

Rev. Dr. yugo Suzuki' sermon

9/13/09 **"Strange Words of Jesus" Matthew 10: 34-39**

Some of Jesus' sayings are puzzling to say the least. Consider the following: "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."

These are strange words coming from the Prince of Peace.

In order to make sense of what Jesus was saying, we need to understand the social context in which these words were spoken.

In Jesus' days, Jewish society was controlled by a caste system. People were ranked strictly according to their social status.

The family reflected this social stratification. The mother had power over the daughter. The mother-in-law had power over the daughter-in-law. The husband had power over the wife. The father had power over the son.

Jesus rejected this ranking of human beings.

For Jesus, God was on the side of the oppressed. He made this point clear in the Sermon on the Mount. "Blessed are you who are poor. Blessed are you who weep. Blessed are you who are excluded and discriminated against. For God is on your side."

God took offence at the arrogance of the powerful and their lack of compassion "Woe to you who are rich now. Woe to you who are laughing now. Woe to you who are full now."

Jesus wanted the weak, the poor, and the oppressed liberated from the yoke of the caste system. That was why he said, "I have come to set a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law."

What he insisted was that family and blood kinship did not define human worth. It was God's love that defined it.

No wonder the poor and the oppressed flocked around Jesus. No wonder women were conspicuously present among his followers.

That was Jesus two thousand years ago. What is he saying to us today?

For that, we need to understand the social context in which we find ourselves today.

Today we are defined by how we measure up to the superficial values of our society.

What are those values? Some sociologists define them as the three A's: achievement, affluence, and appearance. If we can measure up to them, we feel worthy. If we do not, we feel unworthy.

Today Jesus admonishes us not to become enamored by the values of this world. He does so by pointing to the theological foundation of human worth: "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son."

For the peace here is the false peace of this world; the sword he talks about is his warning against our misplaced trust in finite things that do not deserve our ultimate allegiance.

Here is the good news. Jesus Christ has overcome the false peace of this world with the true peace of God. He admonishes us to treat each other as God treats us.

God is gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. God is love.

Thanks be to God.