

OPENING SENTENCE: What does the Holy One require of us? To do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God.

PRAYER of ADORATION: O God, you are infinite, eternal and unchangeable, glorious in Holiness, full of love and compassion, abundant in grace and truth. Your works everywhere praise you, and your glory is revealed in Jesus Christ our Savior. Therefore, we praise you, blessed and Holy Trinity, one God, forever and ever. AMEN.

Sermon: Disciples Like the Teacher

Scripture: Matthew 10:24-39

A disciple is not above the teacher, nor a slave above the master; it 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. So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops. 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. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. Everyone therefore who acknowledges me before others, I also will acknowledge before my Father in Heaven, but whoever denies me before others, I also will deny before my Father in Heaven. Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but the 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; 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 sons or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and 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.

THIS IS THE WORD OF THE LORD!

The section begins with the truism that the disciple should be like the teacher (v.25); but what is the teacher like? The answers given in the context can be unsettling – Jesus turns down the role of predictable, innocuous do-gooder: “Do not think that I have come to bring peace... but a sword” (v.34). Evidently there is peace, and then there is PEACE. The demands of the prince of true peace may very well feel like a sword cutting through lesser loyalties and making quick work of our flabby, commonsense morality.

If Jesus were really the enlightened and affirming nice guy, we often insist on imagining, should he not have been able to stay out of trouble? What incited people to call him such appalling names (Prince of, not peace, but of demons! Beelzebul (v.25)? Why would following him wreck families (vv. 35-36)? How did he end up on the cross (v.38)?

The answer is not that his opponents had strange and unsettling ideas, but that he did.

Kingdom work, it turns out, is more controversial and corrupting than conventional kindness. If the teacher gives offense, how much more the student (v.25)? Of course, giving offense is no great trick, and no sure sign of faithfulness. True discipleship is the art of seeking the kingdom with single-minded determination (6:33) and letting the chips fall where they may. The church that always manages to glide through life without ever rubbing anyone the wrong way may have reason to question whether it is truly this Jesus it honors as master and Lord.

It is Jesus' warning to the disciples that they must expect what happened to him to happen to them. The sentence was well known to the Jews:” It is enough for the slave to be as his master.” In AD 70, Jerusalem was destroyed, and destroyed so completely that a plough was drawn across the devastation. The Temple of God and the Holy city were in ruins. The Jews were dispersed throughout the world, and many of them

mourned and lamented the terrible fate which had befallen them personally. It was then that the Rabbis said to them: "When God's Temple has been destroyed, how can any individual Jew complain about his personal misfortunes?"

In this saying of Jesus, there are two things. There is the warning that, as Christ had to carry a cross, so also the individual Christian must carry a cross. It is as if Jesus said: "If I, the leader and commander, must suffer, you who are the members of my staff cannot escape the same." Jesus calls us not only to share his glory but to share his warfare and his agony; and we do not deserve to share the fruits of victory if we refuse to share the struggle of which these fruits are the result.

There is the statement of a privilege. To suffer for Christ is to share the work of Christ; to have to sacrifice for the faith is to share the sacrifice of Christ. When Christianity is hard, we can say to ourselves not only; "We are treading where the saints have trod"; but also "We are treading where the feet of Christ have trod." When Christianity cost something, we are closer than we ever were to the fellowship of Jesus Christ; and if we know the fellowship of his sufferings, we shall also know the power of his resurrection.

Three times in the passage 10:26-31, Jesus bids his disciples not to be afraid. In the Lord's messengers, there must be a certain courageous fearlessness which marks them out from others. The first commandment is in verses 26-27, and it speaks of double fearlessness. They are not to be afraid because there is nothing covered that will not be unveiled, and nothing hidden which will not be known. The meaning of that is that the truth will triumph. Great is the truth, and the truth will prevail. When James VI threatened to hang or exile the reformer Andrew Melville, Melville's answer was: "You cannot hang or exile the truth." When Christians are involved in suffering and sacrifice and even martyrdom for their faith, they must remember that the day will come when things will be seen as they really are; and then the power of the persecutor and the heroism of Christian witness will be seen at their true value, and each will have its true reward. They are not to be afraid to speak with boldness the message they have received. What Jesus has told them, they must tell to others. Disciples must listen; they must be in the secret place with Christ, that in the dark hours Christ may speak to them, and that in the loneliness Christ may whisper in their ear.

