

Matthew 10:34-42

This is a different Jesus, isn't it? This isn't the "gentle Jesus, meek and mild" we've heard about so often. And while we like to hear words of comfort from Jesus, these are not those.

This is not Jesus, the Lamb of God; this is not Jesus, the Prince of Peace. This is Jesus, the Lion of Judah; Jesus, the Holy and Righteous King of the universe.

This is Jesus speaking words that are difficult to hear and even more difficult to understand.

This is Jesus, telling it like it is. Well, to be honest, Jesus always told it like it is. But we tend to like to hear the words that assure us of His love for us, of the forgiveness and eternal life He offers as a free gift through faith in Him, of the rooms in heaven that await all who believe in Him. We resonate to His promise that He is with us even to the close of the age, and that He calls us His friends. The words, "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son..." fall lightly on our ears.

And they're all true – absolutely, completely true. God does love us, He did give us His Son to be a sacrifice for our sins, to take the punishment we deserved. He does offer eternal life as a free gift to all who believe in Jesus, and Jesus is our Friend who will be with us always. There are rooms in heaven prepared for all who trust in Him. All true, all dependable, all unchanging, all wonderful to hear and believe.

But the words Jesus speaks in this passage are no less true, no less dependable, no less unchanging, but they are not so wonderful to hear.

They speak the truth, a brutal truth about the message of the Gospel and about being a follower of Jesus.

There is a false Gospel being preached today which promises an end to all troubles and an unending state of bliss to all who put their trust in the Savior. That is not the picture Jesus paints here.

The reality is that the Gospel of salvation divides. It divides humanity neatly into two uncompromising camps: those who receive Jesus as Savior and those who do not.

The sides are not even. Jesus Himself says that the way of faith is a narrow gate and few choose it. Believers will always be in the minority in the world, as we are today. Of the more than 6 billion people on planet Earth today, about 1 ½ -- 2 billion claim the name Christian. However, those who truly trust Him as their Savior is probably significantly smaller.

The word of God, Scripture tells us, is sharper than any two-edged sword. It is uncompromising. It illuminates truth and exposes falsehood. It calls sin what it is and never discounts it or sugarcoats it.

Jesus says in this difficult text that He has come to bring a sword. The new way of life that He brings, the message that He

preaches is so radical, so life-changing that people will divide themselves into two camps – those who accept Him and those who do not, and those who do not will hate those who do.

He is voicing the reality that it is not always easy to be a Christian, not always easy to follow Christ.

His way is not the way of ease, but the way of the cross. It requires abandoning the value system of this world and embracing the value system of heaven.

And that will set us at odds with everyone else. They will not understand the life we live or the choices we make. The life following Christ will seem to them alien and incomprehensible, nonsensical and counter-intuitive. The world will not understand it, and so, as always with things that people don't understand, they will hate it.

This is what it means to be a true follower of Jesus. It means of course to know that our eternal life is secure through faith. But it also means to follow a way of life that is different, alien to the world's values, and sometimes difficult to pursue. We will often be torn between doing what is socially acceptable, in, or cool, and doing what we know He would want.

That is the life to which He calls us. That is the reality of the Christian life. It requires daily choice, a daily commitment to set aside the values all around us, and to embrace the values of the

Savior. It requires that we set His will above all else, even family and friendships.

It has never been easy, despite what the false prophets today are preaching. But it is the way of Christ, and its end is hearing Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

And, in the meantime, as our life unfolds and we make the difficult choices each day, we do not make them in our own power, but with the help of the Holy Spirit. And, as we choose that way and walk that difficult, narrow path, it may mean that one or two or maybe more will see and be drawn to it and maybe one day embrace it, and with it eternal life, as well.

The way of Christ, the way of the cross, the way of a daily choice for Jesus and His will. And finally the way of peace.