

Listening for the Promise

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost (Proper 8) – July 2, 2023

“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–

In 2021 Voddie Baucham, Jr., a black Baptist pastor, published a book entitled *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe*. Baucham’s thesis is that a Marxist-inspired social justice movement has invaded evangelical churches and created a latent line of division within them (i.e. a “fault line”). Like a fault line in the earth, the line of division between the two groups will remain latent until conditions are ripe for a cultural earthquake. At this point the two groups will split apart along the fault line, thereby dividing the church.

Of course, division is nothing new. Scripture informs us that world history is a battle between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. In this battle the serpent strikes the heel of the woman’s seed. But finally the woman’s seed crushes the serpent’s head (Gen. 3:15).

Although this battle is constant in history, it often remains hidden behind good manners. But it periodically heats up as it did during the American Revolution, the American Civil War, and the internal struggle within the ELCA. In all of these conflicts, churches were divided, and in some cases new denominations were formed.

In light of such conflicts, Jesus tells us that He did not come to bring peace but a sword. These words are actually helpful and gracious, though it seems counterintuitive to say so. They are gracious because they tell us not to fear conflict as if something unchristian is happening. They are also helpful since they give us permission to engage this conflict in a Biblical way.

Jesus tells us that he came to bring a sword, and we know that this sword is his living and active word (Heb. 4:12). Because his word discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart, it does two things: It softens and hardens hearts. Thus, applying his word will accelerate the coming split by hardening some hearts. But it will also minimize the coming split by softening other hearts, thereby causing many social justice folks to cross the fault line and return to orthodoxy.

The impending split exists because we have ignored these issues and allowed the tension to fester. Therefore, we cannot avoid this split by remaining silent or by suppressing the discussion of “controversial” topics. But we can minimize the coming split by using the sword that Christ has given us. This is actually good news!