



June 21 – Swords

As I reflect on this text, I find myself thinking about the last face to face conversation that I had with my mother. I was in Iowa City for Synod Assembly and went to visit her during a break. It started off as a great conversation and then went South in a hurry. She started to complain about her pastor being too political and shaming people who did not agree. In her grief, the target turned to me as she wondered aloud how a child of hers could grow up to be a Democrat. For the likely hundredth time, I said that I view the current system like Coke and Pepsi, they are not healthy and that we need to find other options, or at least no sugar options of political parties.

Which I was sitting there with her, taking the brunt of the tension between her and her pastor, my phone was blowing up. Ironically, it was several nasty emails from her pastor scolding me. I was the chair of the Reference and Counsel Committee, and he was trying to get a highly inflammatory and non-factual Resolution before the Assembly floor. So, I gave my Mom a hug and kiss and off I went to deal with the person causing tension for both of us.

Some people hear this passage and think that Jesus is anti-family. I think that Jesus was a realist. The world often tries to tell us that following Christ is about being nice all the time. Yet, I believe what Jesus tells us in this text is our own experience. In most families there are unwritten rules about what you can and cannot talk about when family is together. These topics start arguments. Often, those topics include politics and faith. We don't like to admit it, but politics and faith go hand in hand. The way that we view policies shows the way we view the teachings of Jesus. He becomes a sword.

As the Gospels are told, Jesus did not have a great relationship with his own family or other insiders. Jesus continued to build a larger table, finding the lost and least of the world and giving them the seats closest to him. He was not about building a family, or a club, or group of insiders. He was not exclusive. Jesus wanted to continue to make room for those who felt like they were on the outside or in need of healing. Jesus fed the hungry and healed the sick. Jesus loved the lost and the outcast. We are called to do the same.

If our culture and policies make substantial profit off a person's illness, we are not following Jesus. If our culture and policies cut off aid for mother's and infants because some don't like the country from which they came, we are not following Jesus. If our policies look to people as "other" because of race, ethnicity, gender, expression, or identity and takes away their basic human rights, we are not following Jesus. Following Jesus is not about always being nice. It is about standing with those on the margins.

Even the hymn we are about to sing is often miscast as a nice hymn, Children of the Heavenly Father. It is not about a single group of people. It is about a God who will do anything to make sure that all of God's children are safe and live into the promise of life abundant. This love leads us through the cross and death into new life.

That said, we can follow Jesus in ways that stand up with others while maintaining a non-violent energy. The pastor I mentioned earlier would have done well to note such a truth. That is not to say people will not still be upset. I would venture to guess some of you are upset right now. The tension makes the sword among us known. I will leave you with a quote of what some call the shortest sermon on record, preached by Mike Yaconelli, "There are three points to this sermon. 1. There are millions of people starving to death around the world. 2. Most of you don't give a damn. 3. More of you are offended that I said 'damn' than the millions of people who are starving." Amen.