distracts, it tempts, it conceals. The world seduces us to live as if this life were an end in itself. Finally, we are vulnerable in and of ourselves. Our own sinful natures are weak, they are easily misled, they are easily flattered. Left to ourselves we find our own idols or become gods to ourselves.

Why are we here? Here we are censured for our ungodliness. Here we receive forgiveness. Here we are showered with God's love. Here we are built up in divine wisdom. Here we are strengthened to carry our crosses and make witness to our neighbours. We are about to receive the body and blood of the holy Son of God. We have foregone it for some time. We did it out of concern for the general welfare of others. Yet, we shouldn't forget that everything we do- even for the public health of the community- is temporary in this fleeting life. Only the things of God are eternal. Holy Communion connects us with His immortal permanence.

Dear friends, we are here to celebrate that fact that we have been released from the fear of death. *"Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."*⁵ We are looking forward to an immortal life. Will there continue to be contention in this world? Yes! Will there finally be peace? Yes! Through the blood of the cross Christ has already made peace between us and the heavenly Father. The divine ledger will be balanced. The debt does not remain unpaid. Your name, your account, your record...your online history, everything that blemishes your name and reputation will be cleared.

Welcome back to God's house. I pray we all cherish it a little more than before. Do not fear. God is in His house and we cannot be hidden from Him anywhere in the universe. Amen.

+ In nomine Jesu +

Third Sunday After Pentecost
21 June 2020
Reverend Darrin L. Kohrt

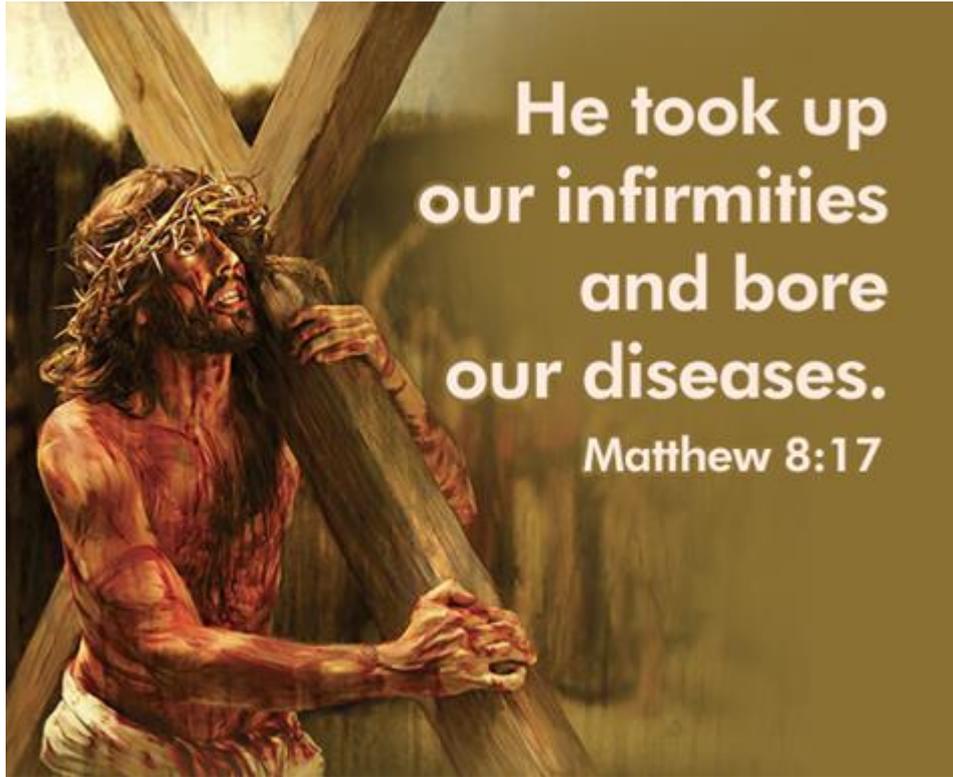
¹ Matthew 10:28

² Matthew 10:24

³ John 3:16

⁴ See Romans 1:16

⁵ Matthew 10:28



**He took up
our infirmities
and bore
our diseases.**

Matthew 8:17