

What if you woke up one day, and everything you said and did was way out of character for you? You get out of bed, and the things you say, and your actions were totally different from what people would expect you to say and do. Would the people who really know you be shocked or confused?

I think the words of Jesus in today's gospel lesson were pretty shocking and confusing for the disciples as well. They had traveled with him, and they thought they knew what he stood for. In fact, they had heard him preach that love was more important and that people were more valuable and that forgiveness was more powerful. But now Jesus seems to turn 180 degrees from his character.

"You think I have come to bring peace to the world" Jesus begins. "I have not come to bring peace, but division. Because of me, households will be divided. Sons will argue with their fathers. Daughters will disagree with their mothers. Good friends will be at odds with one another. And all because of me."

My perception of Jesus is that he calls people to come together in unity and agreement. One of Jesus' names is "The Prince of Peace." But now Jesus' words seem to run contrary to all of that. Today, Jesus did not talk of unity but of division.

I believe that it is basic human nature to want to live at peace and agreement with others. In spite of the fact that the world is filled with so much violence and disagreement, I believe that the majority of us do not want to rock the boat. If you think back to the most enjoyable and fulfilling times in your family, or in your workplace, or even in this church, they will probably be times when everybody was getting along and there was no conflict or division.

There is a story of a group of girls who attended a summer camp. One girl was torn between two sets of friends. Some of them were sunbathing on the dock, saying to her "stay with us." But her other friends were in a rowboat saying "no, come with us." There she stood, one foot on the dock, the other foot on the edge of the boat, and the boat was moving. While trying to make everyone happy, she ended up falling into the water.

I think this is exactly what Jesus is addressing in the gospel lesson today. He is warning us that there will be times when following him will require us to turn away from something else. There will be times in this life when we will be required to say "yes" to one thing, and "no" to the other. And of course, the action we most often take is the same one that girl did on the dock. We try to go in both directions. We try to say "yes" to it all, and we end up falling.

Is this choice an easy one, the choice between following the call of Christ and following the call of the world? The choice is usually not an easy one. For one thing, the call of the world looks awfully attractive sometimes, and the call to discipleship can sometimes look rather bland.

While in Wisconsin, I married a young couple who were very much in love. She was a strong Christian but he was unchurched. Even though he did not go, he was perfectly willing to let his wife attend church. That arrangement worked for awhile, and then they had a child. Now, she wanted her baby baptized. Now, she wanted to teach Sunday School. But the husband had enough of church and he laid down the law. It was a painful time for her, as she tried to choose between her husband, to whom she had promised, and her God, to whom she had also promised. Every time she came to church after that, I was reminded of Jesus' words: "From now on, a family will be divided two against three because of me."

So, I'm wondering about you today. Has your faith ever caused you to make a choice? Have you ever had one foot on the boat and one foot on the dock trying to decide what to do? If you have, then you understand exactly why Jesus said what he did.

The Christian life is like that. Every day we are called to make choices, decisions as to which way we will go that day. Sometimes, those decisions are costly, in terms of money, or family, or friendships. If our destination is important to us, we make the correct choice. Not every time, perhaps. But often enough. May God give you wisdom and courage to make those choices in the days ahead.