

The owners and players of the National Football League have been in a lockout for over 125 days now. That means for the better part of four months two groups that need each other have been against each other. There's been no peace as they try and hammer out a deal where each side agrees to some of the other side's demands. Only then can they hope to have peace.

It's a complicated relationship where a period of no peace leads to peace. But it's peace that probably won't last. It won't be the last labor dispute that league has in all likelihood. Every day we strive for peace in our relationships too. We want peace with everyone close to us. Even those we're not close with we don't want to be arguing or fighting with them either. We'll do just about anything to achieve peace including at times smothering our faith in Jesus.

You might remember a few weeks ago the encouragement came from Jesus that we should go out and share his Word with others. People will die if they don't hear that life giving Word. That takes compassion to share just like Jesus. This week Jesus gets real. Just because we go out and share wonderful news doesn't mean everyone is going to listen. In fact sharing his Word means persecution, this can come from our close relationships. In the gospel this morning Jesus clarifies...

**Peace isn't always peaceful
Expect rejection
Trust God**

Doctor's visits often bring bad news. Sometimes it's good, but the expectation is for bad. But which would you rather have? To hear that you had contracted some serious illness but that there was a treatment, or with a fake smile they told you everything was great and you could go home even though you did have a bad illness. We need the bad news so we can deal with it. People facing their sin want exactly the opposite though it seems. Tell me anything but the bad news.

Jesus says we have to share the bad news of sin. Then he explodes any false ideas we might have about how people will receive God's message of sin and grace. **"Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword."** The Bible calls Jesus the Prince of Peace. On more than one occasion he greets his disciples with Peace be with you. Isn't Jesus all about peace? Didn't he come so everyone would have peace, get along, and love each other? Jesus takes away your rose colored glasses. Life under Christ is one of discord and war, not peace on earth. You and I should expect rejection because Christ Jesus promised it would happen.

So when you sit at the table in the restaurant and you start praying expect people to look at you funny. When you answer someone's heartache and grief by quoting Scripture or taking out your Bible expect people to get uncomfortable. When you address someone else's sins with stern warnings expect that they'll fire back saying you've done the same thing. These don't mean God's Word is failing or you're failing. They're examples of just what Jesus said would happen. Not peace, but a sword. And not just with the strangers in your life, coworkers, or the causal friend. **"A man's enemies will be the members of his own household."** Our own families might leave us, not listen, or be in conflict with us. Christ warns don't expect peace, expect conflict. If we're speaking God's Word and sharing Jesus there will be those who will reject our message.

You love your spouse. You love your mom, dad, sister, brother, and grandparents. You couldn't imagine your life without them. But what happens if it's your own family that gets in the way of your relationship with Jesus? You love them, but you love Jesus. **"Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me."** So when you let your spouse tempt you into staying away from church, you're not worthy. When you shrink back from saying anything when your mom laughs when you mention prayer, you're not worthy. When you get pulled away by a brother who's lost the faith, you're not worthy. Not being worthy means forfeiting Christ Jesus. It's saying we need an earthly relationship more than we need Jesus. In one way or another we've all failed to put God first.

Still you always come first to God. He never loves anyone ahead of you. And he shows you that love in Christ Jesus. His Son took up his cross, the cross of all suffering, the cross of his death. He took it up completely aware of what it meant. Giving his life was not easy, but it was when balanced with losing you forever. So he did. He gave his life in a display of grace unmatched. He put you first even as you have failed on occasion to put him first. He passed the test and defeated sin and Satan. There's true peace, peace with God because of Christ.

As Jesus walked to Calvary carrying his own crossbeam he wasn't expecting a peaceful conclusion to his day. He knew what was coming. Eventually he would be nailed and put up on the upright beam to form the cross on which he would die. But even as Jesus was facing his end fully expecting rejection he did it with complete faith. Jesus trusted the plan his Father had laid out. He trusted that once dead he would arise. He trusted that this would pay the price for the sins of all people. He trusted that God would make this right. Christ Jesus trusted God and was raised to life.

I've seen enough death in the last three weeks, actually the last six months. I don't want to face it anymore. I don't even want to face suffering because I've seen enough of that too. I would gladly do whatever I could to avoid both. You're probably the same. But how far would we go? This week I read that Campus Crusade for Christ is dropping the Christ from their name. Their reasoning is that Christ is getting in the way of their mission. Some people don't listen simply because of their name. It struck me as odd that the name Christ is getting in the way of actually sharing Christ. Do we drop Christ? Are we leaving Christ behind here today because church is where he belongs, not out in our life? Are we hiding our Christianity because it might keep us from a job, a friendship, or success? At times we put Christ and our Christianity in a box so that we don't suffer for them.

Would you rather suffer in hell without Jesus for eternity or suffer because of him now and be in heaven? **"Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."** Finding life can be having a goal to be wealthy or popular. But those might pull us away from true life with Christ. So we lose those goals as Jesus redirects our goals heavenward. Finding life is behaving and speaking how I want right now. Except that destroys faith and we lose heaven. Jesus points us to a better way. Put to death that which harms us so we might be fully his. Moses had the Israelites put to death their own families who were worshiping the golden calf. It was painful, but their relationship with God was at stake. Do we trust God to do what's painful now, even separating from things important to us or people important to us if they're costing us life with Christ? Trust God, believe in Jesus. He strengthens us to do what's painful because our relationship with him is more important than anything.

We believe we should have peace, an easy life. But peace on earth gets us nowhere. It's just survival. Jesus wasn't focused on survival but on sacrifice. After dying he was buried, but rose back to life. It was through that sacrifice that he gave you life. We will face rejection because we follow Jesus and tell others about him. Trust God so you can get away from anything that keeps you from following Jesus. It will hurt and you can expect rejection. But Christ Jesus will make sure it helps eternally. His command is full of promise; promise to overcome and receive life. Trust God for that. There you'll have true peace that will forever be peaceful.