

PENTECOST 4 – JUNE 21, 2026 – DEACON RICH WILSON

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Now we *know* Peter kept a sword for *just such* an occasion.

So we're *not surprised* that it is Peter who jumps on Jesus' statement in a fury.

“*Thank you Jesus!*” Finally the time has come for You to lead us to victory over our oppressors – the Romans!!!!!! We are armed and ready to follow you into battle, to restore King David's *earthly* kingdom. We've been waiting for you to step up and be the military and political leader we've longed for, to overthrow *the* Roman's. We will *follow* You anywhere...”

If we're honest with ourselves, don't we all have our own “inner Peter” crying out for Jesus to lead the revolution that will finally free us from all our enemies?

Hopefully, 2,000 plus years later, we know Jesus did not come to bring literal war – but what's with all the hyperbole?

Quite simply, the word “sword” is a metaphor – “a figure of speech that compares two unrelated things by stating that one thing is another.”

“Sword” is a metaphor for the “Word of God,” and it is used in other parts of the Bible like Isaiah and Hebrews.

Here's the Hebrews metaphor: "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, *piercing* to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the *thoughts and intentions of the heart.*"

"Thoughts and intentions of the heart?" *That's pretty messy stuff.*

It reminds me of my old friend Deacon Armand who I met in my work as a prison chaplain.

Deacon Armand told me one day that he did a lot of marriage counseling.

"You're a counselor too," I asked him. "No, Rich, I'm business guy like you – but I know how to help people get to the real problem in their marriage so they're working on the real issue, the heart of the matter, not the symptoms." The good deacon was a fixer, not necessarily a "heart" guy.

I guess sometimes you do need a machete to clear away all the little trees before you can see the big one blocking the path forward.

Sometimes peacemaking, perhaps especially in marriage counseling, generates violence first *before* healing, restoration and peace.

In Jesus' time, first-century Jewish society revolved entirely around familial allegiance.

So of course Jesus did not want us to hear that He came to "set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother..."

Jesus did want us to hear that following Him demanded a “higher allegiance” than the allegiance to even our parents, spouse, children and siblings.

And Jesus knew that following him would cause an inevitable clash when one member of the family chose to follow Jesus and others did not.

For all the reasons Fr. John detailed in his sermon last week, I’m guessing that most of us have not found ourselves “set against” our family because we are placing our highest allegiance in following Jesus.

I would guess we all find, as Jesus intended, that following Him is also the pathway to being a good daughter or son, wife or husband, mother or father.

Jesus did come to bring peace.

*Sometimes* I think the biggest obstacle to peace is fear.

The sword Jesus speaks of, literally the Word of God, “cuts through lies and exposes human motives” – in Jesus’ time, in every generation, in every time.”

We stand in Jesus’ truth, fearless, because the Word of God has set us and the world, free – *if* we choose to believe and accept that freedom.

We not only hear and speak this truth, it has become the ground of our being, the driving force in our lives – not just something we do on Sunday mornings, but something we live out every day...as best we can.

Yes, there is disruption and division in this world and in the Kingdom of God that we live in. But that disruption and division is not a call to arms (the *literal* sword); but a call to repentance, a call to return to the *Word of God* which is also the “peace which passes all understanding.”

Last week Fr. John talked about the “enormous gifts” all of you have, the gifts that *make up* our parish.

I’ve worshiped in 5 Episcopal churches in my lifetime. Each one was a new and wonderful experience for me.

I would have never thought I could *even* replicate the gift and gifts of my last parish where I was ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church.

Then I came here.

At a time in our life when we really needed a home, Kathie and I found one here, as if it were a long lost, first love. It would be easy to say that’s all because of Fr. Joe, all of you, or the rest of the clergy.

But there’s something going on here that can only be explained by the Presence and Spirit of God.

Yes, this parish has “enormous gifts”; but they can only be explained by the “Word of God” which is “living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword,” exposing our “gifts” that *only* God can give.

Praise Jesus.

