Embrace the Tension

INTRO:
At the end of last week’s sermon, I said that as Christians, there will always be tension; Between our beliefs/lifestyle and the beliefs/lifestyle of the surrounding culture.

- Remember, our citizenship is in heaven; we’re only ambassadors here in this life. We’re here representing our homeland (heaven...)
- We’re gonna be different. We’re gonna stand out. Often times, in contrast to the surrounding culture. That’s OK.
- We won’t always fit in. Nor should we. Rather than trying to get rid of the tension thru rejecting/accommodating/transforming the surrounding culture;
- Embrace it. Embrace the tension. When you believe what the Bible says (Jesus...) There’s gonna be tension with culture/our own natural inclinations.

This week’s gospel reading is really a continuation of last weeks. Thematically, it’s full of that same tension between our culture/natural inclinations;

- And following Jesus (…not only following Him) but believing what He says is true in the midst of all the other competing beliefs out there.
- You see, as long as we’re in this life;
- There’s gonna be tension... Let’s look at this week’s main text, I want you to observe the tension that’s present in Jesus’ instructions;

**MAIN TEXT: Luke 10:1-11** After this... the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them on ahead of him, two by two, into every town and place where he himself was about to go. He said to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. “Go your way; behold, I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. (T) Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals, and greet no one on the road. (T) Whatever house you enter… remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide, for the laborer deserves his wages. Do not go from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and they receive you, eat what is set before you (...as Lutherans)

- Let’s unpack some of this; “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.” There are precious few in the church today who are harvest minded.
- Mission minded. Christians who believe/understand what’s at stake when we talk about eternity. The Church is too concerned about everyone liking us (accepting...)
- That we’ve buried the truth of heaven/hell (eternity) beneath our natural inclination to wanna be liked/accepted within this culture/society.
- We’ve buried the tension that’s supposed to be there. “Pray to the Lord of the Harvest to send laborers into His harvest.”

Laborers to proclaim the gospel of Jesus. **John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whosoever believes in Him would not perish...” There’s tension...
And then Jesus said, “I am sending you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.” I’ve beat this to death over the past 2/3 weeks, Jesus didn’t save us/send us out;

- To fight for our rights. To fight for a kingdom here on earth (politically/culturally...) Lambs don’t fight. (We’ve become a church of lambs dressed in wolves clothing!)
- We’re fighting like crazy for things in this life; comfort and freedoms that we’re already promised in Christ!
- As fallen human beings, we’re naturally inclined to fight (...put on wolves’ clothing)
  As Christians, wolves’ clothing doesn’t fit us anymore! Stop fighting!
- The way you live your life conveys a message; don’t fight the tension, embrace it.

“Carry no moneybag, no knapsack, no sandals…” IOW, travel thru life in the exact opposite way that you’re naturally inclined to do.

- How many of us go on a 3-day trip and we have to rent a U-Haul so we can bring everything we packed?
- We live life the same way; accumulating things. Travel light. We’re just passing thru this life. Life doesn’t consist of the things we possess.
- Again, there’s tension here. Things are great! But how easy it is for us to be obsessed with things. Possessions. Money.
- There’s a fine line between enjoying God’s blessings and obsessing over them.

A little further into the text, Jesus says “Do not go from house to house. Whatever house you enter remain in the same house, eating and drinking what they provide.”

- Don’t be greedy. Don’t be consumed with always trying to find a better deal. Be thankful for what you have/stay focused on what really matters.
- I don’t know about you, but a better deal can be hard to pass up. For instance, BOGO’s at Publix. I have to take advantage of those!
- I don’t need all that stuff, but I don’t wanna lose money on this! (...trade in my handcart) How many of us;

Buy something just because it’s on sale? I love when the cashier says, “you saved $50 today shopping at Kohls.”

- And I’ve said, “Oh good, now give me the $50 so I can save it.” I didn’t save $$$! I may’ve spent less than I would have. All kidding aside,
- You can feel the tension in our text between our natural inclinations (fallen nature) and following Jesus. Jesus continues;

Whenever you enter a town and they receive you... 9 Heal the sick and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you.’ But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. (G) Nevertheless; know this, the kingdom of God has come near.’

- It’s interesting that Jesus gives these instructions at this point. Remember last week what had just happened at that Samaritan village.
- They didn’t receive Jesus, or His disciples, and James and John wanted to call fire down from heaven and kill all of them!
NO! Wipe the dust off your feet/move on. Get over it! That’s great advice for us today.
I’m curious what we think Jesus meant when He said,

- **John 15:18-20** “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but you’re not of the world, because I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you.”

