

*Arvada*  
United Methodist Church

December 6, 2009

“Peace in Small Packages”  
Matthew 10:26-31; 34

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As I began preparing the message for today...a message about peace...I wondered, what did Jesus say about peace? I opened my favorite study Bible to find out. I turned to the Gospels, the only place Jesus speaks.

In the book of **John**, Jesus talks about peace. He talks about peace with his disciples...just before his death. Well, that wasn't exactly the context I was looking for to prepare an Advent message. I'll save that for Easter.

In **Mark**, Jesus talks about peace. But ... the same passage talks about sin...and hell... I figured I better leave the scary stuff to Rusty and Valerie.

So, I turned to the book of Luke. ***Surely Luke***, lover of the poor and underserved would write about Jesus' words of peace. Indeed he does. Luke reports the crowds went wild when they saw Jesus! They shouted messages of peace! But...Luke says they were calling for peace in HEAVEN. Peace in HEAVEN? What about peace on Earth? I'm reminded of a favorite author of mine, John Dominic Crossen. He says, “Heaven's in great shape! Earth is where the problems are!”

Finally, I turned to Matthew to find Jesus' words of peace. In Matthew, Jesus very clearly addresses peace as he is preparing to send his disciples out to minister. He is giving them quite a pep talk! Jesus says this, “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the Earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.” **I did not come to bring peace, but a sword?** When I read this, I thought: Is it too late to change my topic? I'm just a ministry student trying to preach words of comfort. Maybe I should preach about love. I'm sure Jesus is clear about love...

Well, I figure we all open our Bible and find things we struggle with. Things that don't add up. But I don't think we should just throw it all out. We ought to give it our careful, prayerful consideration.

So let's consider this confusing statement about peace to see how it relates to our lives as Christians during this season of peace.

Did Jesus actually say these words, “I do not come to bring peace, but the sword?” **There are three reasons it is likely he did.**

First, the original Greek words of this passage appear to be translated correctly. There are no Greek words that are similar that would make sense in this conversation that Jesus is having with his disciples.

The second reason these words are likely authentic to Jesus is that they also appear in at least two other independent sources. One of these is the Gospel of Thomas; a collection of one hundred fourteen sayings of Jesus that date to the same time period.

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A third reason it is likely that Jesus actually said these words is that they are NOT consistent with his overall message of peace. This actually makes it MORE likely they were really the words of Jesus. The statement, “I do not come to bring peace, but the sword” *does not* coincide with the way Jesus’ followers later talked about him. In Biblical studies, this suggests that the statement is *not* one his followers would have invented.

For all these reasons, it *is likely* these words are authentic to Jesus.

**But it was not a meek and mild Jesus that we hear in this passage! It was a commanding Jesus who was just plain mad that people were suffering!**

As modern people, when we think of PEACE, we typically think of NO MORE WAR. But, in the first century, PEACE likely meant more immediate needs were taken care of. As Dr. Robin Meyers reminded us a few weeks ago, those suffering under Roman rule simply wanted their daily bread. They wanted to live without hunger. They wanted to see people treated fairly. Seeing that this wasn’t happening, Jesus was determined to set things right.

Now Jesus wasn’t a warrior, but he did not back away despite the violence he was up against. His arrival and radical message did not bring about instant peace. He knew that preaching a message of justice and compassion was going to cause conflict. Jesus knew that by upsetting the Roman domination system he and disciples would be met with Roman Swords drawn. One participant in last week’s Brown Bag Bible study put it this way: Jesus knew his message was going to be divisive, like a sword divides.

Pretty insightful.

Jesus’ convictions are quite clear earlier in the book of Matthew. In the Beatitudes, from the famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that for God’s will to be done on Earth, the downtrodden and persecuted would be recognized and helped. They would be rewarded. On the other hand, those serving up injustice would no longer have power. He was calling the social order into question, and sending his disciples out to do the same. He warns the disciples that theirs would not be an easy road, but that they should carry the message anyway.

So how can we carry the message of peace? If we, like Jesus, are mad about injustice and suffering? If, like Jesus, we want to be sure people have their daily bread?

There are many examples of Christians working for peace on earth. Here’s just one small example of children working together to make a difference. It is a striking example because the lives of these children had been devastated by a **deliberate act of violence** in their community.

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A few months after the bombing of the World Trade Center in New York City, several children collected items to send in gift boxes to the children of a war-torn village in Afghanistan. The items were small but thoughtful: soap, toothbrushes, toys, and cards with letters. 90,000 gift boxes came from the children of New York City that year to the children living in the Middle East...many of them from New York City rescue workers, and even the young daughters of the pilot of one of the Sept. 11<sup>th</sup> hijacked planes. One young lady, 12 years old, included this letter in a box she sent: **“Dear friend, you’re probably going through some tough times, so are we here in New York City. Ever since September 11<sup>th</sup> I’ve experienced what you must go through every day. It’s really hard. Please keep me in your prayers, and I will keep you in mine.”** Now that’s working for peace. In the face of violence, these children reached out with a hand of peace.

The film crew who followed the Christmas gifts to the Middle East captured the reaction of a father upon reading the letter included in his son’s gift. There were tears steaming down the cheeks of this turbaned man. Through an interpreter he said, “I am humbled the children of New York City would give these gifts to *our* children.” By the way, when the crowds of children waved to the cameras after opening their gifts, they were asked to hold up the one thing they loved the most. Anyone who had received a toothbrush held it up. A toothbrush. These were simple items, but through them their lives were made easier. **Peace really can come in small packages.**

One by one, in whatever way we can, we each make that small difference that adds up to peace on earth.

The **Alternative Gift Market** which is being held today, down in our fellowship Center, will help to bring peace to the lives of many in the United States and throughout the world. I invite you to stop by and check it out. By participating, you will be a part of a peaceful solution to dozens of global problems.

A Rabbi asked this question of his students:

“When do we know that the light has appeared out of the darkness?” One student suggested, “When we can tell the difference between a dog and a lamb?”

“No,” said the Rabbi.

Another student offered, “When we can tell the difference between a palm tree and a fig tree?”

“No,” said the Rabbi.

“When, then, do we know?” the students asked their teacher.

“We know that the light has appeared out of darkness when someone can look in the face of any human being and see the face of a sister or brother.”

**All sisters and brothers mattered to Jesus. Suffering mattered to Jesus.**

During Advent, we prepare for Jesus...a powerful change agent who lived and died but has been active in our world ever since. As followers of Jesus, we are each called to do the same. Amen.

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