

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost – 2026

Jeremiah 28:5-9

Romans 7:1-13

Matthew 10:34-42

Judas betrayed Jesus. Judas betrayed Jesus up close. It was an intimate betrayal for it was done with a kiss. A gesture of love is turned into a gesture of treachery. The Lord knew that the betrayal was coming. I suspect that that didn't make the pain of the episode any less. Listen to these words from the prologue to John's Gospel: "He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him" (John 1:11). Love ventured into our fallen realm. The Creator came to give all that He had to rescue His people from sin and death and He was rejected. Man was made in Christ's image, and the members of Christ's household rejected Him. What, exactly, did Judas reject? Did Judas reject grace? Did Judas reject the unmerited and loving forgiveness of the Almighty, conveyed to Him with tenderness and sincerity? Was Judas' betrayal in any way Jesus' fault? Should the Lord have said: "You know, Judas has some pretty good ideas. For the sake of peace, let's do this Judas' way?"

Peace is a beautiful thing. It's not the only thing. National peace, peace in the workplace, peace at home; peace is a beautiful thing. It's not the only thing. After an extended time of strife, peace is especially welcome. Peace allows all your anxieties to melt. In conflict, all of one's senses are on high alert. Conflict forces one to stand sentinel. When the conflict is truly over, one can put down the sword and relax. America lost great treasure in WWII. The pride of our nation stood in the breach as war in Europe, North Africa, and the South Pacific threatened freedom. America stood sentinel. Young men knew that peace would only come by them standing tall in a dark hour. The treasure lost was the blood of the brave. There is a reason that America experienced a baby boom after the war. Peace was genuinely won.

Peace is a beautiful thing. It's not the only thing. The coo of peace can be an alluring song. False peace is Judas kissing the Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. There are some who would peddle away great treasure for a false peace. Neville Chamberlain made a backroom deal with Adolph Hitler and attempted to pull Nazi wool over English eyes, declaring "Peace in our time." In the book of Genesis, Lot was willing to give his two virginal daughters to the hounds of hell at his door to protect the angelic visitors under his roof from the perversions of the men of Sodom. Lot was prepared to sacrifice his daughters for the illusion of peace. Did he choose wisely?

Real peace is heavenly. False peace is from below. In the book of Jeremiah, God lamented the false prophets who went about saying, "'Peace, peace,' when there (was) no peace" (Jeremiah 6:14; 8:11). Sin was rampant among the people of God. These traveling salesmen prophets were peddling false peace at the great harm of God's people. The people were wounded, suffering from self-inflicted wounds, gaping wounds. Pride, lust, idolatry – fatal wounds – and the false prophets "healed the wound of (God's) people lightly." The people's wound was a severed arm, and the false prophets applied a "Hug-a-BooBoo Bandage – The Amazing Kids Animals Bandages that Hug." Real peace cannot come to a people who defy God. Does the Kingdom of heaven sue for peace with the kingdom of Satan? What peace is there between light and darkness? Is the church in the habit of appeasing the forces of darkness? Do you think that Jesus has a better way?

Jesus said, “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 a person’s enemies will be those of his own household” (Matthew 10:34-36). What does this mean? Let’s rehearse some basics. Jesus is the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6). At His birth, a great host of angels streamed from heaven to proclaim the product of God with us: “peace on earth, goodwill toward men” (Luke 2:14). Jesus said: “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid” (John 14:27). The Lord is not taking away with His left hand what He gives to us with His right. But His words are unmistakable. “I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

On that first Easter, Jesus plowed His resurrection into a room gripped in fear. He showed them His wounds and declared their consequence: “Peace be with you” (John 20:19). Peace between God and man. Peace between our Creator and sinners. Peace for the world. Peace for us. Authentic peace. You have known this peace in your soul. It’s real. It can’t be taken from you for it is Christ’s construction. No one can put Jesus back in the tomb. When the chalice of Christ’s blood is raised, as the bread of His body is lifted, the pastor announces the gift which God wills to give to us: “The peace of the Lord be with you always.” The punishment that brought us peace was put on Him. By His stripes we are healed (Isaiah 53:5).

And yet that phrase remains: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.” Here’s the irony: the wonder of Christ’s sacrifice, the splendor of Christ’s kingdom being among us, the beauty of Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of our sins, that defining reality will create conflict. Conflict – you have known this bitterness, sometimes in your closest relations. Our allegiance to Christ creates antagonists. It is unpleasant. It can break your heart. When we confess Christ and Him crucified, when we make it known that our allegiance is with Him, that God’s Word conveys the truth in all its parts, there will be those who find that repugnant and will break with you. We don’t break with them. We don’t turn our back on our family. We love and we give and we serve believers and unbelievers. We simply won’t deny Christ. We won’t follow family into the pigpen of immorality (the darkness of unbelief). We have left all that is profane. We aren’t “holier than thou” but we are holy and that means something to us.

A sword; Jesus said that He came to bring a sword. Peter tried to hack the High Priest’s servant to death with a sword when Jesus was arrested. What did our Lord say? Put that away! (Matthew 26:52). A sword; Jesus said that He came to bring a sword. As He died, He suffered a sword, a lance, thrust deep into His flesh. Out of the temple of His body came blood and water, out came peace. The sword that He came to bring was a Roman soldier’s sword that brought a tide of forgiveness flowing from His divine flesh. The irony is that His blood brings division. Divine love arouses hate in some. Why? Because man is twisted. Sinful man will spit in God’s face. Sinful man is blind to the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4). That division is real. It plays itself out in our lives.

The sword Jesus came to bring is not a physical sword; it is the word of the Gospel. It works. The Word of God does what it says. Here’s one of my favorite stories. Alise bought me some

cologne. Genius marketing met a hopeful consumer. It wasn't anything too fancy – a simple red, plastic bottle, but it smelled great. It was the name of the cologne that sparked her interest. What was the name? Really Ripped Abs. I used it. For weeks I used it. Then one hot summer day, after quite a lot of yard work, I was making my way to the shower, and I pulled off a grimy t-shirt in the laundry room. Just then the young lass walked by, took a gander at me, and said: “aww, it doesn't work.” That's how some people view God's Word and the conflict that comes to our households. It won't work. No! God's Word creates faith. God's Word brings about an encounter between the hearer and our Lord. God reconciled the world to Himself through Christ and now the Word is drawing people out of darkness into the light of Life (John 1:4). God's Word prevails. We trust it. We use it. We pick up our cross and we follow Him. We trust Him. We find our life in Him. We follow Him, regardless of who does or doesn't join us. God is sorting it out. Peace, like a river flows, from His side in death, into our chalice and then into your soul. God is sorting it out. One day we will rest in peace. Until then, we walk with Him – in the light, in the truth, in His grace and His holiness. We walk with Him.