

The 5th Sunday after Pentecost, July 2, 2023

Rev. Gerald Luck

Text: Matthew 10:34–42

Theme: Getting Cut Off

Précis: What would you do if the driver who just cut you off was trying to save your life?

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from God our Heavenly Father through our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 1:2)

Matthew 10:34–42

[Jesus said:] “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. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

I drive a lot, around southern Ontario, up north to Sioux Lookout and down south to Georgia, and for the most part, all those kilometres I've put on have been uneventful. For the most part.... There have been times, though, where I have to say, things got a bit dicy. Like when one of those shorter mobility busses cut us off. Ruth and I were driving down this secondary highway when, for no reason at all, that we could see, the driver, who was right beside us immediately to our left suddenly hammered the gas and started angling toward the front corner of our car. Once her bumper had barely cleared ours, she continued on, across into our lane and then straightened out. Not sure why she did it... there was no place to ramp off coming up, and she didn't pull over or anything... and we followed her for a bit, at a distance, thinking that perhaps she was having a medical emergency or something... but she was ok.

How do you react when someone cuts you off like that? Do you get angry? Some people do. Do you wave your fist around wildly and fill the air with colourful words? Some people do... Me? I think, maybe, I rode motorcycle too long, because I didn't really get too excited (when you ride motorcycle, it seems that there's always someone who's trying to kill you so you kind of get used to it, I guess). "Whoah!" I said to Ruth. "Did you see that?" My dear wife just kind of looked up from her book and said, "See what?"

How about the other way around. Have you ever had to cut someone off? Back before Covid, Ruthie and I were driving along and we were just overtaking this transport truck when his rear tire exploded - right beside us. The big pieces of

rubber flew away almost immediately and then all those steel bands in the tire started slapping around, still attached to the rim. It was dark, we were being showered by the sparks, and all sorts of little rubber shreds that were flying everywhere. I accelerated past all that and pulled up alongside of the cab, honking my horn, flashing my lights, urging him to pull over. Finally, I passed him, put on my four-ways and started slowing down with him just being me. I took a bit, and I'm sure that the driver was equally startled as I was cut off my that mobility bus... but he finally did recognize that I was trying to tell him something was wrong so he pulled over.

So what's this got to do with today's sermon text? Well there are times in our spiritual lives when we get cut off, but not by whom you might think.

You might think that our enemy, Satan, is doing everything that he can to "cut us off" and bring us to harm. You might think that, with him prowling the earth, our spiritual lives are akin to riding around in carnival bumper cars - with Satan constantly taking runs at us and bashing us around. He's not. Certainly, the end results of his actions are nothing but sorrow and death - we know that to be true - but our enemy is far more subtle at his deadly craft than to try to kill us by driving directly at us.

Think about how he subtly managed to manipulate God's word in the Garden of Eden, or how he tried to tempt our Saviour in the wilderness. In both those instances, Satan just asked a couple of questions about God's authority. "Did God really say..." and "If you are the Son of God..."

These misdirections were so subtle that we, in our sinful state and with our limited understanding of the depth of God's love saw no harm in them and failed to recognize the danger they posed. But they did pose a danger. In both instances, Satan's questions asked the very same thing. They asked, "Wouldn't

you rather be a god of your own design?"

And as we ponder that question we don't even realize the danger that we're in. Certainly we already have free choice - God gave us autonomy when He made us in His own image, but choice to do what? Are we free, for instance, to ignore God? Are we free to steal? Are we free to have sex with anyone we want? Are we free to maim our bodies? Are we free to choose death over life? The words Satan puts before us twist the truth - they're alluring, but God's word gives us definitive answers on all of these questions. He says, "No." No, we're not free to do as we please. We belong to God.

In that sense, it's God's Word that cuts us off. It speaks death to the unrepentant sinner and it restores the believer to life.

Some people call that "divisive." The sinner thinks that God's word excludes them from His eternal kingdom. But that's not true. Sinners are not excluded - it was for the sake of sinners that He sent His beloved Son to die on that cross. God's word always has everyone's best interest in mind. His laws tell us that we're on a path that leads to destruction. They're written to stop us in our tracks so that we do not die.

The Gospel is given with the same intent. It's written for our sake to freely to restore us to life. But the world does not see it. Thus the division (man against father, daughter against mother, daughter-in-law against mother-in-law and so on). And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. That's what Jesus tells us. And that division is all around us. In our households, in this world - it's even in our churches, if we would be so smart as to recognize it and humble to admit it.

Who do we love, and for what reason do we love them? Do we defend their

sinfulness or do we heed God's Word?

Jesus plainly tells us whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. That is to say, whoever loves the sinner over the Truth - THEY will not receive the benefit of the truth but instead reap the sinner's reward. They might in the meantime rejoice in the sinners love, but that love will not save them.

But those who have been cut off - those who take up the cross and those who loose their lives for Christ's sake - only those will be found worthy.

You've been blessed by God, and in that sense, you've been cut off from the world. And you should rejoice at the importance of that statement. Consider what Jesus says in this sermon text and you'll see exactly what that means. He says, "Whoever receives you receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me."

That union flies in Satan's face and stands in the midst of this broken world. And that, my dear friends, by its very nature, is going to be disruptive, inasmuch as God is disruptive. You will be hated because He Is hated and you will be shut out because His has been shut out, but you will live because He is life.

Not only will you live, but by the simple virtue of who you now are in Christ, you will convey life, because God is now in you.

And "the one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person's reward. And whoever gives

one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

There’s no mystery at all in any of this. Those who actually receive you and the truth of God’s word which you bear are blessed by God’s intervention - sinner and righteous alike, for even the righteous stumble and are misled. The sinner who hears God’s word is blessed when he doesn’t reject the truth that you bring and likewise the believer who has fallen away. When they welcome you into their homes (or into their lives). Disaster is being averted to the glory of God.

Take heart, you who are in Christ. Take heart and be blessed knowing that God is working in you that which is pleasing in His sight. He has intervened in your lives and brought you to safety and now He is blessing others through you by making you His presence in this world.

Some will certainly reject the truth of who you are and what you’ve become. Some will shake their fists at you in rage and curse at you for “cutting them off,” but those who take notice and realize the danger they’re in will see God’s true intent and stop the course they’re on. They will be brought to safety and life in Christ.

Take heart. And be calm about it too. The very same blood that set you apart from this world is the blood that covers you. You’re safe in Christ, even in the worst of this world’s traffic. Remember what Jesus told you Luke 21:16-18. There He says, “...you will be betrayed even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be hated by all because of My name. Yet not a hair of your head will perish.”

This very same Jesus who has cut you off to save you will be your protection to life eternal.

May you be blessed in His salvation and know He is working in your life to build you up as His people. May you be sustained by His blood and be strengthened to be a testimony to the grace of God for the sake of those around you and may those who don't yet know God be brought to safety through you who are faithful...

In Jesus' name,

Amen.

May the peace of God which passes all human understanding keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen (Philippians 4:7)