

“Draw near to us, O Lord, redeem us
and set us free from enemies.” AMEN!

There’s a story in the Taoist tradition about a man
who becomes so disturbed by his own
shadow and the footprints that he leaves behind
that he tries to outrun them.

“They keep following me!”

He cries out as he runs faster and faster,
only to find that his shadow keeps pace and
the footprints continue to track him.

Finally, in exhaustion, the man collapses and dies.

The teacher makes the lesson
through this story to reveal for us

that the man could have simply moved into the shade.

There, resting in the shade,
his shadow would disappear and
his footprints cease and
the disturbances he’d had... foiled. (Pause)

Today we are reminded of our need
to find shade and rest.

That's a good reason for Sabbath.

It's also a good reason for Sunday worship
for we become weary in a world like ours.

Rest from a world where UFC
fights occur on the lawn of the White House.

Shade from the glaring world
where value is set at the highest shock level
(even if it's blatantly racist behavior) and

in a society where hateful speech and
divisive behavior among people is
set in disguise of freedom of speech and
the pursuit of happiness.

Rest from a world where lies spread and
said enough times that people
begin to believe the most absurd things.

Those who know their history
know that, in many ways,

2026 in the United States is following the doomed
path of the Roman Empire of
the first and second century.

It is amidst these parallel worlds that Jesus urges
his followers to not be afraid.

Do not be afraid when faced with opposition
when that opposition comes because
you're following Jesus.

The honesty, which comes from the
mouth of Jesus in our text today,
is hard to swallow on any day,
but especially on Father's Day.

It's difficult to read about a man
being set against his father on a day like today.

In an era where so many family relationships
are complicated and distorted due
to political division and life purpose.

We have Jesus giving both affirmation and
warning to us his followers.

On the one hand, when we face being
silenced or become victims of injustice,
we can trust that it will all be uncovered one day;

that God's justice will make it right.

Then, on the other hand, Jesus gives
a clear warning to us, too.

When we deny him behind closed doors,
deny him with our actions and words,

these denials too will come to light and be exposed.

These denial, according to Jesus, not me,
means that one day Jesus will deny us before
God the Father.

And I can think of nothing worse happening. (Pause)

Commentator Danny Zacharias writes
that perhaps the most difficult part of this passage
is Jesus' declaration that he has
“not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

My first thought is that Jesus is speaking of
an actual sword.

One that is in his hand and that he wields
like some holy samurai.

While there might be comfort in that image of
Jesus vanquishing our foes, this goes against all
we know about the Son of Humanity.

Later in Matthew, Jesus will be in
a place called Gethsemane.

The garden spot where he's arrested,
then one of his followers will lash out with a sword
in order to protect Jesus.

The “Samurai Jesus” would have applauded the action,

but the “REAL” Jesus appealed to that disciple
to return the sword to its sheath,
for all who take up the sword
will perish by the sword.

Our conclusion is that this makes it impossible that
Jesus is speaking about an actual weapon.

So what does he mean?

He means, I humbly suggest, that following him
will bring separation to, and into, our lives
and our relationships.

Separation that is similar to that which occurs
when swords are used to split
something, or someone.

Following Jesus draws us into living a life that will
not go over well with those who are interested
in pursuing American Empire, or
societal privilege based on having money
or pedestals set by race or gender.

(Pause)

This teaching from Jesus, read today,
was likely the main reason he was crucified.

It was why the sword of the empire was thrust into him.

He was promoting a way of life,
to those who'd listen and follow,

he was promoting a way of life that was opposed
to the deeply rooted values of Roman interests.

And if our nation is moving in the direction similar
to the Roman Empire then our following Jesus
will cause us to be divided too.

For the sword of the American Empire
will never bring comfort
to those whom God loves and favors. (Pause)

So, our gathering together here each week and
coming together during the week is an invitation
to enter into this type of conflict.

To enter into devotion to Jesus, and Moses,
and Mohammed, and Buddha, and Baha'u'llah
and other peaceful leaders and advocates.

This devotion is protesting action against
nationalism, racism, and privilege.

Jesus invites us to this kind of conflict and
to be optimistic but not naive.

Remaining hopeful and remaining vigilant
requires community.

Cross carrying is hard work because it makes
one both vulnerable and valuable.

God sees it, remembers it, and invites us
to be part of making things right.

AMEN!