

In our Gospel this morning . . .

Jesus, the rabble-rouser and revolutionary, does not mince words.

Because, waking and sleeping, he sees the Cross ever before him.

Jesus does not take any prisoners.

Because he is on a mission to unleash the love that will expand the household of God.

Jesus does not shy away from the truth

about what his coming brings.

Because he wants us to know the Truth that will make us free.



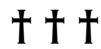
Standing flat-footed in the mess between memory and hope,

Jesus said,

“Do you think that I have come to bring peace to earth?

No, I tell you, but rather division!”

Division. Yes, division.



Heaven knows we already have more than enough division

in our country and throughout the world.

We do not need any more.

Yet, this is not the division that Jesus brings.

Jesus did not come to bring

the social, racial, economic, political, and religious divisions

that are running rampant and wreaking havoc

in our country and the world.

Or the division we read about in the paper and watch on the news.

Or the yawning chasms widening

in our marriages and families, in our workplaces and schools.

Sadly, this division that kills, oppresses, and separates, is our doing,

the result of choices we have made and continue to make.



And strange as it may seem, despite the division that plagues us,
the division that Jesus brings,
presents us with an opportunity and a choice.

The opportunity always to remember and really embrace
the essential truth about ourselves
and the choice to discern
what loving our neighbors as ourselves really means.

Knowing that seizing this opportunity and making this choice
might provoke divided, even hostile, responses.

While still believing that Jesus did not come to bring a division
that kills, oppresses, or separates,
but a division that gives life, inspires growth,
and challenges us to love better.



What intrigues me most about this passage
was not what Jesus said, but why he said it.

Why Jesus framed the division he brings in the language of family
with the image of a divided household.

What if Jesus spoke in this way and chose the image of family,
not to diminish the sense of meaning, identity, and purpose
we may derive from this most primary of relationships,
but to challenge us to prioritize an even more essential one?

What if, by focusing on our family relationships,
Jesus was trying to cut through all that is or may be
meaningful and messy in all our relationships,
the tangible and not-so tangible ones,
so that we reexamine them and our priorities?

So that we each ask ourselves:

what relationship matters to me so much

that I allow it to shape my life and give me my identity?

What if, on this occasion,

Jesus “loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift-sword”

to cut to our hearts and remind us

that our truest, most authentic identity

comes not from our relationship with family and friends,

nature, work, country, beliefs, money, or possessions,

but that our truest, most authentic identity

comes from our relationship with God?

That our relationship with God

ought to be the relationship to which we devote our lives,

the one relationship that guides all our other relationships?



Now, there are those who believe that this passage is prescriptive.

I cannot see this passage that way and, frankly, hope I never do.

It seems to me that this passage is descriptive

as it uplifts the sobering, existential reality

of what it means to look to Jesus

as the pioneer and perfecter of our faith.

But not only that.

Amid the very real division we face,

amid the change and loss we experience, if we look deeper,

this passage also presents us with a comforting, eternal reality,

an essential truth about us, you and me,

that will never change and can never be taken away:

You are a child of God. Fearfully and wonderfully made.

Not a mistake or an embarrassment.

You are a child of God.

On your worst day, still reeling from your worst decision or deed.

You are a child of God.

No matter how you identify, who you love, how you feel,

regardless of your circumstances.

You are a child of God.

Whether your course is set or you've failed to launch.

You are a child of God.

Whether you're feeling good or you're at a medical crossroads.

You are a child of God.

Whether you have it all figured out or are holding on to life by your fingernails.

You are a child of God.

Whether you've come into this space carefully coifed or tore up from the floor up.

You are a child of God.



This truth will change you for good if you let it.

If you embrace it. If you take it to heart. If you surrender to it.

And make a prayer of this hymn,

Have thine own way, Lord.

Have thine own way.

Hold o'er my being absolute sway.

Fill with thy Spirit till all shall see,

Christ only always living in me.



One afternoon, two friends were strolling around Harlem, New York.

Their stroll took them past a Mosque.

As they passed the Mosque, an older man,

presumably leaving the Mosque after worship, tumbled down the front steps.
One of the two friends immediately rushed to help the older man,
taking him back into the Mosque to make sure that he was alright
and to attend to any injuries he might have sustained.
After finding the Imam and other worshippers
who helped him attend to and comfort the older man,
he left the Mosque and returned to his friend
who was waiting impatiently on the street.
A little annoyed, his friend asked him,
“Why in the world did you help that man? He isn’t even Christian.”
To which he replied, “I know he’s not. But, I am.”



Beloved, Jesus does not call us to foment the division that plagues us.
Or to flee from it.
Rather, Jesus calls us to engage the division
we encounter in the world by receiving the division that he brings.
A division that loses nothing and gains everything,
that does not diminish or reject others, that offers wholeness and a sense of belonging.
A division that transforms our lives,
because, having embraced the essential truth about ourselves,
we allow this truth to help us see strangers not just as neighbors,
but as children of God, *as siblings*.
This is not merely how we interpret the present time,
but how we run the race that is set before us with perseverance.
And with love. And with grace. Always with grace.
The grace by which we are saved.
Amen.