No one can speak for Christ who has not heard Christ speak; no one can proclaim the truth who has not listened to the truth; for we cannot pass on that which we do not know. Whoever would teach and preach must first in the secret place listen and learn. Disciples must speak what they have heard from Christ, and they must speak even if their speaking is to gain them the hatred of others, and even if, by speaking, they take their lives in their hands.

Truth is not popular; truth is like the sun light to sore eyes. Once Bishop Latimer was preaching, when King Henry VIII was present. He knew that the King would not relish what he was about to say. So, in the pulpit he soliloquized aloud with himself. Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! He said, be careful what you say. Henry the king is here. He paused, and then he said, Latimer! Latimer! Latimer! Be careful what you say. The King of Kings is here.

Those who have a message, speak to other men and women, but they speak in the presence of God. Those who bear Christian witness are the men and women who know NO fear, because they know that the judgements of eternity will correct the judgements of time.

Disciples are men and women who listen with reverence and who speak with courage, because they know that, whether they listen or speak, they are in the presence of God.

The second commandment is in verse 28. To put it very simply, what Jesus is saying is that no punishment that others can ever lay upon us can compare with the ultimate fate of one who has been guilty of infidelity and disobedience to God. It is true that human beings can kill the physical body; but God can condemn a person to the death of the soul.

Some people believe in what is called conditioned immortality. This belief holds that the reward of goodness is that the soul climbs up and up until it is one with all the immortality, the bliss and the blessedness of God;

and that the punishment of evil men and women, who will not mend their ways in spite of God's appeals to them, is that their souls go down and down until they are finally obliterated and cease to be. We cannot erect a doctrine on a single piece of text, but that is something very like what Jesus is saying here.

We do well to remember that the penalties which human beings can exact are as nothing to the penalties which God can exact and to the rewards which he can give.

The second thing this passage teaches is that there is still left in the Christian life a place for what we might call a Holy fear.

LET ME TELL YOU A STORY:

The Jews knew well this fear of God. One of the Rabbinic stories tells how Rabbi Jochanan was ill. "His disciples went in to visit him. On beholding them he began to weep. His disciples said to him, 'O Lamp of Israel, right hand pillar, mighty hammer! Wherefore dost thou weep?' He replied to them, 'If I was being led into the presence of a human king who today is here and tomorrow in the grave, who, if he were wrathful against me, his anger would not be eternal, who, if he imprisoned me, the imprisonment would not be eternal, who, if he condemned me to death, the death would not be forever, and whom I can appease with words and bribe with money – even then I would weep.'

But now, when I am being led into the presence of the King of Kings, The Holy One, blessed is he, who lives and endures for all eternity, who, if he be wrathful against me, his anger is eternal, who, if he imprisoned me, the imprisonment would be forever, who, if he condemned me to death, the death would be forever, and whom I cannot appease with words or bribe with money – nay more, when before me lies two ways, one the way of the Garden of Eden and the other the way of Gehenna, (Pyre of Fire) and I know not in which I am to be led – shall I not weep?"

And for the Christian the matter is even more compelling, for our fear is not that God will punish us, but that in response to his love we may cause only distress and grief. The Jews were never in danger of sentimentalizing the love of God, and neither was Jesus. God is love, but God is also holiness, for God is God; and there must be a place in our hearts and in our thoughts both for the love which answers God's love, and the reverence, the awe and the fear which answers God's holiness.

Further this passage tells us that there are things which are worse than death; and disloyalty, if they buy security at the expense of dishonor, life is no longer tolerable. They cannot face other people; they cannot face themselves; ultimately, they cannot face God. There are times when comfort, safety, ease and life itself can cost too much.

CLOSING PRAYER:

O God, your love is embodied in Jesus Christ, who washed disciples' feet on the night of his betrayal. Wash us from the stain of sin, so that, in hours of danger, we may not fail, but follow your Son through every trial, and praise him always as Lord and Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. AMEN.

BENEDICTION:

Jesus is no champion of family values. He has kingdom values, and these are often not the same thing. It is remarkable how many stories depict Jesus in conflict with his own family or as the source of conflict in families. He insists that his followers prioritize the kingdom of God and God's righteousness. It should be no surprise that such a complete transformation of human loyalty would have serious repercussions for the many institutions that are displaced in the process. This passage is finally about the radical choices that constitute the life of discipleship. To forsake lesser loyalties is to risk social death in hope of a new kind of life. The image most adequate to this wager is the cross and the life it promises beyond, not instead of, such dying. (vv.38-39). GO IN PEACE!