

**St. Andrew's Anglican Church, Douglas, GA**

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commings+ Rector

Scripture: Matthew 10:34-42

***"Multiplication By Division"***

This week's Gospel is an interesting one - filled with antitheses – this versus that and it is filled with messages that deal with expectations of the people of Israel – and Jesus hits them right where they live – He goes right at the matter - in their family! Some would be excited and follow and some would not and reject the message and the messenger. In first century Israel, the people were expecting the anointed One of God – the Messiah – who was supposed to be a triumphant warrior, who would free the people from their captors and bring a time of peace. Jesus indeed tells them that peace is coming, but it is a ways off in the future.

The passage about sons and daughters is taken right from the Prophet Micah (7:6) *"For son treats father contemptuously, Daughter rises up against her mother, Daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own household."* The Prophet said that terrible divisions would come as God would do something new for humanity. God stepped into history to rescue mankind – and sadly some of mankind replied "we don't need rescuing!" Sadly – we might even hear that today. Jesus quoted this passage from Micah to alert the people to not be surprised if this happens when God acts to save you. We see it in Middle Eastern families today when a person comes to Jesus Christ and then breaks the news to the rest of the Jewish or Muslim family. They are most often disowned and shunned – as if they are absolutely dead to them!

We can see it in the church today –and as a matter of fact we can see it everywhere today – as people reject change – reject stepping out of their comfort zone. People reject signing up for something they don't understand or see it unfolding the way they envisioned it. I am bringing up a sore point – but just look at the fallout from the Presidential election when some people didn't get what they expected. I can remember when Marilyn, John, Theresa and I came back from our trip to Israel in 1999 and we told our beloved family members all about our trip, of my healing in the Jordan River, and of my call to the priesthood. One family member, Marilyn's Aunt, asked if we had joined a cult. I will never forget the look on her face as she said "you have joined a cult, haven't you? This was very strange!" It was not what she expected or even understood. The good news is that before she passed away, a few years later, she had a remarkable conversion experience. She saw evil appear to taunt her in her hospital room, and we told her what to do, she drove it out with the power of the name of Jesus Christ. She then saw Jesus as her savior and accepted Him completely and totally – and then she asked to be baptized. What a wonderful testimony of the power - not only of the love of Jesus – but of the Name of Jesus. How great is that? Sometimes it is a process that requires love and prayer to nurture the seed that is planted.

Jesus is not telling us that everyone who follows Him will have to abandon their families and split off from them – on the contrary – we have proof that many of the Apostles took their whole families with along with them after the Day of Pentecost. The evidence is in 1 Corinthians 9:5 where The Apostle Paul writes - *"Do we not have a right to take along a*

*believing wife, even as the rest of the apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?"*

What the Lord is speaking about is priorities. Jesus is saying loud and clear that what matters is allegiance to Him. Following Jesus, following God means that we must have Him at the top of our priorities list. There is a prayer that Jewish people have been praying for centuries; it is called the Shema. "*Here O Israel, the Lord our God is One.*" (Deuteronomy 6:4) It begins that way. A lot of times people will say –‘see there are not three gods!’ That is what Muslims say – ‘there is not three gods – there is one god.’ Indeed, there is One God and we believe He is in three Persons. You might not understand the prayer: "*Here O Israel, the Lord our God is One.*" That is the position that He is supposed to take in our lives; ONE, the top of the list, the top of the heap. Put it any way you want – the Lord our God SHOULD BE NUMBER ONE!

Remember -Jesus does know how hard this is going to be – because if you remember Jesus was betrayed by a chosen friend, denied three times by a most dear and trusted friend, and saw the rest of His friends run away and hide when He was arrested. In the world we can expect hostility and even hatred, for Jesus experienced this from some of those around him. The world is a place where many do not honor God, trust in His love, or walk in His ways. The world is also a place where Satan, the evil one, Beelzebub, Beelzebul, all of those names – I also believe he is known as Baal, is actively at work, seeking to keep people satisfied with anything BUT the worship of God alone – unfortunately sometimes his effects can run close to home – even within families – and then comes division and dissension because of serious disagreeing viewpoints.

If you recall I often use the phrase that is most usually credited to St. Francis of Assisi "*Preach the Gospel always, and if necessary use words.*" Francis was the son of a very wealthy man, a merchant, who left all of the riches, despite his father’s anger, to go and live a simpler life, imitating Jesus as much as he could. He experienced this division and separation first hand.

I believe that Jesus is telling us that proclaiming His Gospel and the truth of the Kingdom of God may mean that we have to sacrifice some human relationships, and some of them might be intimate or family relationships. Let’s face it – the way of the world leads to a shallow and temporary fulfillment – filled with frustration and disappointment. Yielding and submitting to Jesus and to the service of God and His Kingdom – will find a richer life – filled with fulfillment and deep abiding joy. Much of this is found in the awaiting of His coming again; those who love Jesus more than themselves realize true and lasting self-satisfaction – obtaining personal fulfillment and the goal of their existence. (Luke 14:26) "*If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*" **Jesus is simply asking to put God first!**

Jesus came to take on flesh so that He could establish a new way of being God’s people. This is where it got kind of dicey – because the people like the old way of doing things – and do not like having it disturbed. How many times have you heard –‘that’s not the way we have done it’? I have heard that for years – and I have even said it sometimes. Jesus did not want to bring

division within household or family, or church family just for the sake of division – it was just that if people followed His Way – it was bound to happen.

