

“We Are Self-Helpless”

Matthew 10:34-42

Jesus gives to His listeners – gives us – some difficult doses of reality. Christ did not come to earth to make sinners feel better about themselves and to build them up through a 12-step self-help program. When it comes to that which is important in our lives, that is, providing forgiveness and salvation, we are self-helpless. Our sinful nature is totally corrupt. It is not about what we can do. Christ has done it all. He says from the cross, “It is finished.”

However, what Christ came to do is not what most people thought He would do. In His day, they wanted Him to be the champion for the people and reestablish Israel. Likewise, what Christ actually did is generally misunderstood in the popular perception of our society today. Christ did come to bring comfort and healing as most everyone would attest. But before He can bring comfort and healing, He first brings His sword.

Christ does not heal us through massage therapy. He does not massage all those bad pains and bad feelings away and make us feel good about ourselves for a short while. There are no temporary, superficial, pop-psychology cures when Christ is present. He comes with a sword, and He cuts away, kills, and gets rid of everything evil.

I have had people comment to me that they have difficulty coming to church because of the immense guilt that they feel for one reason or another. They would not come to church because as soon as they walked through the doors, they felt as if every eye was looking at them and casting judgment upon them, or a bolt of lightning was about to strike.

The reality is that this is the sword of Christ at work. As the author of Hebrews wrote: “For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account” [Heb. 4:12-13].

The Law of God shows us our sin, exposing it to us. We heard Paul say that this is the purpose of the Law – that “sin might be shown to be sin” [Rom 7:13]. This is a good thing, and anyone who tells you that sin should not be pointed out says that St. Paul is a liar – and for that matter, they would have to say the same thing about Jesus.

When Jesus says, “Judge not lest ye be judged,” our pop-psychology world forgets to read the rest of the passage. Jesus goes on to say that you need to take the log out of your own eye so that you may see clearly so as to remove the speck from your brother’s eye. Removing the speck is a good and beneficial act.

The pop-psychology religion of the day wants you leave that speck and “love everyone just the way they are”. Allowing the speck to remain; allowing someone to not see clearly and essentially be blind – this is no act of love. Satan wants you to believe the lie. And we see households

divided – a man against his father, a daughter against her mother – because the Word of God, the sword of Christ, the words of St. Paul are given up for the comfortable massage therapy and self-help message promised by the world – a message that leaves you blind.

Christ brings a sword for a reason. God brings these pangs of guilt into our hearts to bring our hearts to repentance and to bring about real change in our lives – real peace. Unfortunately, the common response to these pangs of guilt is to stay away from Christ and His church, or to seek out religious comfort where that sword will never be present. Our sinful nature desires to be comfortable. Our sinful nature desires “peace where there is no peace.”

And this should never be tolerated or desired, because the ultimate peace that Christ does bring is worth enduring the sword. The joy of forgiveness is the joy of knowing that the gates of heaven are open to you. We just sang “What a Friend We Have in Jesus.” Jesus is our friend, not only because He “bears our sin and griefs away,” but He opens our eyes and shows us our sin.

If you were grasping in the dark because you had splinters in your eyes, what would you think if your friends said, “Don’t worry; you’re fine just the way you are; you look good”? You would quickly understand that these “friends” were not friends at all. If they were true friends, they would have looked out for you. They would have helped you even if it was inconvenient for them at the time. No matter how unpleasant the truth may be, allowing a friend to blindly grasp in the darkness of sin is not a show of love.

The sword that Christ wields is very sharp and does not allow anything

to stand between Him and His faithful people. Christ came to make clear the division between God's people and Satan's people. Both groups of people sin every day. However, God's people are led to acknowledge their sin; we feel sorrow for our sin; we repent of our sin; and God completely forgives our sin. And all of this is His work in us. We are self-helpless.

One of my favorite hymns, "Thy Strong Word," begins with the words: "Thy strong word did cleave the darkness." When God created the heavens and the earth, He said, "Let there be light." And that light cut through the darkness. The two are incompatible. Christ, the Word of God made flesh, has now done that to your heart. He wields His sword and cleaves away the darkness of sin. The guilt of sin and the joy of forgiveness are incompatible.

It is painful when the full brunt of the Law exposes our sinful heart. But there is no more joyful feeling than having the pain, shame, and guilt of sin removed from your life by God's gracious forgiveness won for us on Christ's cross at Calvary.

In the work of the Law and the Gospel, we see what a true friend we really have in Jesus. The message of Christ and His Church is not always popular, is sometimes painful, but is always filled with real hope and real peace. The way of the cross is not easy, but it is the only path to salvation. It is the only way in which the gates of heaven are open. We are self-helpless. As we said at the beginning of our worship service today, "Our help is in the name of the Lord." Amen.