

Sermon for July 2, 2023 – The Fifth Sunday After Pentecost

Matthew 10:34-42 EHV

Theme: Confess Christ to your Family

- 1) *Even if it tears your family apart.*
- 2) *So your family can share in your peace.*

³⁴“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.
³⁵For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶A man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.
³⁷“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. ³⁹Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ⁴⁰“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.
⁴¹Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man’s reward.
⁴²Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward.”

“I can’t believe you are being so intolerant, Grandma! Joey and I love each other, and we’ll probably get married someday; we just have to ensure we are compatible. If you can’t accept our relationship the way it is, we won’t visit you anymore!”

Does that conversation sound familiar? If not, how about this one: “Mom, I told you to stop pestering me about Church. It’s straining our relationship. I am never going back. Just accept this fact and stop bringing up Jesus.”

Confessing Christ to an unbelieving family member may lead to arguments, accusations, or even separation. Therefore, an inner voice tempts us: “Do you really want your witnessing to drive them away? They’re your children. Besides, your confession of Christ with them isn’t working. Why not just keep quiet about Jesus so you can enjoy their presence,

Whose voice is that: telling us to keep quiet for the sake of peace? Is it the Holy Spirit’s? No, it is the devil’s voice who wants neither you nor your children to have true peace with God. He wants you to be silent about the Gospel and give up confessing Christ to your family. Why? Because he knows that if you stop confessing Christ to them, he will have an easier job making sure they all end up with him in hell. Not only that, but he also knows that he will have us, too, because a person who stops confessing is a person whose faith is in danger of dying.

That is why Jesus urges you to **confess Christ to your family**, even if it tears your family apart, so that your family can share in your peace.

Part One: Confess Christ - even if it tears your family apart.

Our sermon text is part of a larger discourse we've been studying the past few weeks, when Jesus sent his Twelve disciples on a short mission journey to the towns of Israel. Jesus holds no punches. He warns them that, in the future, they will face persecution from the very people they are trying to save. They will be hated by the same people they love.

Jesus says: ³⁴ *“Do not think that I came to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. But wait a minute: isn't Jesus the Prince of Peace? Didn't angels sing at his birth: “Peace on earth”? Didn't Jesus say before his crucifixion: ²⁷“Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you.”?*ⁱ And therein lies the difference: Jesus's peace is not the peace the world wants. Jesus came to bring peace with God through the forgiveness of sins and a restored relationship with him. The world, however, does not want to acknowledge or repent of its sins. It scoffs at the idea that it needs a Saviour to make things right with God. The peace it wants is the ability to follow the selfish desires of its heart. The world, therefore, is hostile to the Gospel message of God's peace, which is why Jesus says: “Do not imagine that I have come to bring peace (i.e., concord and unity) between you and this sinful world. No, the Gospel I command you to preach will be a source of division between those who believe it and those who don't. You will face confrontation and conflict because the world wants neither me nor the salvation I offer.”

³⁵*For I came to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. ³⁶A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.* Many of you have experienced Jesus' words firsthand as your intimate family members may have called you intolerant or unloving for warning them about sin. They may have accused you of breaking your relationship with them because you keep telling them about Jesus.

How should we respond? Should we apologize for warning our family against sin and God's coming judgment? Should we hide our faith to live peacefully with our children and grandchildren and avoid offending them?

Listen to how Jesus answers those questions: ³⁷ *“Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. ³⁸Whoever does not take up his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.*

Jesus' words sting, don't they? How can Jesus demand such love from us? He can require it because He is our God. He created us to love and serve him. To love anything or anyone above Him is to make that object our god.ⁱⁱ

Another reason He can expect such love from us is that He is our Saviour, who loved us so much that he became human to rescue us from the everlasting damnation we deserve because of our sins. Do you remember our first lesson this morning? Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son out of love for the LORD. The LORD stopped Abraham from doing that and had the story recorded to illustrate God's great love for us in sacrificing His Son to save us. Isaac's willingness to submit to his father pictured Jesus' willingness to submit to his Father's plan. Jesus bought us back for God with his holy precious blood and innocent suffering and death. Why? So we might be His children, living under Him in His kingdom, enjoying everlasting blessedness, righteousness, and life.

But Jesus' sacrifice would have done us no good had he not done something else: had he not sent the Holy Spirit to awaken saving faith in our hearts through His Gospel so we might receive His salvation. The Holy Spirit accomplished this through the preaching of his Law and Gospel – the same Law and Gospel He wants us to share with our family, friends, and neighbours out of love for Him.