It is important to read the 2 verses immediately before today's Gospel; let's look at page 1516 of the Pew Bible – and Matthew 10:32-33. Jesus said "*Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.*" These are some remarkable promises to those who will follow Him, who accept Him, and who live by His ways – who say 'the Lord our God is One.' Jesus says that He will stand up for us before His Father in heaven if we stand up for Him. Those who lose their lives will gain them, and with those promises comes an important challenge – one that will grate many people. There are many who would rather be served than to serve. In verse 42 Jesus says that if you give a cup of cold water to the little ones, the least of these – you are in effect giving it to Him, giving it to God and your reward will be great. If you receive Jesus - you receive the Father, and ironically, if you receive the one carrying Jesus' message - then you receive both Him and the Father.

I like to think of it this way – growing the Kingdom of God is “multiplication by division.” When I mentioned that to someone as my title for this week's sermon – their response was -- “Wow - that is deep!” Catchy maybe, but I don't think it's that deep... so let me put it this way – remember the parable of the wheat and the tares where there is a sorting out of the wheat and the weeds during the harvest? Think of it even as a pruning taking place.

God makes His message of salvation and His invitation for Eternal Life available to everyone – but not everyone accepts or chooses to accept – it is their decision, their choice. Do you remember the old TV show (not the movie) Mission Impossible – with Peter Graves as Jim Phelps? There was a scene right at the beginning of every show that had Jim - or his predecessor Dan Briggs, played by Steven Hill, opening an envelope and listening to a small reel to reel tape recorder, that would self-destruct. The tape would say “Your mission Jim (or Dan) **should you decide to accept it...**” Isn't that what we are talking about here? How ironic – the choice – the free will has been given to us and is always ours – the mission is laid out before us. God's message, however, does not self-destruct – nor does His promise: “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him.*” (John 3:16-17) That is God's mission. He wants everyone to say yes, but not everyone will say yes. If you went on and read verse 18 – He says that those who believe in Him are saved, but those who do not are condemned already. Wow, that is heavy – THAT is deep! It involves giving yourself and recognizing that the Lord our God – is ONE. The believers in Jesus Christ are called to carry His Word into the world, sharing the Great Commission – not necessarily thumping on a Bible and saying “Oh, are you saved?” that we might hear from time to time. It is being the best Christian, consistent Christian that you can be; seeing the Holy Spirit in us will bring more disciples. We are not to judge – we are just to carry the message – in word and in deed - the judgment is up to Almighty God. How often we hear people making comments about others

and their walk – and if someone were to question them – their response is “*Do not judge or you too will be judged.*” (Matthew 7:1) If only they would have kept reading because Jesus had quite a lot to say about judging; Jesus continued to say “*For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.* (This is the part that I love) “*Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?*” (Matthew 7:2-3) Those who say Jesus did not have a sense of humor need to read chapter 7. Could you just see Him holding up a stick or a plank and showing that? You see, when you point a finger at someone – there are three more pointing right back at you! It starts from within! I am sorry to tell you that there are some Christians who act so self-righteous and are so judging of others that they give the name “Christian” a “black eye” and completely shut people off from even considering Christianity – ‘oh no you guys are hypocrites!’ How divisive is that? It starts from within! *Oh Lord, let us stop judging, and enable us to keep sharing your Gospel –with your love and without question.*

It starts from within! Jesus said “*The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough.*” (Matthew 13:33) Yeast - or leaven - is the special ingredient that makes bread rise – or multiply in size. It starts from within – the yeast ferments and helps to increase the dough until you have not one loaf but many.

In closing, I want to leave you with these thoughts today – and some things that we need to think about incorporating into our daily lives:

- We live in this world and it is becoming increasingly difficult to not conform to the standards of this world, but we need to be in obedience to the Father's word, just as Jesus did. We are to be in the world, but not of the world. The Apostle Paul wrote: “*do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.*” (Romans 12:2) By staying in His Word we can be made holy by the truth of God's Word - by the beauty of His laws, and by the power of His Holy Spirit. My friends - we need to read the Bible! When we had our Vacation Bible School On the first night I asked how many were always in the Word – and there were not that many hands. So I gave everyone there a “Bible Promise Book.” It is like a cookbook. You open it up and right in the front and it shows all of the different feelings and emotions that you might be going through – and then you turn to it; a lot of Proverbs, a lot of Psalms, a lot of Scripture. It gets you into the Word of God. It may not look like a Bible – but it is bringing you into the Word of God in a new and different way and hopefully it will be like when you have one potato chip – you want more. Hopefully when you get into the Word in this way it will make you want to read more of what God has to say about these things.

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, Sunday, July 2, 2017, Year A

- Through seeking and having a real relationship with Jesus, we can reflect the perfect love that has existed between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit through all eternity. There is a Greek word called the *perichoresis*. My dear friend and beloved professor Dr. Les Fairfield – from Trinity School for Ministry describes this as “*the dance*” – the full ongoing eternal relationship of the Triune God. It is the reality of love in our lives which will be one of the most powerful means of people in the world seeing the beauty of the message of Christ. By our love people will know that the Father sent the Son into the world. By our love for one another, people will know that we are loved by God. Plainly speaking – it is about relationships! Do you remember the old song “*And they will know we are Christians by our love?*”
- And finally, we need to pray, just as Jesus prayed. We need to pray for ourselves, for our faithfulness to the Father's Word and His call upon our lives; for people to come to faith in Jesus, the Messiah, through the Word of God; and for the whole world to come to know Jesus, through our lives, through our love, through our example, through the Holy Gospel and by the working of the Holy Spirit. It is that simple – it's Multiplication by Division.