- Being hated; being persecuted by the society in which we live *(it doesn’t feel good!)*
- We’re invested here. Our lives. Our livelihood.
- And yet we don’t belong here. Jesus chose us out of the world. Our citizenship is in heaven. Our true home is in the new heavens/new earth.
- Why does it surprise us that the surrounding culture hates us/our message?

Why are we shocked that in this age of tolerance, *true biblical Christianity is not tolerated?* It shouldn’t shock us *(surprise)* one bit. **But it does;**
- And rather than embracing the tension that exists between living in this world and following Jesus *(...it’s there! Jesus said it’d be there!)*
- **Rather than embrace it, we try to do away with it.** Last week we talked about trying to force culture *(sword...)* This week *(...other side of the coin)*
- By sanding down the rough edges in the Bible that cause tension with our society because we don’t wanna be hated/persecuted.
- And now, all those competing beliefs out there have gained *an equal* if not a greater influence in the church than the Words of Jesus Himself.

Jesus said “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except thru Me.”
Really? That’s so intolerant! Let’s sand that down a little bit!
- Let’s get rid of that tension. Jesus is not *the* only way *(...a way)* Another example; In **John 8,** when Jesus addressed the woman caught in adultery;
- He said, “Neither do condemn thee, go and sin no more.” Everybody accepts the “Neither do I condemn thee” part... But what about the “go and sin no more?”
- Let’s sand that down a little bit. Get rid of the tension. Why should anybody listen to what the Bible says/Jesus says about what is/is not a sin?
- As a post-modern society, we’ve moved well beyond that antiquated way of thinking. And many in the Church are following their example.

But rather than changing what Jesus says *(Bible says...) And try to erase the tension; Why not just wipe the dust off our feet and move on? *(...fighting, condemning, boycotting...)*
- You don’t believe what Jesus said, that’s fine. I’m not gonna fight with you, **NOR** will I change what Jesus said in order to be accepted by you.
- **Embrace the tension** rather than trying to do away with it just to be comfortable. Temporarily comfortable at that. *(Let’s get back...)*
- **17** The seventy-two returned with joy saying, “Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!” And he said to them... I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall hurt you. Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”
Talk about what really matters; *rejoice that your names are written in heaven.* Rejoice!

Because your sins are forgiven, and you have eternal life.

- That’s as real as it gets. In this complex world, full of so many different beliefs, this is as real as it gets. Jesus’ teaching is simple *(not complex...)*
- “God created us. We rebelled against God and brought death upon ourselves. But God so loves His us that He took on flesh;
- And sacrificed Himself for us on the Cross so that we can be reconciled with our Creator and have eternal life once again.
- And whosoever believes in Jesus will not perish but has eternal life/is reconciled with God.” A simple truth. **However,**

Because it goes against every other belief system that we’re exposed to in this world; the simplicity of that message gets lost.

- In one of Luther’s last sermons *(his health was failing him and he was too exhausted to continue preaching...)*
- He urged his audience to “hold on to the simple Gospel.” Hold on to Jesus. (P)
- Whether it’s in Luther’s day and age or in our own;
- The tension we experience as we live in this world and at the same time; Try to follow Jesus. Try to keep the faith; believe/proclaim what the Bible says!

The tension between the two can be overwhelming. No matter how bad it gets, hold on to the **simple gospel.** Hold on to Jesus!

**HTT:** if that tension disappears or goes away, then one of two things has happened. One is good and the other one is not so good. **EITHER;**

- You’ve died physically/you’re living in the perfect presence of Jesus in heaven. Where there is no tension/stress/pain...
- **OR** you’ve died spiritually/compromised the faith. We’re all gonna die physically, *if Jesus tarries...* but we don’t have to die spiritually/compromise.
- Jesus overcame the world. And thru faith in Him we will to. But right now, in this life, there’s gonna be tension.

Rich Mullins wrote a song called “*The Land of My Sojourn.*” He said he wrote it about living in America. Here are a few of the lines,

- “Nobody tells you, when you are born here. How much you’ll come to love it, but how you’ll never belong here.
- So I’ll call you my country, but I’ll be longing for my home. I wish that I could take you there with me.”
- As that song ran thru my head this week. I could feel the tension. I felt it in our gospel text as I read thru that. I certainly feel it in my own life;
- As many of you feel it in yours. Don’t try to bury it. Don’t try to do away with it. Embrace it. Embrace the tension. It’s supposed to be there.

*And may it be unto us...*