

And So He Picked His Battle

Matthew 10:34-42

The Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, July 2, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

You parents know how it is with your children.

They are doing something that if they continue to do, they will experience harm that will last them a lifetime. Or they are contemplating doing something that if they do it only once, they will experience harm that will last them a lifetime.

You could intervene in their life. You know what is going on. You know what will happen to them. You know what to do and say to get it to stop. You also know that if you do intervene they will be mad at you. They will resent you for your interference. They will think that they know better than you. They will be angry with you, tell you off, and rebel against you as only your child can.

You don't want to put up with all of that. It is tempting to simply leave them alone and let them go their own way. You think of all of the other times that you intervened in their lives only to have them rebel against you. And sometimes even intervening did not do any good. Sometimes you intervened and part of their rebellion against your sound advice was to go and do what you did not want them to do anyway and they experienced the long term pain and suffering that you were trying to spare them. If intervening did not do any good last time, it is tempting to let them go their own way and learn their lesson the hard way. That is the way that they want to do it anyway. If you do that, it will spare you a lot of trouble in here and now. There will not be this tension in the house. There will not be the screaming and yelling, if your child does that sort of thing. There will not be the argument and the nonsense that goes with a good argument. But if you do not have the fight now, they will suffer later because you did not intervene.

And so it is with God.

The creation has lapsed into sin and corruption. It is fallen. The human creatures that live in it are responsible for the lapsed state of the creation. They do not do anything to repair the creation or restore it to its former condition. In fact human beings seem intent on keeping things corrupt, sinful, and dead.

God could intervene. God can raise the dead. God can forgive sins. He could send His servants the prophets to preach to them to repent of their sins and by so doing begin the restoration of the creation. He could even send forth His Son born of woman, born under the law to redeem those under the law. He could send His Son to tell them to repent that their sins may be forgiven. He could send His Son even to die for them and demonstrate His great love to them. He could institute sacraments by which that forgiveness and repentance would be imparted to them. He could send forth apostles and preachers to proclaim repentance and forgiveness. Such preaching would prepare the creation to stand in the glory of God again. Such preaching would begin to restore the creation to its former glory. Such preaching would begin the raising of the dead and the rolling back of the corruption. If God does this, He will spare us long term suffering in hell. Like any good parent He is the only one who can see this suffering coming. We are unaware of what is to come and cannot see the long term damage that our sins do either to ourselves or others. We are unaware of the coming damnation and some of us deny that it even exists.

God could leave us alone. It certainly would spare Him a lot of trouble. God does not have to intervene in our lives. God does not have to risk the lives of His prophets and apostles to get His message across to us. God does not have to engage in the long fight and argument that will take place if He does send forth His Son along with His prophets and apostles. God could spare the life of His only Son and the suffering and torments of hell on behalf of a corrupted humanity. God could also spare us the infighting

that will take place if He does intervene in our lives. God knows that if He intervenes some people will respond to His summons to repentance and some will not. He knows that if He intervenes He will divide humanity in two some favoring Him and others opposing Him. He knows that some will love Him and just as some children do when their parents intervene some will hate Him. He also knows that those who love Him for what He has done and those who hate Him for what He has done will be opposed to each other. He knows that this division will cut across all human relationships and vocations. No one will be spared. He knows that fathers and sons will stand in opposition to each other. He knows that mothers and daughters will stand in opposition to each other. He knows that in-laws will stand in opposition to each other. Some of them will praise Him for the intervention that He provides in Christ Jesus and others will resent Him for it. And those who resent Him for it will persecute those who love Him for it.

God could leave well enough alone. Why stir up a hornets' nest? Why start an argument with the creation in which some people will ignore Him any way and wind up damned anyway? But you already know what He did. You already know that He sent forth prophets. You have read what the prophets wrote. You already know that He sent forth apostles. You have read what the apostles wrote. You already know that He sent forth His Son to suffer and die to save sinful, corrupted humanity and restore the creation. You already know that the battle between those who love God for doing this and those who resent God for doing this is joined.

And so when Jesus sends forth His apostles He makes sure that the one thing is clear with them, "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." And for those of you who are interested in this sort of thing, the kind of sword that our Lord refers to here is a short sword used for close combat. How close is the combat that the Lord will bring? A man will be divided against his father. A daughter will be divided against her mother. A daughter-in-law will be divided against her mother-in-law. Shall the Lord go on or do you get the idea? A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.

