

## **Matthew 10:24–39**

*24 'A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; 25it is enough for the disciple to be like the teacher, and the slave like the master. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebul, how much more will they malign those of his household!*

*26 'So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. 27What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 28Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground unperceived by your Father. 30And even the hairs of your head are all counted. 31So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows.*

*32 'Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in heaven; 33but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in heaven.*

*34 'Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

*35 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;*

*36 and one's foes will be members of one's own household.*

*37Whoever 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; 38and whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it.*

Holy, Holy, Holy One, guide us by the Spirit of truth to hear the Word of life you speak, and to give all glory, honor, and praise to your threefold name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Today's gospel lesson is a continuation of what it means to be a disciple of Christ. In last week's lesson Jesus told his disciples that they needed to go out to the towns. They were to go without money, extra clothes, a walking staff, or basically anything. He told them to proclaim the Good News and if nobody in town welcomed them, they should shake the dust of the town off their feet and move on. He also says it will not be easy. That they will be ridiculed and even persecuted for their mission. Jesus calls on his disciples to rely on the Holy Spirit for their defense and protection.

As we go through this week's passage, I think it is important for us to take a moment and really consider what it looks like to be a disciple of Christ in today's world. Lots of people claim to follow Christ, but many of them are perfectly fine to let the rule and role of empire lead them away from what Christ is actually asking us to do.

What it comes down to in the end is that the mission of bringing forth the Kingdom of God is going to lead to conflict, not because God wants conflict, but because what God does want for us goes against the way the world currently is, and the people in power like the way it is, they have no interest in making changes or giving up the power and comfort they have.

As one commentator notes, "The difficulty in preaching today's text is not the complexity of its concepts, but the seeming disconnect between the palpable threats of the world it displays and the "safe" world we inhabit."

Have we compromised our faith and ourselves in the name of safety, in the name of fitting in, in the name of getting along, and especially because it's easier? Let's look at some of the things that this text says and really take a look at how we should be thinking and acting if we claim to be Christians.

One of the biggest things that we need to look at is what does it mean to be like Jesus? Note that I said Jesus and not other Christians. If we are trying to act as other Christians, then we are already in trouble. We are all fallible, so if you try to emulate someone else instead of Christ, you are going to automatically fall short of the mark.

Last week I got into a debate with someone on Facebook, which is rarely a good idea, but sometimes people post stuff that is so wrong I feel compelled to say something. At the end of the argument he claimed that a certain high-profile politician has always represented Christianity from the start. Well, I couldn't let that stand. Let's just say for starters that I do not agree with most of this politician's ideals, but that isn't why I don't think he is a Christian. I find his use of Christianity to be more of a prop than anything; to try to rally Christians to his side. I had to tell this other person that and explain why. You see, this politician early on in his political career claimed to be Presbyterian but when it was researched, he was not an active member of any congregation. This politician claimed to revere the Bible but did not know how to properly say the name of a book of the Bible, and I'm not talking about one of the obscure ones from the Old Testament. In fact, this politician when asked could not tell a reporter what his favorite Bible verse was, nor could he site any Bible verse, or even an approximation of one. To top it off I have not once seen any mention of this politician attending a church service unless it was to give a speech or maybe attend a funeral, but I certainly recall reports of his predecessors attending various services.

Now some of this might be forgiven, but when you add it all up it doesn't look like a very Christian picture. To make things worse this politician has a history of personal actions that are very unchristian, which I'm not going to get into at this point. Certainly we all fall short, but some, like this particular politician, seem to consistently and repeatedly do so and make no attempt at repentance; which if we are being honest is one of the largest parts of being Christian. We must have a desire for repentance.

Today's scripture starts with the idea that the disciple should be like the teacher, So, what is our teacher like? This is where things get interesting. Certainly, Jesus is a do-gooder, but in this case that doesn't mean what many assume. "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." Why would Jesus say that? Because like I mentioned at the start of this sermon, to bring a true Godly peace to this world means destroying the systems we have in place now. Our current systems and culture oppress people in a variety of ways and that is not what God wants for us. What systems am I talking about? Systemic racism, and unadulterated capitalism for starters. There is so much to say about these and many more, but I don't have the time to delve into everything. I'm going to focus on the systemic racism for today.

