

Sword of Peace



Not Peace But A Sword? - an unexpected response of Jesus

The context, in Matthew Chapter 10, is that of Jesus sending his disciples out into the world, "like sheep among the wolves," to face adversity on behalf of the sacred words from the mouth of Jesus proclaiming the good news.

On such a solemn and seminal occasion, we might expect a message of reconciliation and peace with all peoples. Instead, this is what we hear (Mt 10:34-37)

34 "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. 35 For I have come to turn

" 'a man against his father,
a daughter against her mother,
a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law' "

36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' 37 "Anyone who loves their father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves their son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. "

(* see Matthew 10:36 Micah 7:6

Trenches

*I sign no parchment with
the fearfully entrenched
or hearth-warm kin
by dark clouds blind
to sky and abyss*

*Hopeful stars aver that peace
will come but first
climb out of narrow trenches
surrender arms in pain, and then
shatter bitter water pitchers
spilling grudges, ancient hurts
onto good earth*

*Thirsty then,
drink only, then
from a sacred mouth
before the new unknown
of dawn*

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The Sword of Peace: A Journey of Transformation

The Comfort Zone

How unexpected! Jesus said, "Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword," he revealed a deep truth about the spiritual journey. At first glance, this seems to clash with his comforting words elsewhere: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you." How can these two statements fit together? Let's explore this paradox and uncover the deeper meaning behind his message.

Imagine ourselves deeply entrenched in the routines and comforts of our daily lives. The poem "Trenches" paints a vivid picture. These verses depict the struggle of leaving behind what is familiar—the "hearth-warm kin" and "narrow trenches"—to face the vastness of the heights and depths of the love of God, the "sky and abyss." Climbing out of these trenches means letting go of our defences, the grudges we've held, and the pains we've carried. It's like shattering pitchers of "bitter water" and pouring out their contents onto the earth, symbolizing release and healing.

When Jesus spoke of bringing a "sword," he surely wasn't talking about physical violence. The sword is a metaphor for the necessary division and conflict that come with true transformation. His teachings challenged societal norms and comfort zones. Embracing his



message often meant facing opposition, even from family members. He warned that following him might set "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother." This division isn't the goal but a result of committing to a higher truth that not everyone may accept.

The Call to Let Go of False Peace

This journey mirrors what theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer described: "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."¹ This isn't about physical death but about letting the false self—the ego—fade away. It's an invitation to release our attachments to status, possessions, and to revise or even abandon relationships that hinder our spiritual growth. Complacency is a false life.

St. John of the Cross, a foremost Christian mystic and poet, expressed a similar idea: "In order to arrive at being everything, desire to be nothing."² By emptying ourselves, we make room for the fullness of God's presence in our lives.

Meister Eckhart, a German Dominican theologian and philosopher, deepened this understanding: "To be full of things is to be empty of God. To be empty of things is to be full of God."³ Our lives are often cluttered with distractions—material possessions, worries, and desires—that keep us from experiencing the divine. Letting go of these is like climbing out of the trenches

and surrendering our "arms."

The peace Jesus offers is different from the superficial harmony that comes from avoiding conflict. Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and writer, explained: "The peace that Christ promises is not a peace that can be achieved by avoiding conflict. It is a peace that comes only after the great struggle, after the 'sword' that separates us from ourselves and the false peace of illusion."⁴ True peace arises when we face inner conflicts and confront uncomfortable truths about ourselves and the world.

Embracing Change

Change can be scary, but it's essential for growth. Lao Tzu, an ancient Chinese philosopher, reminds us: "New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings."⁵ Letting go of old habits and attachments can be distressing, but it opens the door to new opportunities.

The Bhagavad Gita, a sacred Hindu text, personifies this process through the figure of Time: "I am Time, the great destroyer of the world, and I have come here to engage all people."⁶ Time brings change, and with it, the chance for renewal.

Healing, Letting Go, Entering Unity

In our modern lives, we might feel stuck in societal expectations, material pursuits, or lingering resentments. The poem urges us to "shatter bitter water pitchers, spilling grudges, ancient

hurts onto good earth." Releasing past hurts is essential for healing. Holding onto bitterness keeps us trapped and blinds us to new possibilities. Letting go allows us to heal and grow.

Our personal journey also affects those around us. As we transform, we may influence others, sometimes causing division but also inspiring them to seek their own truth. The Quran acknowledges human diversity: "And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ."⁷ Our differences can lead to conflict but also enrich our understanding and compassion.

By embracing our unique paths while respecting those of others, we contribute to a tapestry of experiences that reflect the vastness of the divine. This interconnectedness reminds us that, although our journey is personal, we are not alone.

Climb Out of a False Peace

It's tempting to settle for comfort and avoid conflict, but this often leads to a false sense of peace. We might think we're at peace, but we're really just avoiding deeper issues. Jesus' message and the metaphorical sword challenge us to confront these illusions, even if it brings temporary discomfort or division. True peace requires facing reality head-on.

Stepping into "the new unknown of dawn"

symbolizes hope and the promise of renewal. It takes courage to leave behind what is familiar and venture into new spiritual territories. This courage is a recurring theme throughout the journey. Embracing the unknown can lead to profound growth and transformation.

