

Gracious God, take our minds and think through them;  
take our hands and work through them;  
take our hearts and set them on fire.  
Amen.

We are now settling into Ordinary Time – the long season after Pentecost. It's called ordinary not because it is typical – rather, it comes from the word “ordinal,” meaning “related to a series.” From now until November our gospel readings will move chronologically through Matthew.

This week's reading comes from the second of five major discourses or teaching sessions Jesus delivers in Mathew's gospel. This one is often called the “Missionary Discourse” as it consists of instructions to the disciples as Jesus commissions them and prepares to send them out to preach, teach, and heal in villages throughout the region.

If today's passage feels disjointed to you – swinging from the comfort of *do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows* to the threat of *do not think that I have come to bring peace, but a sword* – then looking at the context is helpful.

Over the preceding chapter Jesus has been telling the disciples what he is sending them out to do, and the very trouble they may encounter in bringing his message to the world.

As this discourse comes to an end, he is trying to both encourage his friends and offer them words of comfort.

Do not fear, it will be worth it in the end I promise.

When you bring news of the kingdom of heaven it will upset the systems of the world,  
but stay the course – take up the cross and follow me, and you will not be lost.

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Even knowing this context, the image that has stayed with me all week has been Jesus' proclamation, "*Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*"

It's a far call from the image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd, let alone the Prince of Peace.

And yet the hinge in his statement **is** the word peace, and the meaning behind it.

There are several Greek variations of the word for peace with slightly different meanings. The one used in Matthew here is eiréné – meaning peace, quietness, rest, peace of mind.

Jesus declared that he was not bringing that kind of peace, a peace that upholds the status quo of the world. We see this reflected in his statement about setting family members against each other, which certainly does not bring "peace of mind."

No, the peace he brings is the peace that can only be found through God's mission of justice, compassion, and reconciliation in a broken world.

This **true peace** is a sword to the false peace of the world because it upsets the status quo. That is why true peace so often initially brings conflict, because it confronts the powers that be, and has the power to discomfort the comfortable.

The status quo is a power thing.

The impulse to not rock the boat, to not tell the ungarnished truth and upset people. It is a norm that is enforced in both dysfunctional families and in loving families alike. It is a standard that many of us face in our workplaces. And it is a huge force in societies.

And the thing is, it's the status quo because it works for a lot of people. But not everyone. Jesus knew this, and he wanted better for us. He searched out the least, the lost, and the last to show us that there would be no **real peace** until there was **true peace** for everyone.

Which brings us back to the original context. The words we read today are just as much encouragement and comfort for us as they were for those who first heard it. Following Jesus is not simple or easy, and it can put us at odds with the world around us, but that is what disciples do – they follow where Jesus leads and go where they are sent.

The word disciple means “learner.” Discipleship then, is a journey that includes trying to understand what Jesus is seeking to teach us, and what we are to learn from it.

And here's the thing. This work is never done. There is no final exam. This is a lifelong endeavor that requires effort and focus.

Like all learning, discipleship involves discomfort and mistakes – it requires perseverance and humility. But its rewards are beyond this world.

We promise in baptism to seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbor as our ourselves, and to strive for justice and peace among all people, respecting the dignity of every human being.

When we do this, we too bring a sword. This is the life of being a disciple of the One who brings true peace. Amen. Alleluia!