

Matthew 10:24-39 Pastor Bill Uetricht 3 Pentecost 6/21/20

I must admit that I find it to be somewhat of a cruel joke what shows up as the readings on some of the big cultural family days. You know, we are ready to celebrate Father's Day, and I am hoping for some words that make you tingle, that touch your heart with the significance of human relationships, especially between fathers and their children, and we get: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; 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; one's foes will be members of one's own household."

Well, happy Father's Day to you, too, Jesus. You are making me feel so warm and cuddly. I hope my boys give me a Father's Day card with that kind of touching message.

But hold on! Before we get too cynical, let's put the message in its context. And the context is the community of Matthew. This is a community that is knowing the pain of persecution, and the kind of persecution that, yes, comes from governmental systems, but more particularly, the kind that comes from folks who might be near you, who might be in your own family. Matthew's congregation without a doubt knew the reality of being turned into authorities for their faith and also the reality of being rejected by family members because they had become Jesus followers. Following Jesus took them into a whole new world, a whole new way of thinking, connected them to a whole new group of people. And as you can well imagine, that didn't always go over so well, particularly for their families.

The teachings of Jesus today are Matthew's way of explaining what his congregation knew all too well. These are after-the-fact words that are intended to reassure his audience that what they are going through is not unexpected.

But I don't want to stop there, allowing Jesus' words today to be tamed, to be thought of as something that apply only to Matthew's audience. There is an edge to these words that is worth our while paying attention to. And to explore that edge I want us to think about a little twentieth-century psychology that the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung brought us.

Jung spoke of archetypes, what might be called "patterns," patterns that Jung believed just existed in life and nature. The number three is an archetype. We often speak and write in threes: Bob loves baloney, ribs, and Brussel sprouts. Speaking in threes is a typical pattern.

Jung believed that in life in general and in family life in particular there existed a father archetype and a mother archetype, patterns that bring fulness to life. For Jung, the mother archetype, often, but not always lived out by women, is the energy in life that gathers together, that draws close, that wants to comfort and reassure. Jesus describes himself in this way as he laments over Jerusalem: "How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings!" Jesus is the archetypal mother. He longs to gather together. He longs to comfort and to reassure.

But we would be mistaken to think that Jesus is only the archetypal mother. And this view shapes too much of Christianity. Jesus is just a friend who makes me feel warm and fuzzy and who tames the tough stuff of life. That is not the Jesus of the gospels and certainly not the Jesus we confront today. In many ways, Jesus as well as being the archetypal mother is also the archetypal father. And for Jung, the archetypal father is the energy in life that kicks the chicks out of the nest, that sends them on their way, that sometimes even places them in wild and somewhat dangerous places.

This is what is going on in Matthew's gospel. Jesus is *sending* his apostles. We learned last week that the apostles are the "sent ones." They are being sent, and probably their initial expectation is that it is going to be so much fun. You know all about the unbridled joy of the newly converted or the newly charged and sent. The world is their oyster. But Jesus is warning the apostles that their lives are not going to be easy. Like him, they are going to face big problems. "A disciple is not above the teacher." They make fun of me; they will make fun of you. They call me names; they will call you names. And you got to get this, disciples, your own family members may be the biggest problem. They will be the ones most likely to turn on you.

Jesus isn't always warm and fuzzy. To follow him is not to pretend that real life doesn't exist. It's tough out there. But the disciples are being sent, nonetheless. That's what the father archetype does. That's what the father energy does because real life isn't going to be found simply in the warmth of the nest. To discover real life is to move beyond the past, to leave behind the family, to take up the cross and follow Jesus.

In Jesus' day, the family in so many ways represented the past. It's where you came from and what established who you were. When he says today "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," he is speaking of loving the past so much that it prevents the movement into the future and even into a healthier present. The family sometimes can help you stay stuck. It can sometimes prevent you from connecting to people who can help reshape your world.

I've had the opportunity obviously to love family throughout my life—my own family of origin, my wife, my kids. And now I have the opportunity to love a grandson. And I love this kid so deeply. We are

really good buds. Without a doubt, Liam is the recipient of some of my mothering energy. And to be honest, I am not going to let go of that mothering, protecting, comforting energy too soon. I am going to milk it for all its worth. But it won't serve him for me to shield him from real life forever--although I may do my best to do so!

Last week Liam and I together watched a bird die and then buried it. Last week we got on the bike trail, him on his battery-operated scooter and me on my bike, traveling the four miles to our downtown. Can't say I wasn't a little nervous sometimes. But Liam, you've got to go. You've got to be sent. You've got to know that it's not going to be easy, that you are going to have to put a lot of effort into it, that not all people are nice, that life can sometimes be downright crappy, that death is a part of the journey, that you will not find true life simply by staying at home, protecting your little self and being preoccupied with it. Don't think for one moment that Jesus only came to bring peace. He came to unsettle.

Liam, one more thing, though. And you really need to get this. What is sending you is the same thing that wants to protect you. Love is sending you—love that grounds you, gives you inestimable worth. “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father's [knowledge].” That bird we watched die, it was loved by God. And you are worth a whole lot more than that bird. “Even the hairs of your head are counted.” You matter greatly. You are loved deeply. You have what you need to be sent out into a tough world. “Keep your eyes on the prize.”

Paul and Silas bound in jail, had not money for to go their bail.
Keep your eyes on the prize; hold on. Paul and Silas began to shout. The jail door opened and they walked on out. Keep your eyes on the prize. Hold on. Hold on, hold on. Keep your eyes on prize, hold on! (sung as the conclusion of the sermon)