While divine grace guides us, we also have a role to play. The call to "climb out of narrow trenches" and "surrender arms" emphasizes that we must take active steps in our transformation. It's a collaborative process between us and the divine. We need to make conscious choices to let go of what's holding us back.

The Journey Toward True Peace

Jesus' unexpected words in Matthew 10:34 are a profound invitation to embark on a journey of deep transformation. He's calling us to examine the entrenched parts of our lives, face the divisions within and around us, and embrace the challenges that come with seeking true peace.

The path isn't easy. It might be filled with painful endings and the dismantling of illusions. But it's also filled with the promise of new beginnings and a peace that surpasses all understanding. As we climb out of our trenches, surrender our defenses, and open ourselves to the divine, we step into the fullness of life that Jesus offers—a life rooted in truth, love, and the profound peace that only comes through transformation.

End Notes

- 1. Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, Chapter 4.
- 2. St. John of the Cross. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Book 1, Chapter 13.
- 3. Meister Eckhart. *Selected Writings*. Penguin Classics.
- 4. Merton, Thomas. *New Seeds of Contemplation*, Chapter 16.
- 5. *Bhagavad Gita*, Chapter 11, Verse 32.
- 6. Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*, often attributed but not directly containing the phrase "New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings."
- 7. The Quran. Surah Hud 11:118.



"The chief thing that separates us from God is the thought that we are separated from God."
Keating, Fr Thomas osco, a Benedictine Trappist abbot. *Open Mind, Open Heart: The Contemplative Dimension of the Gospel*. New York: Continuum, 2006.

"We are kept from the experience of Spirit because our inner world is cluttered with past traumas... As we begin to clear away this clutter, the energy of divine light and love begins to flow through our being."

Source: Keating, Thomas. *The Human Condition: Contemplation and Transformation*. New York: Paulist Press, 1999.

"The path of descent is the path of transformation. Darkness, failure, relapse, death, and woundedness are our primary teachers, rather than ideas or doctrines."

Source: Rohr, Richard, a Franciscan monk. *Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2011.

"Without transformation, you can assume you're at a high moral, spiritual level just because you call yourself Lutheran or Methodist or Catholic."

Source: Rohr, Richard. *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe*. New York: Convergent Books, 2019.

Questions for Group Discussion and Personal Reflection

1. Facing the Sword of Truth

- ◆ Jesus spoke of bringing a "sword" rather than immediate peace. What truths in your own life might this "sword" be calling you to face? Are there beliefs, habits, or relationships that hold you back from deeper transformation?
- ◆ How do you feel about the idea that peace may require facing inner conflicts or disruptions in your life?

2. Letting Go of the "False Self"

- ◆ Reflect on Bonhoeffer's idea of being called to "come and die." What might this mean for your own life? What aspects of your self-image or identity might you be clinging to that no longer serve you?
- ◆ St. John of the Cross speaks of "desiring to be nothing" to "become everything." What would it look like for you to let go of certain attachments or desires?

3. Breaking Free from Comfort Zones

- ◆ The poem "Trenches" describes the struggle of leaving behind comfortable routines and patterns. Where do you find yourself "entrenched" in your own life? Are there comforts you lean on to avoid facing uncomfortable truths?
- ◆ Have you ever experienced a time when letting go

of comfort brought unexpected growth? How might that shape your willingness to make changes now?

4. Distinguishing True Peace from False Peace

- ◆ How do you define peace in your own life? Is it possible that some of your peace is based on avoiding challenges rather than facing them?
- ◆ Thomas Merton talks about the "false peace of illusion." What kinds of illusions (such as denial, avoidance, or false security) might you need to confront in order to move toward a more genuine peace?

5. Embracing Change and New Beginnings

- ◆ Lao Tzu said that "New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings." Think of a time when an unexpected ending or a painful experience led to growth or a new chapter in your life. What did you learn from it?
- ◆ The *Bhagavad Gita* calls Time "the great destroyer of the world." How do you respond to the idea that change and letting go are natural and necessary parts of life?

6. Unity in Diversity

- ◆ Reflecting on the Quran's message of diversity, how do you view your unique journey in the larger community of people with differing experiences and beliefs?
- ◆ How might embracing diversity—both within yourself and in others—help you grow spiritually? In

what ways can you foster unity and understanding in your relationships?

7. Taking Responsibility for Transformation

- ◆ Transformation requires both divine grace and personal responsibility. What concrete steps might you take to climb out of your own "trenches" and move toward growth?
- ◆ How can you balance openness to change with a commitment to spiritual practices or habits that ground you?

8. Embracing the Unknown

- ◆ How do you respond to the idea of stepping into "the new unknown of dawn"? What fears or hopes come up when you think of letting go of the familiar to embrace something new?
- ◆ How can you practice faith or trust in times of uncertainty? What might it look like to "drink from a sacred mouth"—to find wisdom or peace in something greater than yourself?

9. How do you feel?

- ◆ After reading this article, do you feel confused? Fearful? Excited to start or continue walking? Prayerful? Yearning for help from Christ? Write a poem!

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