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# It Hurts!!

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*Text: Luke 12:49-56*

**Y**ou know how sometimes you read the Bible and what you're reading leaps right off the page and grabs you by the throat and says, "Hey! Listen to this. This MEANS something!"? Well, this lesson isn't one of them. To be perfectly honest with you, I found myself confused and troubled by it.

Don't you find it somewhat disturbing too? After all, this is *Jesus* speaking, the one called the Prince of Peace...the one at whose birth choirs of angels proclaimed peace on earth...the risen one who greeted his terrified disciples with, "Peace be with you." This Jesus is the same one who said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you", and "Blessed are the peacemakers...."

So what is this? Is the Bible wrong? Did somebody hear Jesus incorrectly? Was he misquoted? Maybe one of the translations is inaccurate. Whatever the reason, it certainly is confusing and troubling.

Now here's an amazing thing about the work of the Holy Spirit—it can make even the most obscure, uninteresting, disturbing passages of Scripture speak to us. We can't expect that God always will speak to us in simple, one syllable words that even a two-year-old can understand. Sometimes we have to work too, so that the teamwork between intellect and faith can help us grow in faith and under-

standing. That's not to say that we can ever comprehend completely the great mysteries of our God and our faith, but we must try. So let's accept the challenge and take a brief look at this puzzle about peace.

Here are some dictionary definitions of peace: state of mental or physical quiet, tranquillity, repose; absence or cessation of war; public order, freedom from riot or violence; reconciliation after strife or enmity; freedom from mental agitation or anxiety.

Moreover, the Hebrew word *shalom* is often loosely translated *peace*, but in its truest sense it defines God's vision of creation restored to its original design where all creatures, human and otherwise, live together in harmony, and no one suffers want, deprivation, oppression, or violence of any kind. Isn't this the vision we hold of God's kingdom?

But now Jesus' words, "Do you think that I have come to bring peace to the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division!" seem even more disturbing, since we are taught that Jesus came to make God's kingdom a reality.

Well, how about this? Perhaps Jesus is saying, "*Because* I am the Prince of Peace...*because* I come to bring God's kingdom of *shalom* to reality, I bring division. *Because* God's *peace/shalom* stands in *opposition* to the sin and death, brokenness and destruction of the way the world is, therefore I bring division. *Because* God's peace stands in *opposition* to the pain and suffering caused by greed and selfishness, disease, addiction, enmity, violence—therefore I bring division.

How, then, do we see this opposition worked out in our lives as followers of Christ? We often are encouraged to believe that being a Christian, accepting Jesus as our Saviour, turning our lives over to Jesus, will be the answer to all our struggles. How many television evangelists build their ministries on convincing people that if their faith is strong enough and of the right kind, they will be healed, their children will turn away from destruction, their marriages will mend, their financial endeavours will be a success? And for some it seems to work—a miraculous quick fix, Jesus-taken-three-times-a-day wonder drug. Say the right words, think the right thoughts, pray the right prayers, and your life will be filled with everlasting peace, joy, and

success.

Well, there are and have been over the ages countless numbers of God's children who, at one time or another, said the right words, thought the right thoughts, prayed the right prayers—whose lives were, and are, anything but peaceful. People like Abraham, Moses, David, Mary, Jesus, Peter, Paul, Martin Luther, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Oscar Romero. Would you call their lives peaceful?

Is your life peaceful, free of strife, anxiety, pain? I know mine isn't. Of course, we are all children of God, called by our Baptism into a new restored relationship with God, justified by faith...you know the words. I rejoice in that every day and I know it to be true.

I also know life hurts. It hurts to meet daily the broken people in our society, broken by poverty, illness, addiction. It hurts to hear on the news of police officers losing their lives, of children drowning because they were foolish or because someone else was foolish.

It hurts to watch our children struggle with life's problems when all we want for them is not to make the same mistakes we did, when all we want for them is to be happy.

It hurts to watch someone we love—a parent, spouse, child, sibling, friend—slowly, or not so slowly, sicken and die.

It hurts to love someone and build a relationship with them and then watch that relationship disintegrate and die.

It hurts to live with ourself and our own brokenness, struggling with depression, guilt, anxiety, fear, failure, loneliness, aging.

Nevertheless, as baptized children of God, we are called to love others and to walk with them in their struggles and reach out to heal the brokenness around us, and that hurts.

Maybe in this lesson today Jesus is trying to open our eyes so that we see the reality of life as his followers. Maybe instead of white-washing it and making it palatable he wants us to follow with our eyes open—see the signs, understand what it means to live in opposition to sin and death and the way the world is. This isn't a picnic we're invited to. It's darn hard work and it hurts.

To follow Christ is to love, and to love truly is to suffer with those you love as well as to rejoice when they rejoice. And I don't need to

tell you, the suffering is a lot harder.

To follow Christ is to challenge continually the greed and selfishness, the sin and death in the world and within ourselves.

To follow Christ is to look with compassion on the victims of the world's greed and violence and share their pain, and work to alleviate it.

To follow Christ is to look without flinching and see the destruction caused by sin—in community near and far, in the lives of individuals around us, and within ourselves, and to know and acknowledge that you yourself—and I myself—too often are the cause of suffering and pain.

Bearing the sign of the cross is to bear the cross. And that hurts like...well, you know.

To follow Christ does indeed mean conflict and pain. For as our commitment on this journey increases we become more and more at odds with the world and experience more and more of the pain.

And yet...there is something more.

When my mother died the love my family and I shared as we clung to each other in grief and pain WAS God's peace—certainly not an absence of pain and suffering, but comfort and strength, just as God's peace was made real and present through the love and support of so many friends.

God's peace is real and present when people share a meal here at St. Mark's on Wednesday evenings, when a child comes to the waters of baptism, when forgiveness brings healing in a broken relationship, when we share the bread and wine of communion and declare and renew our commitment to God's kingdom.

The reality of God's peace is that it doesn't solve the problems or erase the grief and loss or shield us from the realities of life. Yet in some mysterious, grace-full way it gives us the strength to carry on. It enables us to experience joy in the midst of sorrow. It provides courage and wisdom and motivation to challenge the brokenness and destruction in the world.

This IS the peace that passes all understanding...the peace of God that is present within the division that following Christ creates.

Well, did I solve once and for all the puzzle of how Christ can say, "I came not to bring peace but division" and still bring us peace?

No. Because it is a mystery—one of those great contradictions so prevalent in our faith.

Nevertheless, when we share the peace with each other today, when we say "The peace of Christ be with you", let's remember what we are really doing: we are offering a hand of reconciliation and friendship, we are reminding each other that we are called to challenge and engage the powers of evil and destruction in the world, we are saying to each other, "Brother, Sister, we are in this together. I'll be here to walk with you, cry with you, face the sin and evil of the world with you, and together find the peace of God amidst all the chaos and confusion."

Thanks be to God.