

Our next reading comes from the gospel of Matthew. The text we will be reading are instructions that Jesus gives to his disciples as they prepare to go out and share with others. The 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew is a chapter of transition for the followers of Jesus.

Up until this point they have been able to listen and be students. Now they are being challenged to go out and make a difference and put their faith into action. But Jesus warns, in what we are about to read, that this will be a very difficult time.

### **Read Matthew 10:24-39**

I sometimes hear people talk about trying to create a family based on a biblical model. When people talk about a biblical model of family and marriage they do not usually quote this passage which we just read. Jesus has some unsettling comments about family and marriage here. Jesus says:

“I have not come to bring peace, but a 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.”

“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.”

All of us are here in church today because in one way or another we want our life to be easier in some way. We want to join a church and be comforted. We want to join a church where our kids will have a good time. We want to join a church where we will have lots of friends. We want to join a church so that we, maybe, make some connections in the community.

We do not, I think, become a part of a Christian church so that parents are set against their children. Where children are set against their parents. We do not become part of a Christian church so that we can be told that the relationships we have with our family becomes secondary. That's not what we are looking for when deciding if we want to become involved in a church and, if we do, which church to become involved in.

A Spiritual Director tells the story of a few years ago when a young woman who had an appointment with him arrived a little early and was shown into his office to wait while he finished up a meeting down the hall. As he came into his office the client turned from the wall where she had been examining his diplomas. She pointed at one of them and said, "What is 'Spiritual Direction'?"

The Spiritual Director say he fumbled around for an answer and finally said something like, "People come in to see me and I listen to them talk about their life, sort of like going to a counselor but, instead of whatever a therapist might say, a spiritual director tries to help people find where God is in their life."

"That's funny," the client responded, "I should think it would be more important for people to figure out where they are in God's life." So instead of asking "What is God doing to make my life better, more whole, more spiritual, etc." The real question is "What am I doing to involve myself in the work and will of God in the world today?"

Many of us seek to follow God with the hope and expectation that our life will be made easier. That we will have this cone of protection placed over us. That we will be shielded from human misery, human pain, human frustration, human disappointment.

Many of us sign up for this Christian faith with the expectation that it will grant us accolades and popularity. That being a faithful follower of Christ will give us prosperity and abundance. Now, there are some preachers who do preach this prosperity gospel.

But to read the Bible and conclude that God wants us to be well off and comfortable is to misread this Bible. If anything, being a faithful follower of Christ will lead us to be uncomfortable with how we live our life.

Wil Willimon was the chaplain at Duke University. One of my favorite Willimon stories is his story about an encounter he had with the father of a graduating student. The father called his office and exploded over the phone. "I hold you personally responsible for this," he yelled at Willimon.

The father was angry because his graduate-school-bound daughter had decided (in the father's words) "to throw it all away and go and do mission work in Haiti with the Presbyterian Church." The father screamed, "Isn't that absurd! She has a Bachelor of Science degree from Duke University, and she is going to dig ditches in Haiti! I hold you responsible for this!"

Willimon, not easily intimidated, asked him, "Why do you blame me?" The father replied, "You ingratiated yourself and filled her with all this religion stuff." Dr. Willimon was quick to reply, "Sir, weren't you the one who had her baptized?" "Well, well, well, yes," the father stumbled.

"And didn't you take her to Sunday school when she was a little girl?" "Well, well, yes." "And didn't you allow your daughter to go on those youth mission trips when she was in high school?" "Yes, but what does that have to do with anything?" replied the father, becoming more and more aggravated.

"Sir," Willimon concluded, "you are the reason she is throwing it all away. You introduced her to Jesus. Not me!" "But," said the father, "all we wanted was a Presbyterian." Willimon replied, "Well, sorry sir, you messed up. You've gone and made a disciple of Jesus Christ."

Being a follower of Jesus Christ is not easy. If it is easy then we are probably not really a follower of Jesus Christ but a follower of some type of empty hologram of Jesus. Putting ourselves out there for a faith in Jesus Christ leads to disappointment. Putting ourselves out there for Jesus leads to conflict. Putting ourselves out there for Jesus Christ leads to loneliness at times.

But this text teaches us to not let fear prevent us from being a faithful follower. To not let our fears prevent us from taking the risks and being faithful with our actions. Putting ourselves out there doing God's work will, sometimes, not be satisfying. But ultimately it is not about us and our desires for whatever accolades or satisfaction that we think we need. Ultimately it is about God and us seeking to be in God's life.

I conclude with a poem:

*As Jesus's disciples we're urged not to dread:  
the hairs are all counted on each of our heads.  
For as God holds the sparrows in loving concern  
so our lives are held too; and in life we can learn  
that when hardship comes, as it will, to the just,  
God's love is still near: it calls us to trust*

Yes, to trust that even the people with whom  
we're in conflict are loved; that the rooms  
in God's house are not only for those  
who agree with our views, wear similar clothes.

The "sword" Jesus brings – love, sharp as a knife –  
divides the deathly from that which brings life;  
but neither hatred nor rage is given excuse –  
caring's the reason that sword is turned loose;

and if on occasion a family's at odds  
it may help to recall that all members are God's  
children, and thus equally cherished:  
forget not forgiveness; let anger soon perish.

For Christ did not say we're forbidden to love  
our children or parents, just not placed above  
his way of the cross: his way of self-giving,  
of mercy and grace – the way of full living.

*Let us therefore repeat that we don't need to dread  
(though the follicles fall from each of our heads!)  
Just as God holds the sparrows in loving concern  
our lives are held too; thus in life may we learn  
that when hardship comes, as it will, to the just,  
God's love remains near; and so, let us trust . . .*

AMEN.

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-Given: June 25, 2017 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)

-King, Andrew, <https://earth2earth.wordpress.com/2014/06/15/316/>

-Harmon, Kendall, <http://kendallharmon.net/2016/10/will-willimons-wonderful-story-of-an-angry-duke-university-student-parent/>

-Fairless, Rev. Dr. John, "Teaching the Text," <https://lectionarylab.com/2014/06/16/year-a-the-second-sunday-after-pentecost-june-22-2014/>