

“Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn

“ a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law –

A man's enemies will be the members of his own household.’”

“Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

“He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because his is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.”

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST
JUNE 15, 2008

WE ARE THE TWELVE JESUS SENDS TODAY

In sending us Jesus calls us:

1. To fearlessly confess His name
2. To endure the bitter conflicts because of Him
3. To grow toward a more perfect consecration to Him

Dear committed followers of Jesus,

Our text for this morning is a continuation of the last Sunday's sermon text and both are a part of the instruction Jesus gave to his twelve disciples when He sent them out in His name. He gave them authority to drive out evil spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. It sounds exciting, doesn't it! However, the glamour of the glory of being sent can soon become dulled when those among whom you are sent to serve respond to your presence with sharp criticism. Discipleship has its ups and downs. There can be celebrated victories brought about by the proclamation of the Good News

about Jesus. And there are sad days when someone, who has been walking in the fellowship, takes a sharp left turn and no longer walks with you.

As we look at this section of God's Word, it is important for each of us to see and understand that the Holy Spirit caused these words to be written for our learning, not just for our information. Let us try to get ourselves into this text under this theme: WE ARE THE TWELVE JESUS SENDS TODAY.

In sending us Jesus calls us 1. To fearlessly confess His name, 2. To endure the bitter conflicts regarding Him and finally, 3. To grow toward a more perfect consecration to Him.

The text begins, *Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my father in heaven.*

This is the principle. As we confess Jesus before men, He will confess us before the Father. Jesus is calling for a fearless confession of Him when the situation calls for it. If someone is making a joke of your name, you would hope that your friends would speak up and correct what is being said. Jesus is no different. He expects us to speak up on His behalf.

Fear is what often hinders a person from acknowledging Christ. We might be afraid that we are going to lose friends because of our confession. We may be afraid that we will suffer embarrassment for confessing Jesus. We may feel that we have enough things to be embarrassed about already without adding our faith to the cause.

I have shared with some of you the bold witness of a little Korean girl. A number of GI's had been captured and were being forced to march across the country on Christmas Eve. It was bitter cold and there was a foot or more of snow on the ground. When the detail approached a village, the line was brought to a halt and most of the guards went into the village for food and warmth. The line of prisoners was left standing in the snow under armed guards. A little girl came from the village carrying a bowl of rice and she was saying "Jesus is Christmas, Jesus is Christmas." One of the guards warned her to stay away but she keep stepping closer to the officer at the head of the line of prisoners. Finally, the guard yelled at her to stop and when she took another step, he shot her. That officer who wrote about the incident said that it was the most memorable Christmas Eve he has ever had and the red blood of the little girl soaking into the white snow made an indelible impression on the his mind of a little person who sealed her confession of Jesus with her blood. Jesus calls for a fearless confession of His name.

Jesus also calls us to endure the bitter conflicts which arise because of Him. Listen again to the Word. *Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law – a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.* Do you think this ever

happens? You bet it does. In Edna, Texas, where I first was called into the public ministry of the church, most of the members had brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, fathers and mothers split between our church and the other church in town. In some instances the relationships were cordial but in others they were adversarial.

That was all mild compared to what people are going through in other parts of the world today because of their confession of Jesus. There is open hostility and genocide going on in Africa, Asia and the Orient. In this country a school boy drew a picture of Jesus in his art class and was expelled for doing so. I know of a little boy who is told by his father that he doesn't have to obey his mother. He doesn't have to play in the band concert, if he doesn't want to. Instead, he can go fishing with his dad. He doesn't have to attend worship and Sunday school. He can stay home when he is with his dad. No blood-letting there but clear opposition to the Word of God and opposition to the confession of a godly woman.

Yoko Takata became a Christian in Tokyo. When her father died, her brothers would not allow her to attend the funeral. She was completely cut off from the family.

The point is that the confession of Christ divides people into those who are for Him and those who are against Him. There is no neutral ground. We are either gathering with Him or we scatter. We are either trying to move the light of the Gospel forward or we are trying to snuff it out.

There are subtle traps into which the devil tries to lead us in order to compromise our confession of Jesus. Internet pornography is at epidemic proportions in our land. Christians from grade school age to senior executives are getting caught up in it. It becomes an addiction. But there is help. Talk to me if you are on this slippery slope and do it before you slip over the edge.

It is important to live in a way in which we are moving closer to Jesus rather than living on the edge. The song writer caught the idea. He wrote, "*Take my moments and my days. Let them flow in ceaseless praise. Take my lips and let me sing, always, only for my King.*" You get the idea. Our lives should be moving toward a more perfect consecration to Jesus.

There is an important phrase in the last verses of the text. Jesus is talking about life – losing it and finding it and He put it into the context of relationships. If your relationship with a family member is more important than your relationship with Jesus, then you are breaking the very first commandment and you are on a collision course with the words, "depart from me." The key phrase is "*more than Me.*" Jesus is not suggesting that we not love our father or mother or anyone else for that matter. The keeping of the second table to the Law is to love our neighbor as ourselves. So, it is a matter of priorities. Jesus first, others next and myself last.

You will also find that when Jesus is first, He is the motivating factor in reaching out to others in their need. A cup of cold water to one of the little ones or a cup of rice offered on a bitter Christmas Eve reveals the heart in which Jesus is enthroned. Our lives will soon be past. Only those things done for Christ will last.

Giving because you want to give and you know why you want to give - giving because the love of Christ compels you result in you being the recipient of God returning favor – receiving a prophet's reward or receiving a righteous man's reward. You give and God will add to you. Grace Church is in the process of giving up members to other congregations because they have moved away. But I fully expect that God will give us new members and perhaps more than we are giving up. After all the focus is on kingdom and not congregation.

Fearless confession – confident endurance of conflict – more focused consecration- these are the activities to which Jesus calls us and for which He is equipping us to move forward. Amen.