I think it's safe to say that none of us have lived up to Jesus' words about loving God above everyone else. I know that I haven't, because of which I pray, "Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner." And the LORD has been merciful to us – so much so that Jesus has paid for our sins. Now, in the peace of his forgiveness, he invites us to take up our crosses and follow him – remembering how he didn't let the mockery, false accusations, and injustice he suffered keep him from taking up his cross to save us. Why wasn't Jesus deterred? Because He loved humanity. The same love that drove Jesus to his cross compels us to lovingly warn our family and friends against sin and point them to Jesus for forgiveness. And what is the result of showing such love? It can mean experiencing what Jesus experienced en route to his crucifixion: being falsely accused, despised, mocked, and ridiculed.

But God sees and feels for us. He offers us his love in return for all the love we lose on His account. On a different occasion, Jesus promised: "*Amen I tell you: Anyone who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the kingdom of God will most certainly receive many times more in this time, and in the age to come, eternal life.*"ⁱⁱⁱ

Our text continues: ³⁹*Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.* If you are willing to deny Jesus for any reason, you will lose him. Sure, life may seem better if you don't talk about Christ. You will enjoy your family's presence; conversations with them will be fun. But at what cost? Their salvation? Your salvation?

But if you continue lovingly to confess Christ to your family, know that the LORD is with you. Even if your family members go so far as to abandon you, the LORD will stay with you and comfort you. And do you know what else? Your family members will hear your loving confession of the Gospel. Who knows: after some time, they might repent, come to faith, and receive everlasting life. Faith only comes from hearing the Gospel.^{iv} Therefore, if you don't share the Gospel with your family, how will they have life? But if you share the Gospel with them, the Holy Spirit will call them to faith, as Jesus promises: ⁴⁰*Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.*

Part Two: Confess Christ - so your family can share in your peace.

You see, whenever we confess the Gospel to our family, it is with the loving intent that they receive Christ and the everlasting life he won for them in faith. What good is all the love we show our family if we hide the very message that would prevent them from going to hell? What good is our love if we are unwilling to warn against sin and point to Jesus, our Saviour?

God's word is effective, as the LORD himself says: *my word that goes out from my mouth will not return to me empty. Rather, ... it will succeed in the purpose for which I sent it.*^v Whoever receives us when we preach the Gospel receives Christ himself. Whoever receives Christ receives God and all the blessings and peace he offers through his Son.

Therefore, Jesus says: *⁴¹Whoever receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward. Whoever receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴²Whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water to drink because he is my disciple—Amen I tell you—he will never lose his reward.*"

You are all ambassadors of Christ by virtue of your faith in him. You are his prophets – commissioned to proclaim Christ to the world. You are righteous, covered with Christ's righteousness by faith. From the newly baptized infant to the oldest senior, you are all disciples of Christ instructed by the Holy Spirit through the Gospel. The rewards you offer others are rewards of grace that you yourself receive freely through the Gospel. Whoever receives the Gospel in faith that you proclaim receives all the blessings and benefits you have received from God through faith.

So, let me ask you: if you knew about something that would really help a family member, you would do all you could to tell him about it, right? You might even pester him for his own good – even if he doesn't want to hear it. If we are willing to do this for earthly things, how much more should we share with them the good spiritual things we have received from Christ?

Understand me correctly: I am not saying we should "pester" anyone – that is not how God wants us to share the Gospel. But we should always be ready to speak the truth in love: honestly telling our family members about our spiritual concern for them and pointing them to Christ. Again, I am not talking about pestering or trying to force our family to believe. I am talking about actively looking for and taking the opportunities that present themselves daily to lovingly share God's truth about sin and grace with them, as God's Word encourages: *always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that is in you.*^{vi}

Confessing Christ with your family is tough – especially if your family is vehemently opposed to him. Therefore, as opportunities arise, remember why you want to share Christ with them: because we love them as Christ loved them and desire their salvation. Don't listen to the devil when he tries to keep you from lovingly witnessing Christ to them. Why? Because he is trying to destroy them by keeping you silent. Therefore, out of love for Christ, keep confessing Jesus with them so your family can share in your peace. This is the greatest love you can show your family – even when they don't accept it. Amen.

ⁱ John 14:27 EHV

ⁱⁱ Cf. Exodus 20:3 & Matthew 22:37

ⁱⁱⁱ Luke 18:29-30 EHV

^{iv} Cf. Romans 10:17 EHV

^v Isaiah 55:11 EHV

^{vi} 1 Peter 3:15 EHV