

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.

*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 one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.*

Wow, Jesus. That sounds pretty harsh. Not like your usual “turn the other cheek”, “the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed”, and “love is all you need” rhetoric.

These words from Matthew’s gospel sound like a prophecy—and the words sound almost **combative**- all this talk about swords and people being set against each other. Jesus seems to be saying that there are some absolutes, and they make all the difference between following him, and not following him.

But perhaps Jesus’ words are not a prophecy, a prediction—maybe he’s just speaking the truth.

He could be saying: “If you follow me, you will be turning your back on what the world teaches is important: following me will not cause you to live in peace with society, but – in fact—it will seem to many as if you are battling against what the world teaches. “

What does the world teach us?

It teaches us to get ahead. The world teaches us how much we lack—or to put it another way—it tries to sell us what it thinks we NEED. Most of the time that takes the shape of how much ‘stuff’ we need, the newest, coolest products, energy savers, a new car on Christmas! The world teaches us that our safety, our fears, our thoughts, our desires—are the most important things on earth.

And most damaging of all—the world teaches – sometimes around the clock—that it’s either ‘them’ or ‘us’.

That’s what the world teaches us is all important.

And what does Jesus teach? He teaches each of us very unworld-like values:

We are to love our neighbor (and btw—that’s anyone who isn’t each of us).

And as if THAT wasn't challenging enough—Jesus says to love our enemies and pray for them. And I'm pretty sure he wasn't talking about praying for their demise, either.

Jesus spoke about riches (I can just hear you in the pews: "OH NO—she's only been here two weeks and she's already talking about money!" I can just see the phone lines lighting up....)

But anyway--Jesus told us we cannot serve God AND riches. Now—he's not saying that riches are evil, nor that having money is bad—but what he IS saying is that money can become an idol-- can BECOME a person's religion. Try it sometime—ask someone what they think about the most. Where they focus is – is what is most important to them, and that kind of focus on something other than loving God and each other is normal, worldly.

But if we follow Jesus' way, we will undoubtedly run counter to what the world urges us to do.

I mean—picture this: imagine what would happen if you went home today—or—better yet—when you went to work, or met with friends—and you announced that you were a follower of Jesus. After your friends and family recovered from that shock—that you would even MENTION that—imagine telling them that your mission is to see God's face in everyone. Imagine what the reaction would be if you talked about loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you. That you've discovered that in this life there is no "them" and "us"—there is only US.

What would the reaction be?

Would that bring about a peaceful conversation- or discomfort—a sword?

I think we'd find that we would quickly have daughters or sons, or fathers, or mother-in-laws wondering what cool aid we swallowed! I bet we'd have people telling us be more "practical"-- less Pollyanna-ish. And I bet some people even be angry that we weren't following the world into mass anxiety.

Jesus' way isn't an easy one, nor is it always comfortable. Learning to love is one of the biggest challenges he could have thrown down.

Now-I'm not talking about love as pie in the sky, or lovely sentimental feelings. Love isn't a feeling, it's an action.

Think back to a time when you were really mad at someone you loved. I suspect in that angry moment you weren't awash in lovely feelings of love—quite the contrary. But you still loved them. When I was growing up I could be really angry at my parents, but still love them completely.

I'm talking about love the way I suspect Jesus talks about it-- as a creative dynamite—a force that can change the world.

Think of how life would change if we practiced what Jesus demands. If we saw everyone as a child of God. If we doled out forgiveness instead of judgement. If we gave away more and needed less. If we saw love as creative dynamite. What could happen?

Teilhard de Chardin said it brilliantly:

Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, human beings will have discovered fire.

Amen.