Here's the thing, none of us like to believe that we are part of the problem. Do you know how many times I've heard people say, "I'm not racist. I treat everyone the same, or my family came here after the Civil War and didn't own slaves." or, "My family was persecuted too when we came to the U.S." At one time I've said similar things myself. Nobody wants to be accused of being a racist, and many of us would flat out deny it. Honestly, I think we don't recognize our racist tendencies; the stereotypes that we grew up with and some consciously or unconsciously assume are true: things like black people are lazy or can't swim, or Jews are sneaky or money

grubbing, just to name a few. Even if we don't have a racist bone in our body, we still are part of the larger system. Nobody wants to hear that though. Especially since it's harder to figure out how to fix it.

Recognizing systemic racism feels like being blamed for something we didn't do. Has anyone ever offered to forgive you for something you don't think you did? Forgiveness is lovely, of course—it's one of the more beautiful words in the English language. But it can sound ugly if your acceptance of it would implicate you in something you refuse to acknowledge ever doing. Suppose I come up to someone and say, "Dan, I would like to forgive you for that completely rude and inappropriate thing you said to me a few months ago after that committee meeting." Well, if Dan happens to believe he said nothing that was even remotely out of line after that meeting, then his response may well be, "You can keep your lousy forgiveness! I don't want it because I don't need it."

That's the problem. We don't see the problem, or refuse to acknowledge it, so we certainly aren't going to want to work on changing it, but that is exactly what God wants us to do. Nobody said it was going to be easy, in fact Jesus said it would be the opposite. If we are coasting along as Christians and it seems like no big deal, chances are we are doing it wrong.

Which brings me to my second point. Should we be afraid or not? Jesus says, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." Jesus is saying don't be afraid about what happens here on earth because our soul is safe. Yet at the same time he says we should fear the devil and his work to corrupt us.

This is easier said than done. I have been here for almost eight years now, and some of my sermons have been very pointed, yet I have never had a parishioner or group of people come to me, or the personnel committee, to complain about what I've said. I'm sure that people have walked out of church vehemently disagreeing with what I've said, yet I've never really heard about it. Perhaps this congregation is too willing to let it go, perhaps people feel it's not worth arguing or discussing, or maybe people just aren't listening closely enough. Whatever the reason I guess I'm lucky. Multiple ministers that I know have not been as lucky. Just last week a friend was pushed out of his call because he dared to say that black lives matter, and by the way they do. And before anyone says, "wouldn't Jesus say that all lives matter." He would, but he also would say let's focus on the ones that are systemically getting crushed first. After all Jesus left the 99 sheep to go after the one that was lost.

There is a real tension for ministers who want to preach the gospel and tell their congregations what is required for this new kingdom, because it goes against what many of us are comfortable with. It is a real temptation for a minister to play it safe, not rock the boat, and keep their job. Much like my friend, we are all called as Christians to declare this new kingdom and work towards it, even if that means we are afraid and in danger of losing the security we have in this life. Jesus says not to fear that. Let the chips fall where they may and to Trust in God who will protect our souls.

The final point I want to look at is what is up with Jesus attacking families? Why is he saying, "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 one's foes will be members of one's 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;..." People relied heavily on their families. It was difficult in those times to survive on your own, or even as a nuclear family, so why was Jesus saying this?

In the family systems of the time where was the power located? I'll give you a hint, it wasn't called the patriarchy for nothing. Families looked to the father or even grandfather as the head, he was the one who made most of the big decisions. He was the one who has the power in the family. Do you think that someone in that position is going to want to make changes? Is this guy going to let his wife, sons, and daughters start to make decisions that are his to make? Most likely not. Jesus is promoting a change in society and some in the family are not going to like it.

We see this even today. Maybe not in our own families, but I'm sure you've heard of it happening in others. Someone won't come to the holiday dinner because they have politics that are different than their family. Some have been shunned by their family for what they believe or for who they are.

Jesus is saying that our allegiance is to God above everything else, including our allegiance to family. If we have to compromise our lives as Christians to be a part of our families then God says it is more important to remain uncompromised.

The whole point of this scripture when you get down to it is that we must forsake lesser loyalties, even risking social abandonment and persecution, to be disciples of Christ and promote a new kind of life. As Jesus says, "whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Let's hope that we all have the strength and faith to truly be disciples of Christ. Amen