

"Find Life in Jesus"
Matthew 10:34-42
Fifth S. a. Pentecost
Messiah, Boerne
July 2, 2023

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.

Text: Matthew 10:34-42

Dear Friends in Christ:

Road maps can show us various ways to arrive at a destination. I remember the fun I had as a child mapping out various routes our car might take to arrive at the destinations of our family's summer vacations. Now we can simply put in the destination of our travels, and the GPS on our smart phones will give us a variety of ways we could travel to get to our destination, for example, the fastest route, the route with the least turns, and sometimes even the scenic route. So, for example, when I drive to and from church, I can either go the fastest and shortest way with the least number of turns or the scenic route.

Generally, I'll take the fastest route, but sometimes I'll take the scenic route, and when I do, I am blessed by the beauty of the Texas hill country.

In contrast to maps or GPS, the Holy Scriptures teach us that there is only *one* way to eternal life, and that way is through our God and Savior Jesus Christ. When Thomas asked

Jesus to tell him and the other disciples the way to the place where He was going—His Father's house—Jesus said to him. "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me" (Jn 14:6). When standing before the Jewish religious council in Jerusalem, Peter boldly proclaimed that "there is salvation in no one else [other than Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:20). From the promise of God to Adam and Eve of a Deliverer from the curse of sin (Gen 3:15) to the promise to all believers that He is coming soon to take them to heaven (Rev 22:20), the Scriptures teach that *Jesus is the way to eternal life.*

Now, I am fully aware that there are many people who believe differently than *I* do—than *we* do. People are different, and the First Amendment of the Bill of Rights to the Constitution of the United States of America gives people living in the United States the right to practice the religion of their choice according to their own conscience. So, despite the clear teaching of the Bible and of the Lutheran confessions, most people *chose to believe* that there are other ways to heaven than by believing in Jesus. Yet, according to Jesus' own words, He is the *only* way to heaven (Jn 14:6), so when people say that they believe there are *other* ways to heaven, they are calling Jesus, who is God, a liar (1 Jn 1:6-10) and are condemned

already (Jn 3:18). However, as our text this morning says, by following Jesus as your God and Savior, you *will* find life in His name.

Our text today begins with Jesus clarifying the reason for His advent, that is, His coming into the world. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth," Jesus says. "I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Here Jesus is using the word *sword* figuratively for *conflict*. In other words, Jesus came into the world, as He tells Pilate, "to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice" (Jn 18:37). The truth Jesus testifies to is that He is the Messiah, the promised King of Israel, but rather than bringing peace, that truth has brought conflict into the world from the beginning (Gen 3:1-7; Rev 12:1-6).

The conflict over the truth that Jesus is the way to eternal life has resulted in much conflict, even bloodshed, over thousands of years and affects not only nations but also families. As Jesus says,

For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. (vv 35-36)

At the time of the early Christian church, many Jewish families were divided between those who believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, risen from the dead and reigning in heaven,

and those who believed that He was a hoax, a false prophet. As the Good News about Jesus spread to non-Jewish people groups, the conflicts within families and between nations only increased, even as it continues to cause conflict and violence to this very day.

Nevertheless, Jesus is clear about the priority He demands in the lives of His followers. He says, "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" (v 37). We just finished celebrating Mother's Day and Father's Day the past two months, and there's nothing wrong with loving our parents or our children. We simply are not to love them *more* than Jesus. Jesus is true God, the Son of the triune God, so when Jesus tells His disciples not to love members of their family more than Him, He is simply telling them to obey the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me" (Ex 20:3).

Now, this claim of Jesus, that He is true God, is the reason he was charged with blasphemy by the Jewish religious council and one of the reasons He was turned over to Pilate to be put to death by crucifixion on Good Friday. Jesus' crucifixion was not a mistake, however, but part of God's plan to reconcile, that is, to put at peace, the world to Himself (2 Cor 5:18-19). Jesus lived in perfect obedience to God's will, and then He carried the sins, that is, the disobedience, of the

whole world upon His shoulders and died on the cross so that everyone who believes in Him might not perish eternally but have eternal life (Jn 3:16). As true man, Jesus took our place under God's law and died in our place, paying the full penalty for our sins, and as true God, Jesus rose from the dead and ascended to the Father's right hand to rule over all things. Jesus is the Prince of Peace, and He suffered, died, and rose again on Easter Sunday so that we might have peace with God and each other.

When we put Jesus first in our hearts and lives because we believe He is true God and the Savior of the world, we put ourselves in conflict with all other people who don't believe that Jesus is God and Savior of all. This conflict results in Christians suffering persecution, what Luther describes as "the cross." "The cross" is one of the marks of the true church identified by Luther, and Jesus says, "Whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (v 38). The suffering we experience as members of the church because we follow Jesus, however, is not reason to leave the church. Rather, it is confirmation that we are part of the *true* church and assurance that we are on the way to eternal life.

Of course, when we put Jesus first in our lives, this means humbling ourselves and taking a lower place in relation to others. This is what Jesus means by "losing" our life, as Jesus says in our text, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and

whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (v 39). For example, when family visit, sometimes people decide that peace and unity in the family are more important than the conflict and division that might result from attending worship and Bible class on Sunday morning. Now, I'm not judging anyone, but when we chose to stay home for the sake of peace and unity in the family rather than attending church and potentially causing conflict and division, we may be putting ourselves before Jesus, that is, *finding* life rather than *losing* it for Jesus' sake.

You see, we find life by following Jesus. His teaching in our text this morning had particular significance for Christians in the early church. When persecution broke out in Jerusalem during the time of Saul, many Christians suffered the cross, that is, persecution, and when they fled the city to escape persecution, Christians in other towns offered refuge to their fellow Christians, especially family, in their homes. Jesus assured them, "Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me, receives him who sent me" (v 40). Thus, showing hospitality to visitors was not simply culturally expected among early Christians but also an assurance of God's presence among them.

Jesus also wants us to receive and provide for the needs of persecuted Christians today. As I've mentioned previously, persecution of Christians throughout the world is greater today

than ever before. As Christians living in America, we are protected from most of this, although at times we may still feel the sting of rejection for being Jesus' disciples. When we receive persecuted Christians here at Messiah or support their care financially elsewhere in the world, we are putting our faith into practice, and Jesus promises that we will be rewarded, as He says,

The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones [that is, fellow Christians] even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward. (Mt 10:41-42; 25:31-46)

Dear Friends in Christ, maps show us various ways to different *physical* locations, but the Holy Scriptures show us the *only* way to the spiritual destination we desire—our Father's house in heaven. Through Jesus Christ *alone*, God promises us a resting place in the peace of heaven and the priceless gift of eternal life. By following Jesus, trusting His promises, we find life in His name. Amen.