

S.200621 Matt 10.24-39 First Champaign, A Father's Day Meditation,
a sermon by Rachel Matthews

Gospel 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 apart from 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.³⁵For 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;³⁶and 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.

Happy Father's Day. You might be wondering what I was thinking to choose a text that refers to setting son against father on a day that we have set aside to give our fathers honor.

The disciples of Jesus might have wondered that too. Jesus came to fulfill the law not abolish it, right? Honoring your father and mother is one of those laws. (Ex.

20, Matthew 15:4-7, 19:19) And, what about the Fathers of our faith, those archetypes of Fatherhood? What about Abraham, Moses and all of them? Aren't we supposed to honor them?

Well, let's see. Shall we honor Abraham, Father of our faith? Tradition says he was courageous. He set off on a journey of faith because God said so. He was willing to give up all he had just to follow God.

But let's look at that; just what was he willing to give up? His son. In fact, he was willing to give up both sons, Ishmael and Isaac. First Abraham gave up his son Ishmael born to his wife Sarah's maid Hagar. It's complicated. He didn't just give him up; Abraham cast Ishmael out into the desert with his mother Hagar and left them to die because Sarah was jealous of her. Sarah was afraid she would lose out on God's promises if Hagar and Ishmael hung around. The way I read it Abraham listened to Sarah not to God here. Sounds a little like Adam and Eve. Who in these stories is taking responsibility for their own actions?

And, Abraham was willing to give up Isaac, too, the heir to God's promise to multiply his children like the stars. Fortunately, God intervened with a ram stuck in a bush so Abraham could sacrifice a sheep instead of a child. That is a good thing but the idea that Abraham's faithfulness included a willingness to sacrifice his child at all does not sit right with me.

Maybe Abraham might not have been the perfect father. Is that heresy? In fact, most of our forefathers were not perfect – Moses, who broke the stone tablets that held the law and couldn't enter the promised land because of it; Jacob who stole from his uncle; and David, who broke commandment number 7.

What does determine a perfect Father anyway? What are those qualities that we are supposed to honor in our fathers? Is it strength and might? Is it being the consummate provider? Is it skills of a great intellectual leader or a Renaissance man? Is it the passion of a great lover? These days fathers come in all sizes. There are fathers who work all the time so we can have a roof over our heads, dads who learn strategy and serve the military, fathers who camp out or play football or survive a week in the woods. There are dads who make ethical decisions and walk us through tough times, and fathers who can help us get to where we could not go without their extraordinary sacrifice. There are also dads who take care of the

routine and mundane tasks of the day like cleaning dishes or packing lunches, or take us on playdates or shopping trips or paint the world in unique and utterly astounding shapes and textures. Fathers are not one thing and fathers are not perfect. The light is shining on the shadow. The Archetype of fatherhood is changing.

Jesus' disciples were living in a time in which archetypes were changing. It was the right time for God to intervene. Jesus called these disciples to minister to this changing time. Following Jesus was a very costly thing. It is dangerous to challenge an archetype. Jesus was not going to bring peace but a sword. Jesus was going set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;³⁶and one's foes will be members of one's own household." A disciple can expect persecution. A disciple might even have to leave their deeply held relationships and traditions behind.

The early disciples of Jesus travelled from town to town and taught people to love your enemy and love your neighbor. They trusted God to provide. A disciple could be crucified for sharing good news like the blind could be healed and the hungry could be fed because it challenged the status quo. For some early Christian communities after Christ died, the persecution became so scary they lived in cloistered, secret communities. They expected Jesus to come back very soon. But, Jesus did not come back right away and some of those communities started to grow. That was a good thing but then they had to deal with conflict from the inside – differences of opinions. That is what happens when communities grow! The peace of Christ that passes all understanding did not mean living without conflict in tumultuous times.

