

“Learning to live like Jesus”

A sermon by the Rev. Frances Savill

Sunday June 28, 2020

Matthew 10:24-39

This morning we are back in chapter 10 of Matthew’s gospel and Jesus is commissioning his disciples to serve his mission.

They were to go to the lost sheep and heal and teach and cast out demons; Jesus’ ministry was becoming their ministry.

The harvest was great, and the disciples were being sent as workers for Jesus.

Jesus’ instructions were pretty simple, don’t take any extras; they couldn’t take a staff for protection, or money in their belt, they were to trust for God’s provision and accept the care of strangers.

They were armed with the power of Jesus, the good news of the gospel, but nothing else, not even an extra pair of sandals.

And in our passage this morning Jesus tells them that it is enough for them to be like Jesus, which meant that it was going to be difficult.

So let’s consider for a moment what it means to be like Jesus.

It means healing and curing, and bringing sight to the blind, and speaking the truth of the Word of God.

But what happens when the gospel is proclaimed and the truth is told?

When we are called to speak the truth of the gospel, a serene and untroubled reception is not always the result.

Or, in the words of Angie Thomas, *“Sometimes you can do everything right and things will still go wrong. The key is to never stop doing right.”*

It’s not that argument is intended.

It’s just that peace is often hard to come by when the truth ends up actually being said.

And Jesus is telling the truth to his disciples -- if you anticipate a lack of resistance to the truth of which I am asking you to speak, well, I have news for you.

The Kingdom of Heaven is not a tranquil or quiet existence free from disturbance and discord.

Rather, the Kingdom of Heaven disrupts.

The Kingdom of Heaven is unsettling.

The Kingdom of Heaven upends, especially the reigns that feign peace.

The Kingdom of Heaven calls into question the rulers and systems that promise peace but in doing so wield a sword of terror.

The Kingdom of Heaven comes with the demands on which true peace insists -- and never lets go of the kind of peace God has in mind.

This is Jesus' truth telling at its best; no sugar-coating.

Because when we stand up and speak out for what we believe, people start falling away.

Believing in Jesus -- really believing in what Jesus says, what Jesus stands for, and then admitting it -- is risky business.

Relationships will change.

Relationships could very well end.

That is, in part, what Jesus is saying.

When you stand up for what you believe, nothing will be the same, ever again.

Anticipate being unfriended, unfollowed, tried and trolled.

I am sure you can recall relationships that have been altered because of your faith, because of sharing, finally, what you believe.

The church has to decide whether or not it will actually tell the truth of the Gospel -- the Gospel that brings true peace to those who suffer, to those in need of healing, to those marginalized, to those demonized, to those oppressed; God's true peace, realized and known in gladness and joy, fulfillment and contentedness, happiness and blessedness.

Or, will the church, out of a fear of rocking the proverbial boat, out of a fear of death, maintain mediocrity, perpetuate its own privilege, and stay silent.

God's peace expects justice.

God's peace asks for righteousness.

God's peace demands value for and regard of all.

We are very often afraid, afraid what will happen, afraid to speak the truth.

Jesus knows our fearfulness.

Three times in the passage he tells his followers "Do not be afraid."

"Have no fear of them, do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul."

"Even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows."

As we speak the truth of the gospel, as we live as citizens of the kingdom of God, it's as if Jesus asks us; "What's the worst thing they could do to you?"

And for the early church the answer was; they could torture and kill us.

We know Jesus was crucified, so following him could mean suffering and death.

And in response Jesus says; yes they may be able to kill your body, but they can do nothing to your soul.

God alone can destroy both soul and body (10:28); God alone, therefore, is the one we should fear.

This claim speaks of God's power as surpassing, human rulers.

God is greater than any power on earth or in heaven.

But Jesus then reassures the disciples that God is not, in fact, like the powers or rulers of this world.

God knows and cares even for the sparrows that are sold "two for a penny."

God knows even the hairs on our heads better than we do.

The threat of violence and death are real concerns for the disciples, but no longer the determining force in their lives.

The one who has ultimate power over our whole being exercises that power with mercy and love.

We do not need to be afraid as we go into the world as Jesus has called us.

We go speaking the gospel truth, living as God's people bringing true peace to those who suffer, healing to those in need, shalom, new life, to those marginalized, to those demonized, to those oppressed.

Our call, as Jesus' church, is not to be afraid of the world, or the powers, or worry for our reputation, or even to worry about our survival, but to take up our cross, to continue our mission and follow Jesus.

His promise; this is the path that leads not necessarily to success, but to life abundant, and Jesus' kingdom coming in its fullness.

Thanks be to God.