So when the battle is joined whose side are you on? Whom do you love more?

Some of you have sons and daughters who are divided from you. They have discontinued their association with the things of faith and whether they realize it or not by doing so they have discontinued their association with faith and by doing so have discontinued their association with Jesus. They have believed the world and the voice of the serpent that speaks in the world. Now, do you intervene to try to bring them back? If you do, they may not speak to you for years. If you don't, they may wind up in hell unless God intervenes in their life in some other way. You could just leave well enough alone. The preacher just said that God might intervene in their lives in some other way. But God obligates you. You are the father or the mother. He obligates you to bring up your children in the instruction and fear of the Lord. You are their father and mother as long as you and they are alive. It does not matter how old your children are. They are your children. You know this when they return to your home. Are you going to say something to them? Or are you going to remain silent and leave them alone in peace. Do you love Jesus more than your children or do you love your children more than you love Jesus? Your words and actions will reveal which. If you love them more than you love Jesus, then you are not worthy of Jesus.

This same thing can be said of any human relationship. Children and youth of the congregation does your flesh take delight this Sunday because I am putting it to your parents and not you? Or is your flesh terrified that your parents might do something because of what pastor said today and things will not stay the same at home? Fathers and sons, daughters and mothers, are the closest of the relationships that we have. Our Lord deals with those assuming that you will fill in the blanks on other relationships,

but just in case you don't, He put me in the pulpit this morning with this admonition, anyone who loves their friends and peers more than Me is not worthy of Me either.

You could just go along with the crowd. You could go along with the crowd's sins. You could fornicate with the rest of them. You could cohabit with the rest of them. You could lie and gossip along with the rest of them. You could publicly proclaim that homosexuality can constitute a marriage. You could and if you do, you will live at peace with the world for the world loves its own. Or you could not engage in these things. And young people in the congregation even if you do not rebuke these things among your friends by simply not doing them those who love the world more than they love the Lord will reveal themselves by hating you for it. The world knows that it is doing wrong even though it tries to deny that. When you don't engage in a behavior that everyone else is doing they will take it as a criticism and the divisions that our Lord has spoken about will occur. Anyone who loves friend or peer more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Anyone who does not take up His cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me.

And that is what happens when you love Jesus more than these others. You wind up taking up your cross and following Him. You wind up dead to these people alienated from those who do not want to listen to God. Jesus says that you are blessed because doing so puts you in the same category with the prophets and the apostles.

That is why anyone who finds his life loses it. When you do not intervene you have to embrace a false world view that allows you to sit there and do nothing while someone related to you walks away from the Lord and dies. You have to begin to believe in universalism or some godless reality that allows you do sit there and do nothing. Once you embrace a false reality you do not believe in Jesus any more. You might be living at peace with the world, but peace with the world is enmity toward God. That is why anyone who finds his life will lose it.

That is also why anyone who loses his life on account of Jesus will find it for everlasting life. If you are living in the real world, the one that the Lord created and then redeemed, the one to whom He sent the apostles and prophets, then you know that no one can continue to go their own way believing they are their own god or believing in whatever god they have created for themselves and not go to hell. Out of love for them, just as the Lord did, you will reach out to them with the truth that you learned from God. You will not do this to earn His favor. You know better than that. You will do it because once you know the truth there is no other way to be. And at that point you will lose your life. Even if you do not become a martyr, you will lose your life for His sake and keep it for eternal life.

So let us make no mistake on intervention.

If a prophet comes to someone and that someone else receives the prophet in the name of the prophet, the person who received the prophet will receive the prophet's reward. If you are the prophet and they receive you then they will receive the same reward that you have. If you are the one receiving the prophet, then you will receive the same reward that the prophet does.

If a righteous man comes and someone else receives that righteous man in the righteous man's name, the person who received him will receive the same reward from God as the righteous man himself. If you are the righteous man, the person receiving you will receive the same reward from God that you do. If you are receiving a righteous man that God has sent to you, then you will receive the same reward from God as the righteous man who comes to you.

If someone does so much as give a cup of cold water to even a little child because the little child is a disciple of Jesus, the person who gave that cup of cold water will not lose his reward in life everlasting.

Why is all of this true? It is true for the same reason that apostles and prophets stir up such controversy. "Anyone who receives you, receives Me. Anyone who rejects you, rejects Me. Anyone who rejects Me, rejects the One who sent Me."

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.