

"How Big Is Your Box?"
Text: Luke 12:49-53
8-15-2010

There was an episode on one of those "Real T.V." type of shows where a family (in Pakistan?) had made a pet out of a lion. I remember being told once that you can't domesticate wild animals, because you can never really get the "wild" out of them. And that's what was evidenced on the video footage for that t. v. episode, as it showed a little boy petting the lion one minute, and the lion attacking him the next. Fortunately, the boy was not seriously hurt; but he could've been. It was almost a fatal error to have tried to tame that lion.

That serves as a fitting lead-in to our Gospel Lesson for today, because today's Gospel reminds us that we can't "tame" Jesus. We like to try; we put Him in a type of "box" so that we can control Him, making Him say only that with which we're comfortable. But as we learn from today's Gospel, you can't "box" Jesus in, at least not in the size "box" we try and keep Him in. If we're going to receive Jesus, and all that He brings to us and our lives, we need a much bigger "box."

So I ask you today: "How big is your box?" Let's look at that by way of today's Gospel, and see if our boxes are big enough.

As we do, we return to today's Gospel lesson and hear again our Lord say:

"Do you think I came to bring peace on earth? No, I tell you, but division."(Luke 12:51)

Now, I don't know about you, but I can definitely say for myself that those are NOT words that I tend to think of Jesus saying. I mean, the book of Isaiah calls our Lord the "Prince of *Peace*," and at His birth near the beginning of Luke's Gospel (ch.2) we hear the Bethlehem angels say:

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."(2:14)

Luke returns to that theme of peace in ch. 19 of his Gospel, where he quotes the "Palm Sunday" crowd as saying, at Jesus' entry into Jerusalem:

"Blessed is the King Who comes in the Name of the Lord; *peace* in heaven and glory in the highest!"(v.38)

Jesus Himself said to His disciples, shortly before His death:

"*Peace* I leave with you; My *peace* I give to you; ... "(John 14:27)

Even the last word we hear in Church, as we are dismissed with the Lord's blessing, is peace:

"The Lord lift up His countenance upon you (or: look upon you with favor) and give you *peace*."(*the Benediction*, from Numbers 6:24)

Peace is what we want, and peace is what Jesus says we get when we follow Him. And yet in today's Gospel lesson Jesus says something quite to the contrary of that when He says:

"Do you think I came to bring peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but division. From now on there will be five in one family divided against each other, three against two and two against three."(vs.51-52)

What in the world is going on? What's up with Jesus in today's service?

What's up with Jesus is that He is breaking out of our "box." He's showing us that we don't really have the handle on Him that we thought we did, as He takes everything we think we know about Him and turns it on its head. Instead of peace, today we get division; instead of a Lord Who draws us together, today we get a Lord Who drives us apart. Today our Lord Jesus calls us to be faithful to Him *even when that divides us from those we love*. In so doing, He invites us to get a bigger "box" - *a lot* bigger box in which to hold Him. Speaking for myself, I don't find a lot of peace in that.

Of course, there *is* peace in that for us Christians, those of us who are, in Luke's words:

"... men with whom He is pleased."(2:14)

There is peace in knowing that *God is pleased with us* because of the blood of His Son. There is peace in knowing that our every sin is forgiven as we drink that blood and rejoice to have had it washed over us in the waters of Holy Baptism. There is peace in hearing the Word of Absolution at the beginning of the service, knowing that that same Absolution will be pronounced over us once and for all, on the Last Day, when Jesus comes again. There couldn't be more peace than the peace we have in knowing that.

But here's the thing: the peace we have in Christ is ours only by faith in Christ, and that faith is given, and sustained by the Word of Christ. *Those who don't receive that Word don't know peace; they refuse the Word of Christ and bring division between themselves and all believers*. Folks, to believe in Jesus is to be separated from those who do not believe in Him; it is to be divided from those who are not united with Him. That separation and division is a vital part of the Christian life - the life which Jesus goes on to describe by saying:

"They will be divided, father against son and son against father, mother against daughter and daughter against mother, mother-in-law against daughter-in-law and daughter-in-law against mother-in-law."(v.53)

Such is the way of the Christian: the way of division, the way of a lack of peace.

Now, we don't want to hear that, and it's definitely not a very popular thing for the preacher to get up and say. But in response to that I can only ask: "How big is your box?" For as

we see in today's Gospel, it needs to be big enough for us to be able to handle it when Jesus says that following Him will take peace *away* from our lives. Can *you* handle that? Can you handle it when Jesus says something to you that you might not want to hear -like confronting you with a wrong-doing in an effort to bring you to forgiveness and a greater faith.? Is your "box" big enough for that Jesus? Is the "box" that holds your Jesus big enough for you to stand on in confessing your Lord to others, and will you make that confession *even when it alienates you from those you love*? Is your "box" big enough for that Jesus?

Folks, the "real Jesus" is plenty big for that, and the "box" that is your life in Him is more than capable of holding you up as you take your stand with Him. In fact, in today's Gospel, when Jesus speaks of a father turning against his son and a mother against her daughter, He is paraphrasing a passage from the G.T., where the prophet Micah says that:

"A man's enemies are the men of his own household."(7:6)

That passage goes on to say:

"I will wait for the God of my salvation. My God will hear me."(v.7)

God has heard us in the Person of His Son: the Lord Jesus Christ, Who shed His blood for us on a cross as a pledge that He will always hear and provide for us in every circumstance. By His blood - and the Word that unites us with it - no matter the divisive, UNpeaceful circumstance, *we are* at peace.

And so when we hear the words of today's Gospel, we need to realize that there are those in this world who do NOT know peace, and often work against it. Everywhere we turn, there will be those who are NOT receptive to the Word of the Lord. That will bring division between us and them - the division between faith and unbelief; the division between repentance and a lack of it. That division is NOT peaceful! But it is Christian. It is a sign that we're doing exactly what we're supposed to be doing, bringing about the fulfillment of Jesus' Words - Words that promise to bring division and a lack of peace until the Day of His return.

Until that Day, we live by faith, a faith that struggles with the tension of peace in Christ on the one hand, and division from those who break it on the other. Our faith is sustained in that tension by knowing that God, in Christ, carried it to a cross that He might continually free us from it, by His Word. By that Word we know that the day is coming when all division will finally cease, and there will be only peace and unity, forever. Until then, we trust in the promise of a God Who refuses to be "boxed" in; we trust in the promise of the Lord Jesus Christ, Who invites us today to get a bigger "box." That we do -

- in Jesus' ✠ Name,
Amen!