Every disciple comes to a crossroads at some point in life. Martin Luther King, Jr. said in another tumultuous time, "Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness. "

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rCY_Hjv7vKc

There is a scene in the movie Lord of the Rings when Frodo has to make a decision to take the ring to Mordor. He has to decide whether to break the fellowship of the ring or to take the ring to its ultimate doom. He can no longer hang on to both the fellowship and the ring. Frodo, all alone at this point, remembers a time when

he had said to Gandolph, his mentor, "I wish this ring had never come to me." Gandolph replies, "That is not for you to decide. All you have to do is decide what to do with the time that is given to you." Frodo decides to take the ring to Mordor.

But, in the movie scene, Sam, Frodo's dearest friend from the Shire, is the real disciple. Frodo leaves in secret not even telling his best friend he is going to Mordor. Sam discovers he is gone and runs after him. He jumps into the river after Frodo without the slightest hesitation as Frodo takes off in his boat. Sam does not swim. His love for Frodo is so great, he will die first than to break his promise to go with Frodo. Frodo pulls Sam out of the water. They go together.

The cost of discipleship is great. Christ says earlier in Matthew to love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁶ For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, ^[a] what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.(5:46-47)

Theologian Alyce M McKenzie (*Matthew: Interpretation Bible Studies*) writes, "On the surface, Jesus' sayings seem to aid the disintegration of families (the end of family values). But on closer look, Jesus demands a loyalty to him that benefits the larger human family. Radical obedience to the divine love for both the righteous and unrighteous (5:43-48) won't allow obligations to one's biological family to override responsibilities to any of God's children." (Matthew, 91-93) She goes on to quote Marian Wright Edelman who founded the *Children's Defense Fund (Measure of Our Success: A Letter to my Children and Yours)*, "As a parent I believe that protecting you – my own children – does not end in our kitchen or at our front door or with narrow attention just to your personal needs...As a parent I want to make sure you had all your physical needs met and a lot of love. But as a parent I could not ignore other people's children or pain that spills over to public space and threatens the safety and quality of life and pocketbook and future of every American (30-31)."

Discipleship takes a power greater than ourselves to get us through tough times. Think about all those people who have shown us the way. Think about how they stood at the crossroads and decided to stand for justice, love and mercy.

How could Joan d'Arc a 17 year old woman lead a French revolt against the English army? She had faith in God who was giving her guidance. At 19 she died against the hand of her enemy but what she stood for did not.

How could Martin Luther the lowly monk and reformer tell Pope Leo X head of the church universal that the Pope was wrong to forgive sins with money? Martin Luther trusted in God who forgives all people through faith.

How could Sojourner Truth, a black woman, stand up to a white man in a court of law to free her son from slavery? She had a deep sense of truth grounded in God who called all creation "good." And, she loved her son.

How did the civil rights activists withstand the march in Selma, Alabama? There had been too many years of civil rights abuses against the African American community. They had a God-given vision of humanity that included black lives.

What sustained those scientists in the early fight to understand proper treatment for HIV in the gay community? It was a belief that there was a higher truth yet to be told and the whole of humanity to save.

Who do we turn to when our traditions and parents do not measure up to justice, love and mercy? Who do we turn to when the status quo leaves a whole group of people in the shadows? Who will give us the strength to stand up to the powers that seek to silence a human being for wanting to be treated with dignity or that seek to twist truth into a sound bite lie?

The text says not to fear, look to God, our heavenly Father. Jesus says that God cares and will not abandon the disciple. In Eugene Peterson's *The Message* the text reads,

²⁹⁻³¹ "What's the price of a pet canary? Some loose change, right? And God cares what happens to it even more than you do. He pays even greater attention to you, down to the last detail—even numbering the hairs on your head! So don't be intimidated by all this bully talk. You're worth more than a million canaries.

³² "Stand up for me against world opinion and I'll stand up for you before my Father in heaven."

We have a heavenly parent that is not our biological parent. We have brothers and sisters that are not our biological family. We have a community that will stand with us and not leave us as we decide together at the crossroads to choose what is right and just and true. We have a lot to decide right now. Humanity is depending on us. Do not fear, says Jesus. God is stronger than the enemy. God's power is light not darkness, God's power is forgiveness not hate, life not death. Jesus says, ⁹"Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."